

Teachers asked to reprise speech

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COVENTRY — Coventry High School students have been recognized for their performance by the Rhode Island Department of Education in the past, but more frequently, it is the administration that is receiving accolades.

Officials from the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) spoke so highly of a presentation delivered by a team of teachers and administrators from Coventry High School that they suggested the Rhode Island Association of School Principals (RIASP) extend an invitation to them to deliver the same presentation at the RIASP's summer conference coming up next month.

Patricia A. Hines, RIASP executive director, wrote to Dr. Arthur Lisi, who is an assistant principal at Coventry High School as well as head of guidance and students services there, but also serves as part of the six-member team that originally presented the program at the New England Secondary Schools Consortium Regional Conference in Nashua New Hampshire, requesting the team's presence.

In the request she said that "Barbara Miller, Bill Fasano, and Joe Crowley, all judges of the six Rhode Island schools to present at the NESSC Conference in April, highly recommended to me the presentation you and your team from Coventry High School presented to RIDE and again at the NESSC Conference in April. The Board of Directors of RIASP has asked me to extend an invitation to you and your team to give your presentation at a 90 minute breakout session on Tuesday, August 3, 2010, at the RIASP Summer Conference."

Lisi said they were thrilled to have received the invitation and are just as excited about delivering the presentation, which he said that the team has agreed to do.

The topic for the presentation, he said, is Transforming a High School by Using Common Assessments.

"This presentation is about working together to improve school standards and grades and strengthening the school in order to provide for an overall stronger community and economy by making sure that our graduates are leaving the school with the applied learning skills they need to become productive citizens," Lisi said. "It is a big picture approach."

Lisi said he and the other presenters, Chuck Branchaud, a math teacher, Anthony Marsella, a culinary arts teacher, Donna Tobin, an English teacher, and

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Kathleen Sullivan, the science department chair, discussed the importance of providing a "stronger educational basis for kids so that they can be college- and career-ready."

He said they also informed all of the other academics in attendance at the conference about their use of common assessments in all subject areas. He said the school, which is a learning community of 170 faculty and 1,800 students, "has transformed the way in which student learning and progress are assessed and how teachers use student work to inform and adapt their teaching methods." He said the faculty "developed challenging and relevant learning projects in collaboration with students that are now part of the graduation requirements."

"Now it is important to realize how very hard it is to change educational practice, and especially hard at a large high school like us, but when you have the commitment of everyone on board and you begin the process of common tasks and assessments and you have teachers coming to the table in common planning time to make sure it meets best practice criteria so that everyone is geared with the tools that have been designed to ensure that all common tasks are achieved across all kids, it becomes clear that this is something that can be made applicable to any high school, not just ours and that was the point," he said.

Lisi said that the presentation was so well received that the re-

quest from RIASP was not the only one to come in.

"We have received tremendous feedback from our presentation," Lisi said. "We received several requests to come and present. Even Mr. [Michael] Hobin, [the school principal], has received a request from a school in Massachusetts that asked if they could come and visit us to get an idea of what we do so that they might be able to implement our strategies in their school."

Lisi said the programs, initiatives and strategies that are part of the common assessments approach are not unilateral. He said that it takes everyone that is on the team to keep the ship afloat.

"We were lucky that the state took the initiative to require performance-based requirements and offered the support that they did for literacy in a standards-based environment and that we had the type of teachers that were willing to embrace this," Lisi said.

"It took a lot of investment, but people immediately recognized the benefits of seeing students do portfolios and capstones so that they could connect their future learning with their current learning," he said. "So while this new approach was another huge commitment, it was clearly powerful enough that teachers could see the possibility of transforming their high school. This is a major thing for them to recognize and they are. We now have students in physical education programs that are doing tasks that drive our assessments in chorus with the same applied learning

skills, rigor and relevance. All of our staff are using all of the same rubrics to measure success and our entire school is speaking the same language. It's consistent and effective."