

Cov. schools update goals

CHS to reapply for accreditation

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COVENTRY — In keeping with a strategic plan established two years ago, the Coventry School District received an update from Superintendent Kenneth DiPietro last week detailing what goals they met last year and what ones they will focus on over the coming school year.



Kenneth DiPietro

The plan is defined by six strategies, DiPietro said, and is required in each district by the state.

At the school committee meeting last Tuesday DiPietro gave a comprehensive report on how the district has progressed in this plan and where they are headed next.

The highlights of school year 2008/2009, DiPietro detailed on Monday, were in the use of technology in the fifth grade, establishing a strategic plan for special education and successful implementation of the new graduation requirements at the high school level.

As a success under the first strategy of student improvement, all fifth graders gave a multimedia presentation last year, DiPietro said, which was a huge highlight.

This was exciting, he said, first because there was enough technology provided by the town to give this opportunity to the elementary school students, and second because the fifth graders mastered the presentation so well. This is especially positive because it fits into the requirements that students will have when they leave the middle school and finally when they graduate high school.

“Now students give a presentation in fifth grade, eighth grade and twelfth grade — we’re not just expecting juniors and seniors to know how to do this when they do their capstone. Everyone will learn along the way.”

To accomplish the second strategy of addressing learner diversity, a plan for meeting the needs of special education students was established in the district, DiPietro said. It will set the tone for the next three years, he added. One of the pushes here is in training teachers to personalize their teaching to the students in their classroom.

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Cov. to overhaul lunch program

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When he first arrived in the district, DiPietro added, 24 percent of the students in Coventry Public Schools were classified as special education — in the past few years that number has dropped to 17 percent.

“In the past they identified a lot of the students as needing special education plan, now we’re less than 17 percent because our classrooms have gotten stronger and stronger.

Classrooms can adjust to greater diversity and the performance of our special education students have been raising, not lowering.”

As part of strategy three, ensuring a high-quality curriculum, Coventry High School is one of four high schools in the state, DiPietro said, to be used as an example for high school reform and is looked to from around New England as a school where reform was implemented very well.

Taking the strategic plan into fiscal year 2009/2010 without any new money will be a challenge, DiPietro said, but funds from the federal government and some actions already taken within the district will bring things forward.

One of the biggest goals going forward is to continue with the strategic plan number two and continue to work with diverse learners, DiPietro said.

A federally funded program called "Response to Intervention," will train all teachers in the district how to be responsible to diverse learning needs, he said.

Many special education students do better in a classroom with their peers than in their own classroom, DiPietro said. "The reality is that throwing money at treating special education kids specially doesn't work. Instead, regular classrooms with their rigor need to focus on working with all the kids they have."

This is something Coventry Public Schools has already been doing, DiPietro said, but the funding will help pay for the professional development that will make it happen.

In line with strategy three, keeping the curriculum aligned with state standards, this is the year that Coventry High School

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will have to reapply for accreditation, DiPietro said.

High schools have to apply to the New England Association of Schools and Colleges every ten years for their accreditation, he said. “There will be things that they’ll recommend we improve and this is a very big project and target for us.”

Not only is it the high school’s year of being reviewed for accreditation, but it is also the seventy-fifth anniversary of Coventry High School, he added.

The third big thing going forward ties in with strategy six, promoting healthy lifestyles, DiPietro said.

Coventry Public Schools recently contracted Aramark as the new food service provider and will be looking for ways to overhaul the menu and encourage wellness across the district.

“Food service lost a lot of money over the past three or four years,” he said. “We used to make money on kids who bought vendor items like soda after school. But we’re not allowed to do that anymore.”

With Aramark, the school department will be working to revitalize the school lunch and breakfast program DiPietro said, by providing nutritious meals that are affordable.

“You can’t get the meal we’re providing anywhere in the market,” he said. “Aramark’s meal can compete with pizza, tacos, and some of the foods kids want to see, but they’re also putting in with that the full health and wellness meal plan.”

Parental engagement, which is the fourth goal in the strategies, is an ongoing target, DiPietro said, as it is every year. “It is a consistent priority for us, which is why I didn’t list it as a highlight.”