

The future of Meriden's high schools (Part 6)

By Brian P. Daniels and George McGoldrick

The school curriculum lies at the heart of education, and upgrades to Maloney and Platt High Schools must provide the spaces needed to instruct our high school students in a 21st Century curriculum. Facilities that have served us well over the last 50 years will not continue to be adequate over the next 50 years. At both the State and local level, development of a 21st Century curriculum is underway, and educational facilities designed to encourage productive instructional exchanges among students, teachers and staff must reflect the goals and satisfy the needs of the new curriculum.

At the State level, the Ad Hoc Committee for Secondary School Redesign issued a December 2008 draft plan for secondary school reform entitled, "The Connecticut Plan: Academic and Personal Success for Every Middle and High School Student." This plan centered on three organizing concepts. First, student engagement in the educational process is critical. Second, 21st Century skills require proficiency in more than the three basic areas of reading, writing and mathematics. Third, the development of a rigorous curriculum intended to inspire students to embrace meaningful challenges and to develop a broader and deeper understanding not only of themselves but also of the world around them is essential. The State ad hoc committee suggested that the successful implementation of high school redesign will reflect itself in students graduating at significantly higher rates, entering higher education without having to take remedial courses, finishing degree programs, and successfully transitioning into today's workforce. The issuance of the State's draft plan for secondary school reform provides an important roadmap for high school curriculum redesign.

At the local level, the Meriden Board of Education formed its High School Curriculum/Planning Subcommittee in December 2008. The committee was comprised of teachers from both high schools and was charged with evaluating high school programs through the lens of 21st Century skills and the State's report on secondary school reform. The subcommittee was tasked with determining what equipment and facilities would be needed to implement the desired changes. A series of meetings were held beginning in January 2009 and culminated with the publication of the subcommittee's report in May 2009.

The Meriden Board of Education identified a number of factors that would facilitate the requisite 21st Century revisions to the high school curriculum. First, the use of technology in the classrooms would be increased, including SmartBoards, specialized computer labs for individual subject areas, WiFi, and cable television monitors. Second, specialized spaces adequately sized would be created for activities such as departmental conferences, science labs, music (including band and choral), assemblies, theater, exercise rooms, and special education. Third, safety innovations would be added, including surveillance cameras, in-class telephones, and electronic key and identification systems. Finally, and without limitation, the implementation of a freshman academy will be explored. The Meriden Board of Education will further revise the high school

curriculum upon a preliminary determination being made in February 2010 by the City Council as to which facilities upgrade option will be pursued.

Had the schools been upgraded just 20 years ago before the technology boom, we would be confronted today with the task of retrofitting our schools with the tools needed to make our students globally competitive. Instead, we now have the ability to incorporate, in the first instance, the educational equipment and mix of specialized and flexible spaces necessary to implement the new curriculum effectively.

When these upgrade projects are complete, Meriden will be the proud home of two state-of-the art high schools that will deliver the quality education our children need to be successful in a 21st Century economy. Aside from the obvious benefits to our children, such progress is a major step in improving the image of Meriden as a whole and in making our City a more desirable place to live and work.

Brian P. Daniels is a City Councilor for Area 3 and was Chair of the High School Study Committee, and George McGoldrick is a City Councilor for Area 1, is a Deputy Majority Leader for the City Council, and was a member of the High School Study Committee.