

## COVENTRY

# School board eyes exchange program

### Coventry education officials considering plan to host more international students

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COVENTRY — The Coventry School Committee received a presentation last week from Roosevelt International Academy (RIA), an accelerated diploma program for international students based in Providence which allows them to be integrated into local schools to promote culture and diversity.

Superintendent Craig Levis said that he asked RIA to provide a presentation for the committee in the

hope that they would be interested in working with the organization to host international students at Coventry High School.

"There's very little here in terms of diversity," Levis said. "This program would be a win-win for us. It would provide a lot of opportunities for diversity and would have a financial benefit for the school."

Director of Program Development for RIA Michael Dunican gave the committee a thorough presentation detailing the different aspects of the program which

he said can benefit both parties.

The program involves more than 100 international students, most often from China, who become tuition-paying students at local schools for their senior year. The benefit for the international students, he said, is that they are able to be immersed in American culture and learn English. The students pay the district's full tuition to attend. Students at the high school will benefit from exposure to international culture.

Students are housed at the RIA

facility in Providence where they receive ESL and other types of instruction regularly. CHS students will also be allowed to visit the Providence facility.

Dunican said a major selling point for the program is that it doesn't take any seats away from district students. The international students would only fill open seats that are available.

"Our programs are designed to create a real cultural exchange for both countries that isn't going to cost your school and students any-

thing," Dunican said.

Approximately 80 percent of the students graduating have gone on to top 100 schools, and another 45 percent have gone on to top 50 schools. RIA currently has students at the Rocky Hill School, the Lincoln School for Girls, St. Mary's Bay View Academy, Mount Saint Charles, and the Wheeler School among others. The program is also running at Ponaganset High School in Glocester.

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# Exchange

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"I believe we will eventually have every public school in RI added to this list," Dunacin said. "This is a perfect time for you guys to get involved because we're growing and expanding. It's changing the education system."

Dunacin said the demand for students to come to the U.S., particularly from China, stems out of their rigorous school system which is driven by a single test that essentially determines the future of each student.

"You guys are at the forefront of this change in education," he said.

Levis said that he felt the program was a great fit for Coventry because the district is not looking to take on a new project that would require development from the ground up.

"I always look at things from multiple lenses. Sometimes it's the negative things that jump out at me. It was so refreshing to see our high school through your lens," Levis said to Dunacin, who had previously taken a tour of CHS. "You were blown away by the opportunities and potential we have. I want this and I think it's a good idea but we've invited a lot of different people to the table and had a real good conversation."

Levis said he particularly appreciate the opportunities the program would offer for CHS students and faculty. Students would have the opportunity to visit China and teachers would receive professional development training to work with the international students.

"We were so impressed with everything we saw at your location," Levis said. "Everything is first class and that's what we want it to be. We want to make sure we can look parents in the eye and say we're going to provide the best education for your child, something that is world class."

Committee member Dr. Ann Dickson said that in order to feel comfortable with the program she would need to know that it would be a good fit for CHS students in particular, as all communities are different. Dickson also said that because of the large size of CHS the program would have to send a large number of students in order for it to truly have an impact.

"Ten students would be a drop in the bucket since we have one of the largest high schools in the state," Dickson said.

Committee member Donna Kalunian expressed positive thoughts on the program.

"I think it's great because the students are going to college and there are many different ethnicities there and even in the workplace. I can see where that would work really well."

Committee chairperson Katherine Patenaude said that if the students were to come she would like to see the fully immersed in the community by spending time in activities outside of the school the school as well. Levis agreed, noting that he intended for the students to become part of the local culture.

"The reason we continue to grow and expand is that this is working," Dunacin said. "The native students' lives are enriched by this. They are gaining something from this experience. It's about creating a more well rounded community really and one with a better understanding of the world."

If the program is brought to CHS in the future, it would likely begin with 10 students which could be increased over time.

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