



**2019-20 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 2019-2020 school year:

Christine Baldelli, New Fairfield Middle School  
Melissa Bavaro-Grande, East Granby Middle School  
Michael Bernardi, Rochambeau Middle School  
Kenneth Craig, Hall memorial School  
Liana Jorgensen, Sage Park Middle School  
Jason Lambert, Martin Kellogg Middle School  
Deane Renda, Whisconier Middle School  
Dr. Albert Sackey, Nathan Hale Middle School  
Kenneth Seltzer, Fairfield Woods Middle School  
Todd Snyder, Dag Hammarskjold School  
Mathew Walton, Old Saybrook Middle School  
Dr. Rosie O'Brien Vojtek, Connecticut Association of Schools

**Overview**

This was a very challenging year for administrators and school communities across Connecticut because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The year started out strong, but quickly came to an abrupt stop when schools were forced to close. Many CAS workshops, student activities, and award ceremonies were either cancelled, postponed, or conducted virtually.

After administrators got their schools up and running again by organizing schedules, deploying resources, and managing everything else involved with the transition to online remote learning, CAS began offering Zoom-In meetings twice a week and a variety of specific topics for ZOOM conversations and webinars during the spring. In addition, the Middle Level Board began meeting virtually every other week to check-in and discuss current issues as well as to share ideas and resources with each other. For example, the Middle Level Board created a shared Google Drive folder as a way to share resources with each other.

As this report is being written, educators are still waiting for guidance from the Governor, CT State Department of Education, and their own Superintendents and Boards of Education about what will happen next year. But, no matter what next year brings, Social Emotional Learning (SEL), school climate, culture and building/maintaining relationships, and equity for all students, especially ELL and Special Education, will be topics of special interest. Likewise, as we move forward into the "new normal" we need to continue to reflect on what we have learned while physically being distanced due to the pandemic. We must: refine those practices that may not have worked as well as they could have if we had more time to plan before implementing them; celebrate our successes; and continue to implement those things that did work well.

Most of all, we have learned that we are all in this together and we need each other. The desire and importance of working collaboratively across Connecticut becomes more relevant and necessary as we continue to learn more about COVID-19. We have known for a long time that Connecticut has one of the largest achievement gaps in the

country. However, it has been exacerbated and brought to the forefront during this pandemic as we see these inequities becoming even greater because of the haves and have nots across the digital divide. This is especially true for ELL, Special Education, and students who have parents who, for a number of reasons, were not able to supervise and engage with students during remote learning experiences.

One of the biggest changes in current CAS practices we anticipate seeing in the future is the ability to stay connected to each other virtually through platforms such as ZOOM. Providing members of the board the option to meet at the CAS office in person or virtually will decrease the amount of travel for board members who spend over an hour traveling to and from the CAS office and may, in fact, increase the number of board members who can attend the meetings.

Although the year had its disruptions and challenges, it was a very productive year.

Administrators across the state accepted the challenges created by physical and social distancing. They searched inside and outside the box to find creative ways to: create high quality learning opportunities for students; build school spirit and relationships; and actively engage, connect with, and support their school communities.

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

### **Middle Level Board Meetings**

The Middle Level Board of Control held their first meeting on Monday, October 7, 2019. Chairperson Christine Baldelli presided over the meeting. The board reviewed: the CLI 2019-2020 Leadership Series calendar and events; the Student Activity Programs 2019-2020 calendar and event; and Celebrations, Awards and Recognitions for the year. The Middle Level Board actively engaged in a conversation about how to encourage and increase membership as well as how to make CAS the “Go-to-Hub” for resources, professional learning, networking, and support. The Board discussed ways to provide “member only services” such as recording the CLI programs and posting them on the website under a members only section. They also discussed the possibility of a Book Club and updating the “Yellow Pages” they began several years ago. They felt making resources and activities such as these available for members only would add value to the CAS membership. The Board began brainstorming a list of “experts” and “keynote presenters” and wondered if there is a way to share the cost of these experts/presenters and/or bring several school districts together so administrators can learn/network with colleagues at the same level in different districts.

