

TEMPORARY REGIONALIZATION SCHOOL STUDY COMMITTEE

ANSONIA & DERBY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Middle School Visioning Facilitation Guide

A detailed educational plan is a critical component of any regionalization plan submitted to the state of Connecticut. This plan should include an idea of what courses will be offered to students in a future regional district and the structure of potential schools. In partnership with District Management Group (DMGroup), the Temporary Regionalization School Study Committee (TRSSC) in Ansonia and Derby is tasked with developing this educational plan. DMGroup and the TRSSC hope to build a plan around the philosophy and direction of Ansonia and Derby Public Schools.

DMGroup and the TRSSC hope to build a plan around the philosophy and direction of Ansonia and Derby Public Schools. This includes a high school program of study (found in separate document), a plan and vision for the middle school, and a plan for elementary instruction (found in separate document). This plan was developed through conversations with academic leaders in Ansonia and Derby Public schools.

Fiscally, implementing this plan costs no additional dollars for the regional district, as long as the average class size across Ansonia and Derby schools remains stable. There is also no savings in the form of staff for the regional school district. Larger schools allow a school to be closer to their target class size, which may help expand curricula or offerings at schools.

Because both Ansonia Middle School and Derby Middle School are at a crossroads for reimagining their middle schools, this document can serve as a guide for the regional district in considering how the middle school will be designed to best serve students. This document helps set the vision and structure of a potential regional middle school, as well as some of the courses available to students at this school.

*Please note that while this document outlines an educational plan, a lot can change between now and the implementation of a plan. Changes and adjustments can and should be made over time. **No information in this document is binding to any future school or district.***

There are eight components of this middle school plan, outlined throughout this document.

- 1. Portrait of a Graduate & Vision**
- 2. Core Classes**
- 3. Access to Rigor**
- 4. Intervention**
- 5. Student Voice and Choice**
- 6. Teacher Planning Time**
- 7. Social-emotional Learning**

1. Portrait of a Graduate & Vision for the School

The portrait of a graduate includes the core skills and vision for the future regional middle school. This should serve as a guide for district and school leaders in making decisions about the school.

The vision for the future regional middle school is built upon a K-12 vision for helping students become successful beyond their experience in school, either with postsecondary school or with their career. The new regional middle school is committed to improving services and supports for students. There will be a focus on global citizenship and ensuring students are competitive in the global marketplace.

Students who graduate the regional middle school will have developed the following skills: empathy, grit, collaboration, global citizenship, communication, creativity, and independence.

Students will develop successful work and study habits, have positive social development, and will graduate prepared for a seamless transition to 9th grade. This includes strong literacy and math skills as well as opportunities to explore potential college and career pathways. Additionally, students will leave this school with a sense of belonging, teachers will be caring and supportive of student social-emotional and academic development.

2. Core Classes

The student experience at a future middle should be centered around their core instructional classes.

At the future regional high school, the core classes that all 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students will take includes:

- *English Language Arts (ELA)*
- *Math*
- *Science*
- *Social studies*

Depending on focus of the school, courses may be renamed based on specific career pathways to help further define courses. This may include courses like science for engineering or global citizenship.

As the school develops career pathways, there would be tools to help students select into career-based core courses.

In addition to adding potential career pathways at the middle school, the regional middle school will put additional focus and emphasis on ensuring that there is cross curricular and integrated teaching. For example, ELA and social studies courses can become more integrated and aligned to support the student learning experience.

3. Access to Rigor

Students who excel may be ready for some different offerings or options at a middle school. Many middle schools offer higher level courses in specific subjects (e.g. Algebra I for 8th graders) or a set aside gifted and talented program.

Algebra I will be offered to students in 8th grade who are ready for higher level math based on 6th and 7th grade math performance as it is currently offered at both Ansonia and Derby middle schools.

In addition to this higher level course, students may have access to a higher level science and ELA courses, including earth science and adolescent literature and composition. This will allow high achieving students the opportunity to earn high school credits during their 8th grade year.

