

Group honors Agawam school chief

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AGAWAM - School Superintendent Mary A. Czajkowski has been named the 2008 Administrator of the Year by the Massachusetts School Counselors Association.

The statewide award, presented April 11 at a three-day conference in Hyannis, recognizes Czajkowski's leadership and support of counseling programs for the city's seven schools and 4,300 students.

Approximately 25 Agawam school counselors and other local school personnel attended the award ceremony.

"Dr. Czajkowski is a one-of-a-kind superintendent, a visionary with a commitment to excellence, who has been a leader in her support for the school counseling program for the Agawam public schools," said Susan Schoenberger, director of school counseling for the district, in a prepared statement.

Schoenberger lauded Czajkowski's work with counselors, teachers and administrators in implementing the Massachusetts Model counseling approach, which emphasizes group and classroom sessions and work with teachers and parents in addition to the traditional individual counseling with students.

Progress in implementing the program, and the garnering of support from the School Committee and school administrators, Schoenberger said, "have been achieved as a result of Dr. Czajkowski's leadership, commitment and support."

Frank R. Meagher, a guidance counselor at Agawam High School, agreed, saying of Czajkowski, "Her support is essential ... It's a lot of work. It's about a five-year

process (to fully implement the new approach)."

Czajkowski is working to bring counselors' caseloads down to more effective levels and is promoting training in the new approach, which the district began implementing last year, Meagher said.

"We're increasing our classroom involvement (and addressing issues such as) suicide awareness, organizational skills and self-esteem," Meagher said. Night programs and breakfasts for parents have been very successful as well, he said.

Czajkowski said she was honored at being selected the 2008 Administrator of the Year for Massachusetts, as well as by the show of support from the large number of Agawam school counselors and others who attended the presentation.

"They had never given the award, I don't believe, to a school superintendent before, so it was quite an honor," she said.

Giving credit to the counselors, teachers, administrators and others in the school system who are helping to implement the new counseling approach, Czajkowski said, "I'm really representing Agawam with this award."

Mayor Susan R. Dawson added to the accolades, saying, "Mary has worked extraordinarily hard to make our town and our school system everything that it needs to be. I'm proud of her for all the things she's done."

Dawson, sworn in as mayor Jan. 2, said she was serving on the School Committee when Czajkowski was first named superintendent, and added, "Now to work with her on a different level is a really great experience."