

# **The Meriden Public Schools**

## **Plan for the Reorganization of the District's System of Academic Levels**

**Mary N. Cortright  
Superintendent of Schools**

# PLAN FOR THE REORGANIZATION OF THE DISTRICT'S SYSTEM OF ACADEMIC LEVELS

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## Plan for the Reorganization of the District's System of Academic Levels

### Rationale of Plan

It has been the goal of the Meriden District to further improve the achievement of all students at the secondary level, particularly in key subgroups. The District Improvement Team recognizes a need to improve policies and programs at this level. The District Improvement Team believes that all Meriden's policies and programs during and beyond the school day/year should be clearly focused, built on student data, and aimed toward increasing student achievement (Meriden Public Schools' District Improvement Plan, 2008-2011, Policy Tier II Indicator).

Based upon the rationale identified in its improvement plan, our vision is that all students have equal access to a high-quality, rigorous and standards-based curriculum. This vision is supported by Meriden's Board of Education mission statement: *"We will provide all students with educational opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable them to lead productive and self-sustaining lives in a democratic, multicultural society."*; and its goal: *"All students will improve their achievement levels in the core disciplines of reading, writing, and mathematics and be given equal opportunity to engage in other disciplines and activities that complete a comprehensive learning experience. All students will meet high expectations for both positive behavior and learning regardless of disability, ethnic, racial or socioeconomic background."*

**To achieve this vision, the committee formed to address the reorganization of the District's system of academic levels recommends that there be two levels of instructional grouping in the secondary schools: A high-standards academic level and an accelerated level.**

### I. **Background Information**

#### A. Present Grouping System

The Meriden Public Schools currently has heterogeneous classes in the elementary school, three tracks (above grade, on grade, below grade) in the middle school and four levels at the high school (AP/C Honors, B-College Prep, A-General/Alternative College Prep and AA-Remedial). Placement at the middle school is based upon reading ability and recommendations from teachers, students and parents. Students take all classes on the same level. Placement at the high school is based upon teacher, student and parent recommendations. Students may take classes from multiple levels.

#### B. Identified District Concerns about Grouping Systems

- Ability to deliver a rigorous and viable curriculum to all students
- Preparation of students to lead productive and successful adult lives
- Preparation of students for CMT and CAPT
- Behavior of students
- Attendance of students
- Retention rates of students

- Dropout rates of students
- Ability to close achievement gaps
- Disproportionate enrollment of Black and Hispanic students in low-level classes
- Disproportionate enrollment of socioeconomically disadvantaged students in low-level classes
- Disproportionate enrollment of Special Education Students in low-level classes

C. Externally Identified Concerns about Grouping System

- **Cambridge/CSDE Audit**

The Cambridge/CSDE Audit findings indicated the need to improve the achievement of key subgroups of students, in particular, Hispanic students, by: 1) providing more focused tracking of progress and monitoring of these students; 2) increasing their numbers in higher level classes, including college level and honors classes in the high schools; and 3) improving guidance systems to ensure they are actively enabled to raise their aspirations and achieve success in all schools.

The findings also indicated the need to improve the conditions for learning in the middle and high schools by 1) reducing the numbers of suspensions and expulsions overall, and, particularly, of special education and minority ethnic groups; 2) changing the attendance policy in the high schools whereby students can miss 29 classes before losing credit; and 3) reducing the number of program tiers, or tracks, in the high schools and ensuring greater equity for all students in access to courses.

- **State Board of Education/Ad Hoc Committee**

The State Board of Education Ad Hoc Committee made the following recommendations:

1) include strategies to reduce expulsion/suspension at the high school; 2) include strategies for closing the achievement gap for Hispanic students; 3) include strategies to address the attendance policy at the high school; and 4) evaluate the impact of eliminating tracks at the high school.

- **NEASC Accreditation**

The NEASC Accreditation is revising its Standards for Accreditation related to School Culture and Leadership to include: The high school is equitable and inclusive with heterogeneous classes for all students in all curriculum areas, and high expectations for and achievement by all students (Draft 10-16-08).

