

Cov. principal singled out for honor

Head of Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School regarded as one of the best

HANNAH PIECUCH
hpiecuch@ricentral.com

COVENTRY — For his leadership at one of the three largest middle schools in the state, Principal Dr. Michael Almeida has been named Middle School Principal of the Year.

Almeida had no idea that he would be receiving the statewide award from the Board of Directors of the Rhode Island Association of School Principals (RI-ASP) when he attended the school committee meeting on Tuesday night, he said.

RIASP Executive Director Patricia Hines attended the meeting to make the presentation of the award, accompanied by representative from Rhode Island Middle Level Educators Bill Fasano.

Almeida was chosen as the 2010

Middle School Principal of the Year for his collaborative leadership, Hines said. “Dr. Almeida has worked with all stakeholders to develop a school culture at Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School of Coventry which fosters shared decision making; development of strategic plans which reflect shared vision, mission, values, and beliefs; continuous collaboration around learning and teaching; creation of high expectations for all school community members including teachers, administrators, students, and parents; and ongoing celebration and recognition of student and faculty achievement.”

Drawing from the comments of teachers who have worked with Almeida and Superintendent Kenneth DiPietro, Hines outlined the impact of his leadership, the hallmark of which is

“to build a cooperative spirit within our learning community,” she read.

“[He has] extraordinary vision and knowledge of current best practice. He is a firm believer in cultivating shared leadership and capitalizing on individual strengths to build capacity. Teachers feel he motivates, inspires, and empowers them. They credit him with transforming their faculty and professional development meetings by focusing on accountable talk, formative assessments, differentiated instruction, and analysis of data to inform instruction. Omnipresent throughout the building, Dr. Almeida is an active listener when talking with students, parents, and teachers. He processes ideas from everyone and incorporates them into solutions.”

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Principal Dr. Michael Almeida from the Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School of Coventry accepts the Middle School Principal of the Year award from Rhode Island Association of School Principals Executive Director Patricia Hines during the Tuesday night school committee meeting.

Cov. principal earns top honor

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In spite of his surprise at receiving the award, Almeida was quick to graciously accept it and give the credit back to his colleagues. "This is certainly an honor," he said. "But let me just say that this is more about the community and what we all do as a family."

After the meeting, Almeida continued on that theme. "I know there are a lot of excellent middle school principals in this state," he said. "I learn from them whenever I talk to them. It's great to have a middle school network. Here in Coventry I am really surrounded by exceptional professionals. Working in Coventry has provided me with a tremendous amount of professional growth and skills because I work so well with [Coventry High School Principal] Michael Hobin and all the elementary school principals."

He is grateful for this recognition, Almeida said, "but I attribute it to the students, faculty and staff. It's a great honor but I wouldn't have it if it were not for them."

The school committee was very pleased to see Almeida get this recognition, Chairperson Katherine Pate-naude said. "He so deserved it."

Almeida came to Coventry in July of 2007, one year after the middle

school consolidation, DiPietro said. Prior to that time, DiPietro knew of Almeida for his work at Riverside Middle School in East Providence, he said.

He encountered Almeida's name while studying schools that were succeeding with students with individual education plans and special needs, DiPietro said. While at Riverside, Almeida guided the special needs population through some very significant gains. "My research into his efforts then was that he worked very effectively with the staff in terms of assessing where the students were in order to create a more responsible system," DiPietro said. So when Almeida applied to be a principal in Coventry, "I was thrilled."

When Almeida came to Coventry "he faced one of the three largest middle schools in the state that had just been consolidated," DiPietro said. "And the day that he came both the administrators of the middle school had left to work at Coventry's central administration. So if you can imagine, here is a top administrator who in another district virtually raised their scores, and then he comes here to find that they consolidate from two middle schools to one. He had the support of the prior administrators, but they weren't there and he had to build his own team. It was a challenge to begin with and in

three years parents who were very concerned about consolidation, loss of personalization and everything else really do praise him."

As a mother and a school committee member, Lisa Tomasso has seen Almeida's transformation of the middle school first hand, she said at the meeting. "He has done a wonderful job of creating a complete learning environment for both students and teachers," she said.

Before coming to Coventry, Almeida taught at Riverside from 2003 to 2007. He began his career as a physical education and health teacher in Providence, Westerly and Warwick. Almeida holds a bachelor of science degree in physical education from Rhode Island College, a master's degree in secondary administration from Providence College and a doctorate in educational leadership from Johnson & Wales University.

The Middle School Principal of the Year Awards Program is conducted nationally by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, Hines said, with financial support from MetLife. In October, Dr. Almeida along with the winners from each state will be honored at ceremonies to be held in Washington, D.C. He will also be recognized at a RIASP dinner meeting in May.