



**2020-21 Annual Report**  
**MIDDLE LEVEL BOARD OF CONTROL**  
*Submitted by Dr. Rosie O'Brien Vojtek*  
*CAS Assistant Executive Director*

The following school administrators served on the Middle Level Board of Control during the 2020-2021 school year:

- Christine Baldelli, New Fairfield Middle School, New Fairfield
- Michael Bernardi, Rochambeau Middle School, Southbury
- Scott Gaudet, Greene-Hills School, Bristol
- Nilda Irizary, Irving Robbins Middle School, Farmington
- Liana Jorgensen, Sage Park Middle School, Windsor
- Jason Lambert, Martin Kellogg Middle School, Newington
- Deane Renda, Whisconier Middle School, Brookfield
- Tim Salem, Scotts Ridge Middle School, Ridgefield
- Kenneth Seltzer, Fairfield Woods Middle School, Fairfield
- Todd Snyder, Dag Hammarskjold School, Wallingford
- Matthew Walton, Old Saybrook Middle School, Old Saybrook
- Dr. Rosie O'Brien Vojtek, Connecticut Association of Schools

**Overview**

The 2020-2021 school year has come to be known as “the year like no other!” Many of our middle school principals and assistant principals felt more like first year administrators instead of the experienced veterans that most of them are. Throughout the year schools were in a constant state of flux, moving between remote, in-person, or hybrid learning environments, often with very little advanced notice.

CAS began the 20-21 school year where we left off in June 2020 with workshops, student activities, and award ceremonies either cancelled, postponed, or conducted virtually. As we end this school year, most educators have been vaccinated for COVID-19 and we are hopeful that next year will bring back a sense of normalcy, even as it morphs into a “new normal,” yet to be determined.

The weather couldn't have been better on Thursday afternoon, May 27, 2021, when the ROPES Networking group (see below) met in-person for the first time this year at CAS Headquarters for a social event. Everyone was ecstatic as we sat outside without masks and talked - some of us meeting each other in person for the first time!

The Middle Level Board of Control continued meeting virtually almost every month. We had four formal meetings during the year and one informal coffee hour where we just met and talked about whatever was on anyone's mind. The Middle Level Board also continued to share resources with each other via our shared Google Drive file folders.

Most of the middle schools across Connecticut are ending the year in-person with modified versions of their traditional end of the year activities and special events. Many schools are getting ready for summer school programs and/or other extended learning activities. Hot topics for this year continue to be Social Emotional Learning (SEL), positive school climate and culture, staff and student mental well-being and morale, building and

maintaining relationships, social and racial justice, and equity for all students, especially ELL and Special Education. These topics will continue to be important moving forward into the 2021-22 school year.

Like last year, with all the disruptions and challenges, we still had a very productive and successful year. All of us definitely got better at ZOOM, Google Meet, Microsoft TEAMS, and other virtual platforms. Although most of us have experienced “virtual fatigue” at some time during the year, we are all grateful for having the ability to stay connected and to be able to continue to network and share resources with each other. We anticipate that moving forward into next year, we will still continue to do some virtual meetings even as we gain the ability to meet again in-person. We have found that we have better attendance at our virtual Middle Level Board meetings than we did most of the time before the pandemic. Some of our middle level board members travel an hour or more each way to attend our CAS Board Meetings, so it has been great for them to be able to meet without having to drive back and forth, especially on days when they have evening activities. Going forward we plan to provide the option of either meeting in person or virtually to increase board member attendance and participation.

A special thank you to all of the Middle Level Board of Control members who provided guidance and support to CAS as well as sharing their leadership and expertise with colleagues across Connecticut.

### **Middle Level Board Meetings**

This year we had several new members joining our CAS Middle Level Board. They include: Scott Gaudet, Principal of Greene-Hills School in Bristol; Nilda Irizarry, Principal of Irving Robbins Middle School in Farmington; and Tim Salem, Principal of Scotts Ridge Middle School in Ridgefield.