In addition to the above concerns, the State Board of Education approved the following resolution at its meeting on November 5, 2008:

(1) RESOLVED, that the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-223e of the Connecticut General Statutes, conditionally approves, and directs the Meriden Board of Education to implement the District Improvement Plan for the Meriden Public School System, and be it further RESOLVED, that this approval is conditioned on receipt by the Commissioner of Education by March

30, 2009, of an acceptable plan with regard to the reformation of the district’s system of academic levels, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

In accordance with the current District Improvement Plan, a district-wide committee was formed to develop a plan to reduce academic levels at the secondary schools. The committee reviewed the following research and policies of other districts.

D. Research Findings and Review of Other Connecticut District Practices

An examination of student academic attendance and disciplinary data, current research in academic leveling systems, and academic leveling systems in other Connecticut districts reveals the following: 1) Meriden students in the lowest academic levels have the lowest levels of achievement on CMT and CAPT testing, the highest rates of in-school and out-of-school suspension, and the highest rates of absenteeism; 2) a disproportionate enrollment of minority students are in the lowest academic levels; 3) tracking is beneficial for high track students; 4) tracking leads to negative teacher expectations for low-track students; 5) tracking reduces opportunities for low-track students; 6) tracking perpetuates inequities along race and socioeconomic divisions; and 7) tracking influences student motivation. Of special note is the research clearly indicates that de-tracking should be accompanied by other initiatives including curriculum revision, professional development in instructional strategies, support systems, and schedule revision.

A review of other Connecticut districts indicated that many districts have leveling systems similar to Meriden’s. Several are in the process of studying ways to reform their academic leveling systems. In addition to gathering this information from other districts, representatives from the committee visited the Bristol school system several times to meet with board members, central office officials, school administrators and teachers. The Bristol school district currently has in place two academic levels at its high schools; and its middle schools are primarily heterogeneously grouped with the intention to phase in advanced classes in mathematics and English.

Bristol school officials identified two key findings as essential:

- 1) Bristol planned for 18 months before implementation.
- 2) Supports for students and staff members are required for successful implementation of leveling changes.

E. Public Meetings

The Meriden Board of Education solicited public input on the reorganization of the District’s academic leveling system at two Board committee meetings: The Board Policy Committee meeting on October 27, 2008, and the Board Curriculum Committee Meeting on January 14, 2009. Additionally, the Associate Superintendent for Instruction made a presentation to the Board Curriculum Committee on December 9, 2008 outlining the rationale for developing a plan to reorganize the District’s academic leveling system.

## II. Meriden District Improvement Plan

The following Tier II Policy Indicator is currently listed in Meriden’s District Improvement Plan to address the reorganization of the district’s system of academic levels: *The district will review and revise policies to more effectively address the needs of all students.*

Strategies for addressing Policy Tier II Indicator in the District Improvement Plan include:

- Provide a more focused tracking of the academic progress of key subgroups as well as reducing the number of program tiers in the middle and high schools.
- Recommend a policy revision to the Meriden Board of Education which would facilitate the raising of standards at the middle and high schools. (Collapse of levels A & B at the high school, and “on-grade” and “below grade” at the middle school.)
- Establish a committee to develop a policy to collapse levels.
- Implement approved policy (September 2010)
- Increase the number of identified subgroups enrolled in higher level classes in the middle and high schools.

