

# Middletown launching new early childhood effort to break down achievement gap



MIDDLETOWN 09/01/16 Lakendra Cherry (right) talks to her daughter Miloni, 5, as Miloni waits to start her first day of kindergarten at Macdonough School in Middletown in 2016. (Cloe Poisson / Hartford Courant)



By **Shawn R. Beals**  
sbeals@courant.com

NOVEMBER 12, 2018, 3:40 PM | MIDDLETOWN

**T**he Middletown school district on Tuesday is beginning a new early childhood education program that is expected to reduce the achievement gap in the city by ensuring more students are prepared to begin kindergarten.

The district has enrolled in the Footsteps2Brilliance pre-K program that uses mobile software to prepare 3- and 4-year-olds for school.

Superintendent Michael Conner said the achievement gap in Middletown is a result of an access gap or opportunity gap that causes nearly 50 percent of students nationally to be behind on their first day of school.

“This is a new approach to provide access,” Conner said. “It’s not that they’re coming to us. We’re actually going to the community to reach them and sign them up for this.”

Conner will soon complete his first year as the district superintendent, and much of that time has been spent preparing a new strategic plan for the district that is primarily focused on eliminating the city’s achievement gap between white and minority students.

believes preparing as many students as possible to start kindergarten will

Support Quality Journalism  
Subscribe for only 99¢

START NOW >

“If students are going into kindergarten ready to begin, there’s a higher chance the impact of the achievement gap won’t be felt beyond grade 1,” Conner said. “When you look at grade 3, that’s where you really see the achievement gap start to exacerbate itself. You see more students starting to become disengaged because they can’t access grade-level content.”

By beefing up their skills early on, the district can eliminate the periods when some students typically fall behind peers.

The Footsteps2Brilliance program is being provided to pre-school centers and home care centers in an effort to reach every pre-K child in Middletown. Two apps provide reading, science, math and social studies lessons for the youngest age groups, and track progress so a student’s success can be measured easily.

School Readiness Coordinator Dawn Dubay said Footsteps2Brilliance gives parents a clear model to follow instead of leaving them on their own to find the most effective school preparation material.

“Often times families will say ‘I’m not sure how to support my child’s learning at home,’” Dubay said in a presentation to the school board. “These apps do give some specific, concrete examples of ways they can support their children.”

The school district is holding a kickoff event Tuesday at 1:30 p.m. at Snow Elementary School that marks the official start of Footsteps2Brilliance in Middletown.

Board of education member Marilyn Rios said interactions between educators and parents at a young age can make a huge difference in a child’s progress.

“If not for those programs and them showing me how to get my children engaged and reading, they would not be where they are now,” Rios said.

Board of education Chairman Christopher Drake said that at about \$60,000, the program is a modest investment that could have a substantial positive impact on student success.

Pre-school providers and teachers have been trained on the new software, and students who participated in a pilot program at four pre-school sites have already show promising success, Conner said.

Copyright © 2018, Courant Community