

OUR OPINION

EDITORIAL BOARD

JOE VANDERHOOF
president and publisher

DEREK OSENEKO
executive editor

KEN HALL
editorial page writer

EDITORIAL

Middletown, Newburgh schools in the spotlight

Get ready for the great Orange County educational experiment.

Schools in Middletown and Newburgh, both large and challenged, are heading into the next year with major changes in store. The final results, which will not be evident for a few years, could tell a lot about what works and what does not when it comes to improving the way schools educate those who start with the many disadvantages born of poverty.

Middletown is the big story of the week, having made it to the winner's circle of the federal Race to the Top competition where it will receive \$20 million for some innovative programs.

When Middletown made the list of finalists, there were lots of smiles but nothing that could compare to the celebration that comes with being named one of only 16 winners in the nation, and the only one in New York. This means that many will be watching what happens in Middletown, and that will be very important for a reason that might go a bit further than anybody in Washington or Albany expected.

The Middletown superintendent, Ken Eastwood, is an outspoken advocate for his students and faculty. To do that job the way it needs to be done, he also is an outspoken critic of the dysfunctional way New York funds and regulates education. This victory has put Middletown on the educational map, and he should use that enhanced visibility to spread the word.

There is no reason for the governor or legislators to worry once they hear that Ken Eastwood is holding for them on line 2. But they need to make sure and take the

call because he has a lot of things to say that they need to hear.

One of the areas where he has not been shy about spreading his opinions concerns charter schools, the second big local story of the week. If Middletown is making changes in-house, Newburgh is trying the approach of outsourcing, but not by the choice of anybody in the public school system.

The first charter school in the Mid-Hudson, the Newburgh Preparatory Charter High School, received its final approval on Tuesday. It plans to start serving high school dropouts ages 16 to 21 in the next school year. As Executive Director Tom Fitzgerald put it, "This is a charter school to improve Newburgh."

While both efforts focus on counseling, encouraging and equipping students who need extra help, the funding could not be more different.

Middletown will get extra money from the federal government; Newburgh will get less money because some funds will be diverted to the charter school.

That could help Middletown make progress, but it will make an already challenging situation in Newburgh that much worse. It should not take long to see which approach works best and which one cries out for change.

If, as many expect, the charter school makes progress that comes at the expense of the public school system, people in both cities and those watching from near and far need to hope that legislators in Albany show they are capable of learning this lesson before it harms too many students.

YOUR VOICES

Departing cadet should pay

How dare the Army even think of letting Cadet Blake Page get away with quitting the U.S. Military Academy at West Point? All veterans and families of veterans should be outraged.

How long does it take you to know that you are an atheist? Because Page would not receive a commission because of clinical depression, he decided that the best way out was claiming religious discrimination. You mean that it took four years for Page to notice that he was attending religious meetings that at times required sectarian religious participation?

For four years, Page denied another individual who really did want to serve his/her country the opportunity of doing so. For this alone, he should be dishonorably discharged. I don't know the Cadet Code by heart, but I am sure that honesty and integrity are part of it.

As military academies offer the best education in the country and Page took advantage of that, he should be made to pay for it. Any subject having anything to do with the military should not be counted as credit toward a degree by any other college. If Page trained as an infantry lieutenant, any math program should also be discounted.

PAUL SHUST
Warwick

IBM move at issue

I read with interest the article describing IBM changing its distribution to employees' 401(k) plans.

Several years ago, IBM dropped its previous fixed-benefit retirement plans for workers under age 55 and placed them in the revised 401(k) plan, which was probably better than most private retirement plans offered at the time.



Now instead of semimonthly deposits, IBM has decided to wait until the end of the year to make a lump-sum deposit. The employee loses the benefit of dollar cost averaging that came with semimonthly contributions, but that's not the worst impact.

The caveat is the IBM worker must be employed as of Dec. 15 of that year to receive the 401(k) contributions for the entire year. An employee who decides to retire during the year would receive a pro-rated contribution commensurate with the percentage of the year worked.

Not explained in the article would be the disposition of IBM workers who get caught in a workforce reduction. Those dedicated employees who lose their jobs before Dec. 15 apparently would not receive any 401(k) contributions for the entire year. This hardly symbolizes IBM's past goal of "respect for the individual." I hope this is not the case.

JEFFREY GLIEDMAN
Wallkill

Let's use Wall St. rebate

Electing President Obama was a good thing for middle-income taxpayers nationally, but here in New York state, property taxes are still unbearable and unfair.

Former Gov. Spitzer suggests a national stock transfer tax – much of which would come from the state. But did you know the state already has a stock transfer tax that collects about \$16 billion a year, which is rebated every year to Wall Street? That enormous sum could reduce property taxes immediately. We collect it already. Why don't we use it here, now?

Then there's the threat – in "fiscal cliff" negotiations – of taking away middle-class federal tax deductions for property taxes. So highly taxed state property taxpayers would subsidize low property tax states by being taxed twice.

In addition, our governor has promised a tax reform commission that would exclude the most chaotic, extortionate tax, the property tax, from the discussion. Really, Gov. Cuomo?

We property taxpayers are still carrying an unfair burden, and we won't be laying it down anytime soon. In New York state, the politicians help those who are big campaign donors. They are taxed very lightly.

Although we tax reformers fight for tax equity constantly, it could get worse before it gets better. Stay alert.

GIOIA SHEBAR
Gardiner

WHAT DO YOU THINK? We welcome letters to the editor by local people, especially on local topics. Letters should be 200 words or less, must be signed and must contain an address and telephone number for verification. Letters may be edited for length. **Email to:** letters@th-record.com. **Mail to:** Letters to the Editor, Times Herald-Record, 40 Mulberry St., Middletown, NY 10940-6302. **Fax:** 845-343-2170. **Information:** 845-346-3142.