

Teachers stressed over new RIDE tool

Meant to maximize time and resources, but instead teachers say it does opposite

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COVENTRY – The new online data tool meant to help Coventry educators seems to be causing more harm than good, at least at present.

The Educator Performance and Support System (EPSS), an online tool implemented in the beginning of the school year meant to support student evaluation and maximize educators' time and resources is not without its glitches, said Coventry School Superintendent Mike Almeida.

"Teachers have lost hours upon hours of precious teaching time and if ever there was a year we need to support teachers, this is it," said Almeida.

He raised his concerns as he and members of the school committee

discussed adding two days to the school's calendar from days lost to Hurricane Sandy.

"The anxiety is so high because the district lost time because of the storm and because of the pressures put on us by Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) to see this new data collection through," said the Superintendent.

The Educator Performance and Support System (EPSS) is an online tool meant to support high quality evaluation implementation, maximize educators' time and resources, and provide a single data system for educator evaluation. The EPSS provides a tested, yet customized online system to streamline and support the Educator Evaluation work throughout the state.

It is an education initiative that RIDE began two years ago to bring new online tools to teachers and administrators.

Some of the problems educators have faced include pages not being able to load or the website being down, and because educators aren't sure what the state is looking for in these evaluations, they're spending time inputting large amounts of information, which is taking time away from lesson preparation.

"It's getting better but it's not perfect yet," said Coventry's Assistant Superintendent. "The idea on paper is great, but logistics have been an issue."

Kelly Erinakes, president of the Coventry Teachers' Alliance, agreed with Almeida.

"I'd definitely say of the 90 percent of stress we're feeling, 50 percent of that is from RIDE," she said. "It's been so frustrating. There's a great deal of appreciation when those from the central office can understand



Mike Almeida

Tool supposed to help Coventry's teachers, but isn't

Continued from Page A-1

what we're feeling. The stress is higher than I've ever seen it."

Erinakes explained that instead of teachers spending three hours planning a lesson, that time is spent online trying to understand the new system and the focus on the lesson plan is lost.

In an effort to try to ease things a bit, Almeida is putting aside a half day on March 26, a month before the state's deadline to submit evaluations, so educators can have an afternoon to become a little more savvy with the system.

"It's only one afternoon and I know it's not a lot of time, but we can start there and then take further measures down the line," he said.

Almeida pointed out how this has been a burden on every school district in the state and is going to take "relentless attention." He's very concerned about the impact this has had.

"I know there will be many who will lose a few nights sleep, literally, working on this as the May 15 deadline approaches," he said. "We've got to be able to get back to educating our kids — the reason why we all got involved with teaching in the first place."

In addition to putting a half day aside to work on the system, Almeida and Erinakes have worked together to put together a checklist of what needs attention in the system.

"It will go month by month of where teachers and administration needs to be to keep them on track and what needs to be submitted," she said.