

## **THE FUTURE OF MERIDEN'S HIGH SCHOOLS (Part 1)**

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Quality public education is the lifeblood of our American culture. To ignore the fundamental educational needs of our children is to turn our back on the future of Meriden as a community. Currently, the curriculum and the 50 year old physical structures of Maloney and Platt High Schools, educating approximately 2,500 students annually, are components of Meriden's public school system that require our immediate attention.

In the broader educational picture, high school constitutes the culmination of more than a decade of public education for every student. At the earliest grade levels, Meriden's Early Childhood Council is implementing its blueprint addressing education from pre-kindergarten through grade three, family support for those students, and early childhood health and behavioral development. The emphasis, however, remains on the overarching need for families in this City to recognize and return to the simple, undeniable principle that parents are a child's first teacher.

At the middle school level, students in Meriden have the opportunity to choose the theme of the middle school they attend. Lincoln Middle School has partnered with the Connecticut Commission on Tourism and Culture, making it a Higher Order Thinking (HOT) School with the theme "Arts and Media." Thomas Edison Magnet Middle School has a "Science, Mathematics and Technology" theme, while Washington Middle School has a theme of "Global Studies" encompassing the four major strands of environment and health, cultures and societies, government, politics and current events, and economics and interdependence.

The current physical condition of our high schools, including the lack of modern teaching technologies, the aging mechanical systems, and the lack of indoor environmental amenities, constitutes a sharp departure from what should be a natural progression within our school system toward the final step in preparing our children to compete, both nationally and internationally, subject to the demands of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century global economy. Educational research supports the instinctive reasoning that a quality facility results in better student and teacher performance. The National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities created by the U.S. Department of Education cites over 40 academic research papers on the subject. Temperature control, air quality, lighting including the amount of natural light, and acoustics have been ranked among the most important physical factors in a student's learning environment.

The importance of upgrading our high schools specifically was noted in Meriden's recently completed Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). The City Council unanimously approved the POCD. The plan identified one of the City's continuing goals as providing "the highest level of educational services to the children of Meriden," with the underlying objective for the high schools being the creation of "a comprehensive and cost-effective renovation program ... that provides a state-of-the-art learning environment for Meriden's students." The POCD's Action Agenda identified the upgrade of the high schools as a priority that should be implemented within three years.

Recognizing the magnitude of these high school projects and their educational, social and financial implications, the City Council formed the Ad Hoc High School Study Committee in October 2008 for the purpose of gathering and presenting the information

necessary for the City to make an informed decision regarding the best manner of upgrading Maloney and Platt High Schools. The Committee's report, entitled Blueprint for City of Meriden High Schools Redesign, was issued in November 2009 and can be viewed at [www.cityofmeriden.org](http://www.cityofmeriden.org). Over the coming weeks, we will be discussing various aspects of these projects, but we urge everyone to read the full report in anticipation of a public hearing to be held early next year.

The upgrades of Maloney and Platt High Schools no longer are optional. These upgrades must not be viewed only as an expense but must also be recognized as necessary investments in Meriden's future. We look forward to a meaningful dialogue on these projects of great importance to us all.