

PUTTING KIDS FIRST



Submitted photo

Officials from Rhode Island Kids Count and Coventry Public Schools celebrate the group's honoring of the school district as one of several winners of the Young Children's Champion Award.

Advocacy group honors Coventry Public Schools

RI Kids Count recognizes district for early childhood programs

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COVENTRY — In late January Rhode Island Kids Count recognized Coventry Public Schools with the 2019 Young Children's Champion Award during the annual Rhode Island Kids Count Celebrating Young Children Luncheon.

The award is given to organizations

who have made a critical difference for young children and families in Rhode Island.

This year the recognition was given to U.S. Senator Jack Reed, Meeting Street, the YWCA Rhode Island Early Childhood Learning Center and Virginia Najarro Family Child Care.

At a school committee meeting Thursday, Coventry Superintendent Craig Levis called the recognition “a

great honor.”

“Coventry was the only school district that was chosen,” said Levis. “It’s really a celebration for everyone in our district. We have many individuals who have worked and supported students.”

Rhode Island Kids Count was founded in 1994, becoming an independent nonprofit in 1997. Their mission is to

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improve the health, safety, education, economic well-being and development of children in Rhode Island through comprehensive data collection that is used to influence public policy to improve the lives of children, and by stimulating a dialogue on issues involving children.

"It was nice for us to be recognized by Rhode Island Kids Count for the work that's being done," Levis said. "One thing they do a great job at is collecting data and using it to leverage policy and resources, so for us to be recognized was a great honor."

Coventry Public Schools Director of Early Childhood Programs Denise Ahern said the award is the direct result of the dedicated and hard-working early childhood staff in the school district.

"Our district has lots of initiatives we're doing," said Ahern. "Including our itinerant model work, our Bright Stars rating and our kindergarten is doing the Boston Curriculum pilot. We have a lot of activity going on in the district."

"All the credit goes to the teachers," she added. "I put tons of work on them and very high expectations and they don't complaint. They

take it on because they see the importance of early childhood education too."

Ahern noted the district has an upcoming visit to evaluate its Bright Stars rating. The state's tiered quality rating and improvement system, Bright Stars, assigns schools ratings based on a number of criteria. Coventry as a district has maintained a steady four star rating, but they're hoping to move up to five this year.

"We have a five in every category but the environment," said Ahern.

"I'm in amazement with the fact that we've gone to four stars and I can only imagine we're going to go to five stars," said Coventry School Committee Chairperson Kathy Patenaude.

Their next Bright Stars visit is scheduled for early March.

At the luncheon January 28 Rhode Island Kids Count also released their 2019 Policy Priorities for Young Children. These priorities include things like strengthening the state's child care licensing system, expanding Pre-K, reducing chronic absences, expanding on paid family leave and implementing a statewide Kindergarten Entry Profile to give kindergarten teachers more information about each child when they start school.

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