## Plan for the Reorganization of the District's System of Academic Levels

<p><b>Board of Education Mission Statement, Goals for Students, Reorganization Plan Objective, and Phase-In Strategy</b></p>	<p><b>Phase-In Plans and Activities:2008-09 to 2012-13</b>  (For reference purposes, see attached Executive Summary of Meriden's District Improvement Plan)</p>	<p><b>Persons Responsible</b></p>	<p><b>Student Outcomes</b>  (See attached Executive Summary of Meriden's District Improvement Plan)</p>
<p><b>Board of Education Mission Statement:</b> "We will provide all students with educational opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable them to lead productive and self-sustaining lives in a democratic, multicultural society."</p> <p><b>Board of Education Goals for Students:</b> "All students will improve their achievement levels in the core disciplines of reading, writing, and mathematics and be given equal opportunity to engage in other disciplines and activities that complete a comprehensive learning experience. All students will meet high expectations for both positive behavior and learning regardless of disability, ethnic, racial or socioeconomic background."</p>	<p><b><u>Preliminary Planning Activities</u> (December 2008-June 2009)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish Reorganization Committee</li> <li>• Collect relevant data/conduct review of research</li> <li>• Interview other districts and conduct site visits to Bristol Public Schools (High School, Middle School, Central Office)</li> <li>• Plan intermediate initiatives for 2009-10 school year               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Elementary school/middle school transition activities                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Curriculum development and revision</li> <li>✓ Revision of class placement criteria for Grades 5 &amp; 6</li> <li>✓ Establishment of "de-tracking" process in the middle schools to allow students to take classes in more than one level</li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ Middle school/high school transition activities                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Curriculum development and revision</li> <li>✓ Elimination of low-level mathematics classes (process began in 2007-08)</li> <li>✓ Increase enrollment in higher level classes</li> <li>✓ Rename middle school levels from Above Grade, On Grade and Below Grade to Accelerated, Academic and Comprehensive</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• Develop and submit Academic Program Reorganization Plan to Commissioner of Education (3/30/09)</li> <li>• Continue planning for a four-year phase-in of the Reorganization Plan: (2009/10-2012/13)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Superintendent and Associate Superintendent will supervise all planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation activities associated with the Reorganization Plan</li> <li>• The Director of Curriculum, Director of Pupil Personnel, building administration, and subject area and program Supervisors will supervise, coordinate and monitor the day-to-day work of Reorganization Plan implementation.</li> <li>• The Reorganization Committee will undertake and oversee all of the day-to-day planning activities associated with the four-year phase-in of the Reorganization Plan</li> </ul>	<p>As a component of Meriden's District Improvement Plan, this Reorganization Plan shares the same goals and intended outcomes for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving student achievement in Reading, Writing and Mathematics</li> <li>• Closing achievement gaps for targeted subgroups of students</li> <li>• Reducing suspension rates with respect to overall suspensions and for individual students, with higher reductions targeted for particular subgroups of students</li> </ul>