Included below are the lists of formal Middle Level Board Meetings and informal Coffee Hour Meetings held this year. All meetings were virtual from 4:30 - 6:00 pm. The meeting dates were as follows:

#### Formal Middle Level Board of Control Meetings

- Monday, October 26, 2020
- Monday, November 30, 2020
- Monday, January 25, 2021
- Monday, May 17, 2021

#### Informal Middle Level Board of Control Coffee Hour Meetings

- Monday, February 22, 2021,

One of the highlights from our Middle Level Board meetings was our special guest, Dr. Dave Brown, who attended our November 30, 2021 meeting. Matt Walton introduced Dr. Dave F. Brown who has served with Matt on the NELMS Board. Dr. Brown has collated an extensive resource list on the topics we identified at our October meeting as high interest including equity, social and racial justice, diversity, and courageous conversations. Dr. Brown shared insights and experiences, answered questions, and recommended books on these topics.

Dave F. Brown, Ed. D., is a university professor, educational researcher, and provides professional development for teachers throughout the U. S. Dr. Brown has 13 years of experience as a public school teacher in four states having taught from second through eighth grade. His 20 years as an educational researcher have provided him with the database detailing the advantages of certified teachers, urban classrooms, and the value of universities Colleges of Education in preparing teachers well for the challenges of public education. You can learn more about Dr. Brown at [www.americaspublicschools.com/About.htm](http://www.americaspublicschools.com/About.htm)

Other topics of interest for discussion this year included, but were not limited to, Social and Racial Justice, Equity, building relationships in a virtual environment, student and teacher mental health and morale, books and articles members were reading for their own professional growth or with faculty and staff for professional learning, and of course, increasing CAS membership and participation.

The Middle Level Board of Control did not set our meetings for the 2021-22 school year yet. The meeting dates and times will be decided during the summer for next year.

#### **NAESP and NASSP National Leadership Conference and Virtual Capitol Hill Day**

On April 21, 2021, an advocacy team of principals and staff members from the Connecticut Association of Schools attended the virtual NAESP & NASSP Leadership Conference and Capitol Hill Day. The CAS team met via Zoom with each of our Connecticut Delegation staff members. Representative John Larson joined the Zoom Meeting with his staff member for a few minutes during our conversation.

#### **NAESP, NASSP, NELMS and AMLE**

During the year, NAESP CT State Representative, Mike Litke, and NAESP Federal Relations Representative from CT, Scott Nozik, provided written reports to the CAS Middle Level Board of Control.

NASSP will hold a virtual conference for members July 14-16, 2021. NAESP is planning an in-person conference in Chicago from July 14-16, 2021.

Matt Walton, assistant principal of Old Saybrook Middle School, serves on the board for the New England League of Middle Schools. Matt shared information with our Middle Level Board about NELMS and attended the NELMS virtual conference March 10-12, 2021.

AMLE's Annual Conference will be in-person in Louisville, Kentucky, November 4-6, 2021.

#### **ROPES Elementary and Middle Level Principal Networking**

Diana Burns, Principal of Chapman School in Cheshire served as the Chairperson for CAS ROPES committee, created to provide networking opportunities for Pre-K through grade 8 principals and assistant principals. ROPES stands for Reciprocal Opportunities for Principals to Engage with each other Synergistically. The networking meetings provide opportunities to: problem-solve issues; share and celebrate successes; swap resources and best practices; and discuss current challenges and "hot topics."

The CAS ROPES Committee met virtually several times during the year to plan for the ROPES meetings. Two Ropes meetings were held virtually via ZOOM on Friday, January 22, 2021 and Friday, March 26, 2021. The third meeting this year, a ROPES Networking Social Event, was held on Thursday, April 27, 2021 from 4:00 - 6:00 pm outside at CAS Headquarters. Due to COVID-19 the ROPES committee only invited people who had attended one of the other two virtual ROPES networking sessions. Twelve people attended the ROPES social event and had a great time meeting and talking with each other in person. The ROPES committee plans to host more meetings next year both virtually and/or in person. Eventually, the ROPES committee hopes to hold in-person meetings around the state to encourage participation and actively engage more CAS principals and assistant principals in networking opportunities.

#### **Professional Development**

Due to COVID-19, the Center for Leadership and Innovation (CLI) did all of their webinars and meetings virtually this year. The CLI hosted a variety of professional learning webinars that were appropriate for middle level administrators and their school communities.

