

**For immediate release
October 17, 2013**

Superintendent announces launch of Middle School Success Initiative Task Force

Superintendent Stephen Russell has appointed a 12-member task force to discuss improvements to the district's middle school education model in response to district data that shows performance has been stagnant in grades 6-8.

To address these concerns, Salem is launching a Middle School Success Initiative Task Force, comprised of six parents and six educators and co-chaired by Witchcraft Principal Mark Higgins. The group will begin their work at a November 6 meeting with the goal of presenting recommendations to the School Committee in March. The task force will be charged with:

- Reviewing research and literature on middle school education to better understand what models have been most successful in similar communities, and why
- Reviewing survey, focus group and interview data to better understand the needs of the Salem community
- Developing a clear vision for what critical components are needed to create a new Salem middle school model
- Developing a set of recommendations to be presented to the School Committee by March 2014

"This is one of the most important pieces to the puzzle in Salem, and absolutely critical to the future success of our schools," said Salem Mayor Kimberley Driscoll. "We want to get this right, so we can all have confidence that our students are leaving eighth grade well prepared for the academic challenges awaiting them in high school and beyond."

Salem Superintendent Stephen Russell agreed.

"We're anxious to get this work started," he said. "We know we can't wait any longer. This effort will allow us to really tap into the community's good thinking to develop some new strategies to resolve some of the long-standing issues that continue to challenge our middle schools."

Members of the community not appointed to the Task Force will have multiple opportunities to contribute to the discussion by participating in focus groups, responding to the community survey, and/or attending some or all of the Task Force meetings.

The Task Force will follow an aggressive timeline, with the goal of completing its recommendations by late Winter 2014, to enable the district to begin implementation in time for the start of the 2014-15 school year.

Date	Action
10/7	School Committee approval of Task Force
10/8-10/14	Task Force members recruited and selected
10/16	Superintendent appoints Task Force
11/6	<i>First Task Force meeting</i>
November-December	Conduct internal and external research; conduct focus groups and administer community survey
Mid-December	<i>Second Task Force Meeting</i> : Review data from focus groups and survey, begin to develop recommendations
January	Further develop draft recommendations

1/6	Update report to the School Committee
Late January	<i>Third Task Force Meeting</i> : Complete recommendations
February	Finalize recommendations and report
3/17	Present recommendations to the School Committee

The first meeting of the Task Force will take place on Wednesday, November 6 at 6 p.m. at Witchcraft Heights Elementary School. For more information on the Task Force, please contact Superintendent Russell at superintendent@salemk12.org.