<p><b>Reorganization Plan</b>  <b>Objective:</b> Transform the District’s system of academic leveling by creating and offering only two instructional levels in the high schools and middle schools: A high-standards academic level and an accelerated level.</p> <p><b>Four-Year Phase-in Strategy:</b></p> <p><u><b>Preliminary Planning</b></u>  (2008-09)</p> <p><u><b>Phase 1:</b></u> Implementing &amp; monitoring transition activities; planning for Grades 6, 7 &amp; 9 (2009-10)</p> <p><u><b>Phase 2:</b></u> Implementing &amp; monitoring reorganization at Grades 6, 7 &amp; 9; planning for Grades 8 &amp; 10 (2010-11)</p> <p><u><b>Phase 3:</b></u> Implementing &amp; monitoring reorganization at Grades 8 &amp; 10; planning for Grades 11 &amp; 12 (2011-12)</p> <p><u><b>Phase 4:</b></u> Implementing &amp; monitoring reorganization at Grades 11 &amp; 12; monitoring/evaluating overall implementation of Reorganization Plan (20012-13 and thereafter)</p>	<p><u><b>Phase 1: Implementation of Elementary, Middle School and High School Transition Activities and Continued Phase-in Planning for Academic Reorganization at the Middle Schools and High Schools (School Year 2009-10)</b></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement elementary, middle school and high school transition activities as described previously (<b>Preliminary Planning</b>)</li> <li>• Plan for the coming year (2010-11) transition at Grades 6, 7, &amp; 9 from a multi-level system (high-achieving, on-grade, and below-grade levels) to the Board’s objective of a two-level instructional system: A high-standards academic level and an accelerated level <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Continue work at all levels (with particular focus on Grades 6, 7, &amp; 9) on development of the systemic infrastructure to support the Board’s reorganizing vision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Develop, revise and prioritize curriculum in core academic areas (See curriculum work outlined in the District Improvement Plan, pp. 4-10.)</li> <li>✓ Expand and implement common assessments aligned with curriculum standards (See assessment work outlined in the District Improvement Plan, pp. 4-10.)</li> <li>✓ Strengthen and expand the work of school and instructional data teams in the key strategic areas of data-driven decision-making, common formative assessments, and effective teaching strategies (See data-team work outlined in the District Improvement Plan, pp 11-14.)</li> <li>✓ Promote a positive climate in the schools and strong connections with the community (See positive climate initiatives outlined in the District Improvement Plan, pp. 16-23.)</li> <li>✓ Make necessary adjustments to, and realignments within the middle school and high school schedules</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The District Data Team will monitor implementation of the Reorganization Plan as part of its responsibility for monitoring, adjusting, and evaluating Meriden’s District Improvement Plan.</li> </ul>	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Provide systematic professional development opportunities for staff in support of adult efficacy and likely success within the reorganized academic program (See multiple references to professional development activities in most components of the District Improvement Plan, pp. 4-23.)</li> <li>➤ Develop at all levels (with a particular focus on Grades 6, 7, &amp; 9) the student support structures and safety nets to ensure success in the reorganized academic program. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Use Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI)/ Response to Intervention (RTI) models to guide the development of student support systems</li> <li>✓ Design supports for academic, student services and co-curricular settings; and for whole-school/class, small-group, and individualized opportunities and interventions.</li> <li>✓ Examples of possible student supports include academic labs, supplementary services/programs, academic tutorials, foundation courses, IEP revisions and realignments, after-school and summer programs, realigned counseling and guidance services, small learning communities, advisory and mentor programs, high-school teaming structures, etc.</li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ Revise the Board of Education policy framework so that it is aligned with the Board's current Mission and Goal Statements and the objective of its Reorganization Plan (See the work of policy review and revision as outlined in the District Improvement Plan, p. 24.)</li> <li>➤ Conduct a variety of district and community engagement activities for staff and administration; parents; town government officials; and community agencies, organizations, and the community-at-large.</li> <li>➤ Conduct continuous program evaluation of the above work activities and refine programs</li> </ul>		
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	<p>based upon findings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make annual report to the Meriden Board of Education on the progress made in the implementation of the Reorganization Plan and the impact that has been made on student achievement</li> <li>• The Meriden Board of Education will affirmatively vote in order to initiate implementation of Phase 2.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Phase 2: First-Year Implementation of the Reorganization Plan at Grades 6, 7, &amp; 9 and Continued Planning for Academic Reorganization in the Remaining Secondary Grades (School Year 2010-11)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fully implement the Reorganization Plan at Grades 6, 7 &amp; 9, with a strengthened systemic infrastructure, student and staff support systems and a Board of Education policy framework</li> <li>• Monitor carefully, and at frequent intervals, the implementation of the Reorganization Plan and adjust, as appropriate, using data-team practices</li> <li>• Undertake specific planning activities for Phase 3 (2011-12) academic reorganization at Grades 8 &amp; 10</li> <li>• Continue the work relating to systemic infrastructure, student and staff support systems, policy framework, and school district/community engagement activities, as described in Phase 1 above, with a particular focus on adapting this work for Grades 8 &amp; 10</li> <li>• Make annual report to the Meriden Board of Education on the progress made in the implementation of the Reorganization Plan and the impact that has been made on student achievement</li> <li>• The Meriden Board of Education will affirmatively vote in order to initiate implementation of Phase 3.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Phase 3: First-Year Implementation of the Reorganization Plan at Grades 8 &amp; 10 and Continued Planning for Academic Reorganization in the Remaining Secondary Grades (School Year 2011-12)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fully implement the Reorganization Plan at Grades 8 &amp; 10, with a strengthened systemic infrastructure, student and staff support systems, and a Board of</li> </ul>		
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	<p>Education policy framework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor carefully, and at frequent intervals, the implementation of the Reorganization Plan and adjust, as appropriate, using data-team practices</li> <li>• Undertake specific planning activities for Phase 4 (2012-13) academic reorganization in Grades 11 &amp; 12</li> <li>• Continue the work relating to systemic infrastructure, student and staff support systems, policy framework, and school district/community engagement activities, as undertaken in Phases 1 &amp; 2, with a particular focus on adapting this work for Grades 11 &amp; 12.</li> <li>• Make annual report to the Meriden Board of Education on the progress made in the implementation of the Reorganization Plan and the impact that has been made on student achievement</li> <li>• The Meriden Board of Education will affirmatively vote in order to initiate implementation of Phase 4.</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Phase 4: First-Year Implementation of the Reorganization Plan at Grades 11 &amp; 12 and Frequent Monitoring and Evaluation of the Overall Implementation of the Reorganization Plan, Grades 6-12, to Ensure Ongoing Success (School Year 2012-13 and beyond)</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make annual report to the Meriden Board of Education on the progress made in the implementation of the Reorganization Plan and the impact that has been made on student achievement</li> </ul>		
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**Appendix: District Improvement Plan Executive Summary: November 5, 2008**  
**District: Meriden**