Additionally, a future regional middle school would include the two gifted and talented programs that currently exist in Ansonia and Derby. This includes the gifted and talented program that currently exists in Derby and the higher level STEM program that exists in Ansonia right now.

4. Intervention

Students who struggle should have access to high quality intervention in addition to a first presentation of materials through their core classes. Intervention time should be used to address gaps in prior learning, pre-teach, and re-teach materials and is critical for general education students who are behind, students with disabilities, and English language learners.

The future regional middle school will continue to have an SRBI program as what currently exists at both Ansonia and Derby middle schools. The current interventionist positions from both districts would continue to offer support to students requiring Tier II and III interventions and coaching to teachers to support Tier I instruction. They also would continue to meet with administrators and teachers weekly to support interventions and instruction.

The future middle school would have an intervention period build into the daily schedule.

If money was freed up through regionalization, one of the areas that may see increased investment is in the SRBI system for students K-12 in the regional schools.

Additionally, students with disabilities and English Learners would have access to high quality services. At the future regional middle school, students with disabilities would have access to more inclusive services, including team teaching, in-class interventions, and high quality general education classes.

English learners would have their second language acquisition through immersion programs. The new regional middle school will push for English Learners to be taught in the classroom to the greatest extent possible.

5. Student Voice and Choice

Student voice and choice is incorporated into some middle schools in two different ways:

- 1. Student voice** over which courses are offered
- 2. Student choice** over which courses they take

There are a few considerations that play into a school's ability to make changes to non-core offerings and to incorporate student voice and choice into a school's structure:

- **Staffing:** teacher skills should match non-core course offerings
- **Structure:** the course length and schedule structure will impact the courses that are available.

In the future regional middle school much more student voice and choice would be incorporated into the non-core classes students take.

Students will be surveyed to understand their interests in what courses they would like available to them. With the results of this survey, not only can administrators at the school and in the district determine the high level interest in students, but also can rename and adjust their existing offerings to reflect student interests. For example, instead of "business," the school may offer "business of sports." The school may also survey former students to learn what the courses they wish they had in middle school now that they are in high school. This can help shape and adjust existing offerings.

Additionally, the future regional middle school hopes to give students a fair amount of freedom to choose their non-core courses. By providing them some choice, students may be able to discover new academic interests which may stimulate their interests, excitement, and attendance at school.

6. Teacher planning time

There are four different ways teachers have planning time at middle schools:

- **No common planning time**
- **Grade level common planning time**
- **Content team common planning time**
- **Hybrid (combination) common planning time**

Common planning time can be challenging to build into the schedule, but can offer a chance for teachers to discuss student social-emotional, academic, and other needs. It can also be a chance to align curricula and lessons across grades and subjects.

At a future regional middle school, teachers will have hybrid common planning time. There will be grade level and vertical planning time. If possible, with scheduling, both grade level and vertical planning will happen weekly. However, at minimum, there will be monthly professional learning community (PLC) meetings for grade levels and content areas.

PLC time will continue to be used to review data and inform instruction across content areas. Grade level teams will discuss student behaviors and social-emotional needs, student learning, and SRBI. Content area teams will discuss the vertical integration of lessons and how students will progress across years.

7. Social Emotional Learning

Social emotional learning is a key component of any middle school. In some schools, social emotional learning is taught through a separate time with a set curriculum (i.e. advisory/SEL), while in other schools social emotional learning is integrated into the core curriculum.

In both instances, to be effective SEL should be school-wide, focus on specific competencies, be developed through lesson plans and activities together, and should not be shoehorned into the schedule.

In a future regional middle school, social-emotional learning will be integrated into all courses, contents, and components of the student experience. All of this will begin with supporting staff to understand how to support students social-emotional development and learning. One way that the school may explore this is through a program like the RULER program out of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence.

The future regional middle school will provide training to ensure teachers can embed social-emotional learning into their classes.