



Jessica Selby • Daily Times

Tiogue Elementary School students proudly display their recently-earned diplomas after the graduation ceremony held at the school. Some may be nervous about the transition to middle school, but most of them are excited and their teachers believe they are exceptionally prepared.

Middle school, here we come

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COVENTRY — Cameras flashed in rapid fire as fifth-grade students at Tiogue Elementary School proudly accepted diplomas from their school principal.

Parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters of the Tiogue School's graduating class of 2009 filled the gymnasium. They were all there to applaud the students on their successful completion of elementary school.

The students performed various song and dance combinations, recited poetry, showed a slide show and accepted awards for their accomplishments throughout their educational careers at the school.

Jeanna Sinotte, one of the fifth grade teachers at the school who helped to organize the event, said the class began preparing for the graduation event about six weeks in advance. She said the students selected poems like "Monsters in the Closet," from their traditional classroom Poetry Break program, but allocated special time to write and rehearse the song that they wrote especially for this event, "Sweet Tiogue School." It was a specialized song in tune with the Neil Diamond song, "Sweet Caroline."

The students rotated through a three-tiered line up of chairs so as to give each child the opportunity to have a front row seat for the performance.

Many parents cheered, some cried and others sat

gleaming as they watched their children sing, dance and recite the poetry.

Then the school principal, Denise Richtarik came up and spoke to the assembled group.

"This is a milestone for you and your child," Richtarik said. "I know it doesn't seem possible that six years ago these same students entered our school as kindergarteners and now they are going to tackle the middle school.

"They will have new adventures, with that comes more independence, but we are all so proud of their accomplishments," she said. And quoting from Dr. Seuss's, "Oh, the Places You'll Go," Richtarik told the students, "kids, you'll move mountains."

The students buzzed with excitement as discussion about graduating from the school continued. Some said they were anxious about moving on to the middle school, while others said that they were a bit hesitant.

"I am going to miss recess and being on the safety patrol, but I am not nervous," said Tanner Dupre, one of the graduating fifth graders.

Sinotte said the school has been working to prepare the fifth graders for the transition. She said the fifth-grade teachers, herself, Susan Flynn, and Linda Colucci, invited former Tiogue school students that are now in the middle school back to Tiogue to talk with the fifth graders about the transition.

"I think that for the most part many of the kids are

ready," Sinotte said. "We have tried our hardest to get them prepared and we just hope that they will be. Obviously, some are still a little nervous, but we have really been trying to get them excited about it."

Katelyn Walther, another one of the fifth-grade graduates, said that she is a bit more nervous than her classmate, Dupre.

"We only have short passing time between classes, so I am afraid that I am going to miss some of my classes," Walther said. "I am also going to miss our field trips and our friends from this school."

Before they departed, a select group of the fifth-grade students were also recognized with the district's Presidential Award. This award, which comes at a silver and gold status, is given to students who show evidence of improvement in major academic areas, Richtarik said. Students who receive this award also have to abide by stringent academic standards on their NECAP test scores and achieve grade requirements in their regular academic courses.

NECAP stands for New England Common Assessment Program and it is a test given each year that is based on the Rhode Island state standards and defines what students should be learning each year, according to information on the tests.

According to Richtarik, these awards, which nearly a dozen of the Tiogue School graduates obtained, are "very hard to get."