<b>What problems will the improvement plan attempt to solve?</b>	<b>What will be done?</b>	<b>Who will do what - When?</b>	<b>What is the expected effect? How will this be evaluated?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students in general, and identified sub-groups in particular, are not achieving at acceptable levels in Language Arts and Mathematics.</li> <li>The gaps in performance among identified student sub-groups are substantial and need to be reduced, with the goal of eliminating such disparities over time.</li> <li>If students are to be fully successful, the quality of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and data-team practices at all levels of the school system must be improved.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The District will strengthen curriculum and assessment, PK-12, in Language Arts and Mathematics. (pp 4-10)</b>  <u>Strategies:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prioritize curriculum standards and select/implement programs that are closely aligned with such standards.</li> <li>Provide targeted professional development to teachers and administrators in specific curriculum areas.</li> <li>Align curriculum initiatives with State Frameworks for Curriculum and for English Language Learners.</li> <li>Identify and implement differentiated instructional strategies to address the diverse needs of student subgroups.</li> <li>Expand and implement common assessments aligned with prioritized curriculum standards.</li> </ul> <p><b>The District will improve teaching and learning throughout the school system.</b>  <u>Strategies:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standardize, monitor and evaluate the work of data teams throughout the school district. (pp. 11-12)</li> <li>Provide comprehensive training to teachers in Common Formative Assessments and Effective Teaching Strategies; and strengthen system capacity by certifying selected staff to provide training in these areas. (pp. 12-13)</li> <li>Provide support to teachers for improving classroom practices through coaching, modeling and monitoring. (p. 14)</li> <li>Engage parents in helping their children improve skills in language arts and mathematics. (p.15)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Superintendent, Associate Superintendent, and District Data Team will monitor implementation monthly.</li> <li>Director of Curriculum, Director of Pupil Personnel, and subject area and program Supervisors will supervise and coordinate this work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On the CMT and CAPT in Reading, Writing, and Mathematics, the average grade-level gain at or above proficiency will be at least 15 percentage points over the three-year Plan period.</li> <li>CMT and CAPT achievement gaps within targeted subgroups will be reduced by at least 30 percent over the three-year Plan period.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students are losing a substantial amount of instructional time due to inordinately high suspension rates. This is especially true of students in identified sub-groups.</li> <li>The social and emotional climate for students, staff and parents in schools and the community needs to be enhanced.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The District will implement a variety of interventions to promote a positive climate in the schools and strong connections with the community.</b></p> <p><u>Strategies:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on a climate survey, develop and implement plans for improving parent and community relations in all schools. (p. 16)</li> <li>Establish strong transition support for students as they move from the elementary level to middle school and to high school. (p.17)</li> <li>Expand Positive Behavior Support model (or equivalent) into the high schools; continue to strengthen this work at elementary and middle schools. (pp. 18-19)</li> <li>Undertake other climate initiatives through social skills curriculum, in-school suspension programs, community partnerships, and de-escalation training for staff. (pp. 20-23)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Superintendent, Associate Superintendent, and District Data Team will monitor implementation monthly.</li> <li>Associate Superintendent and Director of Pupil Personnel will supervise and coordinate this work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The number of overall suspensions and students suspended in the district will decrease by at least 15 percent over the three-year Plan period.</li> <li>The number of overall suspensions and students suspended in targeted student subgroups will decrease by at least 25 percent over the three-year Plan period.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy revisions are necessary to ensure that the District is responsive to the diverse needs of its student population.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The District will review and revise selected policies to more effectively address the needs of all students.</b></p> <p><u>Strategies:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pursue a policy revision that would reduce the number of program tiers at the middle schools and high schools (p. 24)</li> <li>Review and revise all school attendance policies (p.25)</li> <li>Review and revise policies regarding length of school day and school year (p.26)</li> <li>Review and revise policies pertaining to in-school and out-of-school suspension of students (p.26)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Superintendent, Associate Superintendent, and District Data Team will monitor implementation monthly basis</li> <li>Board of Education will approve any policy revisions, with implementation directed and supervised by the Superintendent of Schools and the central office administrative team</li> </ul>	<p>This area of work will address all of the previously mentioned targeted student outcomes.</p>