

## Coventry Public Schools

1700 Main Street

Coventry, CT 06238

[www.coventrypublicschools.org](http://www.coventrypublicschools.org)

**David J. Petrone**  
**Superintendent of Schools**  
**Phone: 860-742-7317**

**PRESS RELEASE**

**PRESS RELEASE**

**PRESS RELEASE**

DATE: December 18, 2015

### **Coventry, CT: Connecticut Association of Schools Names Steve Merlino 2016 Assistant Principal of the Year**

The Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS) is pleased to announce the selection of the **2016 Assistant Principal of the Year**. Each year, applications are accepted for the *Elementary, Middle, and High School Assistant Principal of the Year* awards. The winners are chosen by the CAS Awards and Recognition Committee, a selection committee consisting of active and retired principals and assistant principals.

**Stephen Merlino, assistant principal of Coventry High School (CHS), is the winner of the 2016 High School Assistant Principal of the Year Award.** Mr. Merlino was nominated for the award by CHS Principal Joseph Blake, himself a former High School Assistant Principal of the Year. When notified of his selection, Merlino commented, "This is a tremendous honor. I work in a great school with fantastic educators. I am grateful for the excellent work of our staff with all the deserving students placed in our trust."

Now in his 25<sup>th</sup> year as an educator, Merlino's desire to make a difference in the lives of children led him to forsake his job in the private sector to work in public education. In 1992, after ten years as a manager of a small business, he embarked on a new career as a social studies teacher at Lyman Memorial High School in Lebanon. In 2001, with nine years of experience in the classroom, he transitioned into school administration as an assistant principal, first at Leonard Tyl Middle School in Montville and then at Windham High School in Willimantic. He is now in his fifth year as assistant principal at CHS where he continues to inspire students with what senior Eric Petersen calls his "uncommonly friendly, compassionate, respectful and approachable" manner.

CHS is renowned for its climate of openness, caring, mutual trust, and respect - and this welcoming atmosphere is a direct result of Merlino's efforts to connect students and teachers both inside and outside of the classroom. Through personal example, as well as through directed initiatives, he has helped transform the relationships that exist between students and adults at CHS. Says Michele Mullaly, Director of Teaching and Learning in Coventry, "In working with individual teachers and the faculty as a whole, Steve continually fosters a positive and supportive school climate, modeling and providing direction to teachers on positive interactions with students." Social Studies teacher Susan Mike adds, "Steve helps provide significant adult contact for each and every student here at Coventry High School."

Further enhancing the positive school culture at CHS is Merlino's constructive approach to student discipline. When handling discipline matters, he works to find a resolution that is remedial rather than

punitive, empowering students to learn from their mistakes. Eric Petersen recalls, "In my own personal interactions with Mr. Merlino, what I appreciated most about him was his ability to convey respect and understanding while informing me of what I had done wrong. Most teachers and administration typically speak to students as if they are children and do not require the same level of respect that any other adult would. Mr. Merlino's way of interacting with students is quite uncommon and it provides better connections between him and the student. He genuinely wants to help students and does not believe that punishment is always the right choice." As a result of Merlino's affirmative intervention strategies, student referrals have decreased by 80% since 2011 and suspensions are down by more than 90%.

Since arriving at CHS in 2011, Merlino has committed himself to increasing the school's capacity to retain and graduate students. His efforts to build a positive school climate have had a powerful impact on the academic success of its students and have helped to achieve the goal of "keeping students in the game." As evidenced by CHS' impressive 98.1% graduation rate, students are more engaged in their learning and more committed to staying in school and doing well. Says Merlino, "Though I won't rest until we graduate every one of our students, I am proud of what we have done." All who work with Merlino marvel at his dedication to his students and school community. He is personally and professionally invested in every student in the school, earnestly intent upon equipping each with the skills and competencies necessary to succeed in the next stage of his/her life. In the words of CHS parent Tim Bohr, "Students with no vision to further their education after high school have become successful college students because of Steve's mentoring and guidance. Steve's commitment goes further than just grades and graduation rates. It involves preparing our young adults to enter college well rounded and confident to face the challenges ahead. With Steve Merlino as the assistant principal in my children's school, I feel proud and confident that they have been provided with the tools and opportunities to realize their dreams and achieve their potential."

### **The State Assistant Principal of the Year Program**

In this new era of shared leadership, the assistant principal's role has become multi-dimensional. No longer does the assistant principal only deal with student discipline and attendance. Today's assistant principal is often responsible for curriculum and instruction, staff evaluation, community partnerships, public relations, technology, student activities, and many other crucial areas of operation.

The Assistant Principal of the Year Program, sponsored annually by the Connecticut Association of Schools, was established in 1990 to bring recognition to the assistant principalship and to spotlight the critical role that assistant principals play in the education of our youth. The program recognizes outstanding school assistant principals who have succeeded in providing high quality learning opportunities for students. These administrators have demonstrated excellent leadership, commitment to staff and students, service to their communities, and contributions to the overall profession of educational leadership.

Each year nominations are solicited for an Elementary, Middle Level, and High School Assistant Principal of the Year. The winners are chosen by a selection committee consisting of active and retired principals and assistant principals. State assistant principals of the year must demonstrate success in the areas of collaborative leadership; personal excellence; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and personalization. All applicants must have served as an assistant principal at one or more middle level or high schools for three or more years.

This information was provided by Coventry High School. For further information, please contact Joseph Blake, Coventry High School Principal at [jblake@coventryct.org](mailto:jblake@coventryct.org).