The Middle Level Board of Control held their second meeting on January 6, 2020. Christine Baldelli presided over the meeting. During this meeting Al Sackey provided an update to board members about NASSP activities, publications, legislation, and other information. Rosie Vojtek explained that the NELMS “Build Your Schedule Around Your Program” workshop was well attended and participants walked away with new scheduling ideas from presenters and networking with other participants. The board discussed ideas for a book study and other Dine and Discuss “Road Show” events across the state. The board was especially interested in SEL, Technology (especially appropriate use), and vaping as topics for Professional Development. The board also discussed membership and how we could reach out to schools and their administrators.

Several other Middle Level Board meetings were scheduled during the spring, but due to COVID-19 did not happen. Instead, the Middle Level Board continued to meet on several different occasions informally during an every other week “Zoom-in Coffee Break” meetings. Topics varied at these meetings, but included end of the year celebrations and graduations, reopening of the school for next year, summer school, and grading.

### **National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) Partnership**

Dr. Al Sackey serves as a member of the NASSP Board of Directors and provided updates and information to our membership.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the NAESP & NASSP Leadership Conference in Washington DC was cancelled for the 2019-20 year. Likewise, the NASSP summer conference in National Harbor, MD, was cancelled for the same reason.

### **Professional Development**

The Center for Leadership and Innovation (CLI) hosted a number of professional learning workshops for middle level administrators and their school communities at CAS until schools and businesses were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic in mid-March. CAS continued to provide informal weekly Zoom-In meetings on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:30 am - 12:30 pm as well as a variety of special Zoom-In meetings and webinars including SEL, Virtual Graduations and Celebrations, and Virtual End of the Year Activities. For specific information about the workshops, see the CLI Report.

The Center for Leadership and Innovation (CLI) directors are planning a diverse offering of workshops and conferences for the next school year (2020-21). Watch for the CLI brochure coming this summer!

### **Conferences**

Matthew Walton, Middle Level Board Member and NELMS Board of Directors member representing Connecticut, and Rosie O'Brien Vojtek, CAS Assistant Executive Director, attended the New England League of Middle Schools (NELMS) conference in Providence Rhode Island March 9-10, 2020. They attended sessions and hosted an exhibit to share information about CAS and CIAC.

### **Student Activities**

Until Schools were closed in March, middle level students participated in the Connecticut Middle Level Student Leadership Conference in January. Middle level students also participated in the Connecticut Middle School Debate League. For information about both of these events, see the Middle Level Student Activities Report.

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

CONGRATULATIONS to the following middle level administrators who received special CAS recognition for:

1. **Principal of the Year** - Joy Wright, Principal, King Philip Middle School, West Hartford.
2. **Assistant Principal of the Year** - Anjanette Belmonte, AP at Henry James Memorial School in Simsbury.
3. **William Cieslukowski First Year Principal Award** - Nilda Irizarry, Irving A. Robbins Middle School, Farmington.

Once schools are back in session and it is safe to continue the award selection processes the Middle Level Award Committee will complete the work for the following awards:

4. **Middle Level Educator of the Year**
5. **Middle School of the Year**
6. **CAS Exemplary School Climate Practices Recognition Award**
6. **Arthur Director Leadership Award**

Unfortunately, the "Arts in the Middle" conference and the Middle Level Scholar Leader Banquet were canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Middle Level Scholar Leaders from schools across Connecticut received a certificate from CAS. Middle Level Scholar Leaders were recognized at a time and place appropriately determined by their individual schools.

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

We wish to thank outgoing Middle Level Board member, Melissa Bavaro-Grande, from East Granby Middle School, for her service to CAS and especially to this Board. We would also like to welcome Scott Gaudet, principal of Greene-Hills K-8 School in Bristol CT as a member on the CAS Middle Level Board beginning 2020-21 year.