

# Regents officials visit Middletown

## Impressed with district's educational programs

By Pauline Liu  
Times Herald-Record

MIDDLETOWN — On the first day of school on Tuesday, the Middletown School District received a visit from some of the people in charge of the state's educational system. Regents Chancellor Betty Rosa and Regent Judith Johnson came to get a firsthand look at the district known for its turnaround. They were accompanied by Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther, D-Forestburgh. According to school board President Edwin Estrada, the biggest source of pride in the district of more than 7,600 students has been the improvement in its graduation rate, which hovered around 52 percent about a dozen years ago. Now the district has an 85 percent graduation rate, according to school officials.

"If you look at the graduation rates for our Hispanic and African-American students, they are within a few percentage points of that 85 percent rate," Estrada said.

The district has a growing immigrant population and a poverty rate of 85 percent, according to district officials.

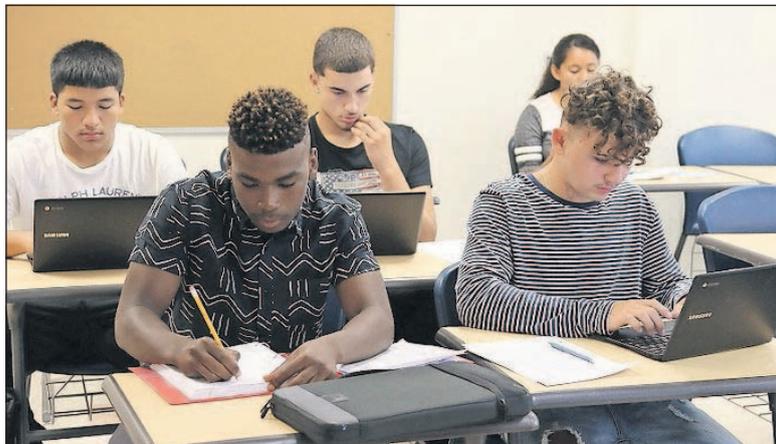
"Aren't they fortunate to have a school system that values every child?" said Johnson, who represents Orange County on the 17-member Board of Regents. "Now, the question is, 'How do we make this happen across the state?'"

Senior Travis Grogan told Johnson that while he's in school, he feels as though he's among family, and that he's been taught that if he works hard, he'll succeed.

Another senior, Andrew Gonzalez, raved about the high school's biomed course and the way the district offers students more learning options. Middletown Superintendent Ken Eastwood credits some of the district's programs with helping to make a difference. A portion of the \$20 million federal Race to the Top grant that Middletown won



New York State Board of Regents Chancellor Betty Rosa gives out hugs to Middletown High School students on Tuesday, the first day of school. PHOTOS BY JIM SABASTIAN/FOR THE TIMES HERALD-RECORD



Students in class during the first day of school at Middletown High School. The district has an 85 percent graduation rate, according to school officials.

in 2012 was used to provide free college tuition to all students who wished to participate in Syracuse University's Project Advance.

"Our students couldn't afford to pay for it, but when they were given the opportunity, they blew the socks off of it," Eastwood said.

More improvements are in the works as the high school renovation continues. Learning will become more personalized, and there are plans to keep the high school open until 9 p.m. next year to ensure that

students have access to the internet for their coursework, Eastwood said. Rosa, who became chancellor in April, said she has made full-time kindergarten, an overhaul of the teacher-evaluation system and multiple pathways for graduation her priorities. As for what she saw in Middletown, Rosa said she was very impressed.

"It would take a lifetime for me to tell you about it, but the biggest thing is that children are at the core of the discussions here," Rosa said.

## Reader photos: First day of school



To view reader-submitted photos of the first day of school, go to [recordonline.com](http://recordonline.com).