Several CLI webinars resulted from conversations during the Middle Level Board meetings. Three of our members stepped forward and with colleagues were featured in the following CLI webinars:

- ***Race, Equity, and Books: How Reading Can Be an Entry Point for Essential Conversations.*** After several conversations this year during our Middle Level Board meetings, Tim Salem suggested that his Library Media Specialist, Janine Johnson, and Social Studies Teacher, Tom Broderick, would explain how his school community at Scotts Ridge Middle School in Ridgefield CT, were using books across the school as conversation starters for critically important current news and historically significant issues. On March

23, 2021, CAS hosted this 60-minute webinar. Tim Salem, Janine Johnson, and Tom Broderick shared strategies and resources for using literature to foster conversations around equity, social and racial justice, and cultural responsiveness. The webinar can be accessed at: <http://cas.casciac.org/?p=19537>.

- ***Stand UP, Speak OUT: From Bullying to Belonging: Building Empathy & Connection Through the Arts.*** This webinar came about because Middle Level Board member, Todd Synder, shared how his school, Dag Hammarskjöld Middle School in Wallingford, was using the program. To culminate their learning from the SUSO program, students created their own video production. On April 27, 2021, CAS hosted a 1-hour webinar with SUSO's founder, Jill Nesi, who wrote and produced the film, and SUSO's educational director, Robin Fox, who created the accompanying activity guides. Others involved in the webinar included: Dr. Aimee Giangrave, Social Studies Teacher, Moran Middle School, Wallingford; Steven Hernández, Esq., Executive Director, Connecticut Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity; and Todd Snyder – Principal, Dag Hammarskjöld Middle School, Wallingford. The webinar can be accessed at: <http://cas.casciac.org/?p=1965>.
- ***A Systemic Approach to Equity Matters: Farmington Public Schools.*** After another conversation during a Middle Level Board meeting, Nilda Irizarry, Principal, Irving A Robbins Middle School, worked with her district to present this webinar on April 28, 2021. During this 90-minute presentation, central office and building level administrators outlined the district's multi-faceted equity framework and explained the ways in which it is embedded in school climate and culture, community engagement, curriculum, and teaching and learning practices. Additionally, two Farmington High School seniors shared some of their student-led equity efforts, including leadership groups and dynamic events such as FHS Social Justice Week. Guest presenters included: Dani Cloud, FHS Student; Russ Crist, FHS Assistant Principal; Lisette Cobb, Equity & Inclusion Coordinator; Nilda Irizarry, Principal, Irving A Robbins MS; Ayan Mohamud, FHS Student; Veronica Ruzek, Director of Curriculum & Instruction; and Kimberly Wynne, Assistant Superintendent. The webinar can be accessed at: <http://cas.casciac.org/?p=19704>.

[For specific information about the CLI webinars and meetings, see the CLI Report.]

### **Student Activities**

This year Connecticut middle level students participated in the CAS Connecticut Middle Level Student Leadership Conference on February 23, 2021 from 8:45 am - 12:10 pm. On April 24, 2021, 263 debaters from 23 middle schools combined into 94 teams to debate the motion: This House, as the US federal and state governments, would not require standardized testing for the 2020-21 school year. [More information about both of these events is available in the CAS Student Activities report.]

### **Connecticut Association of Schools 2018-2019 Middle Level Award**

Once again this year due to COVID-19, CT middle schools submitted the names of the two students they wanted to honor for the CAS Middle Level Scholar-Leader Awards. CAS created certificates for the recipients and sent them to schools to present to students at the time that worked best for them. We sincerely hope that next year we will be back in-person at the Aqua Turf to present the awards to our Middle School Scholar-Leaders.

All other awards were not presented this year due to COVID-19.

### **Board Members for 2020-21**

The members on the current Middle Level Board of Control will remain the same for the 2021-22 year.

Once again we would like to thank all eleven members of the Middle Level Board of Control for your service to CAS during the 2020-2021 school year. We appreciate your expertise, time, and dedication to CAS and for making all Connecticut schools great places for students to learn, grow, and achieve.