

State Education Award Given to Czajkowski

School Counselors Association cites Agawam's program

By Ric Sardella
aan@turley.com



The Massachusetts Schools Counselors Association (MASCA) has issued its 2008 "Administrator of the Year" award to Agawam Superintendent of Schools Dr. Mary Czajkowski, according to Dr. Kathleen Barrett, chairwoman of MASCA's Awards Committee.

Czajkowski will receive the award at the MASCA Spring Conference on April 11 in Hyannis. She was one of three

finalists, and according to Barrett, "The committee agreed that Mary was the most exceptional among them."

Czajkowski said she was shocked when the news came in about the MASCA award. "I was caught completely off guard. Actually, I was shocked. I didn't know that I was nominated. I have received so many calls and emails congratulating me and it's very gratifying," she said.

Czajkowski nomination originated here in town when Susan Schoenberger, the school system's new director of School Counseling, forwarded the application to the MASCA Awards Committee.

Schoenberger credited Czajkowski with leading the overhaul of the schools' former guidance departments into the new School Counseling Center under the umbrella of the Massachusetts Model for Comprehensive School Counseling Program.

"Dr. Czajkowski is a one-of-a-kind superintendent. She is visionary with a commitment to excellence who has been a leader in her support of the School Counseling Program for the Agawam Public Schools," Schoenberger commented. "We are implementing the Mass. Model at every level of the school system, reaching over 4,300 students in seven schools."

As the revamp of the former guidance departments continues to unfold here, Schoenberger further remarked, "Our counselors and our programs have the support from our School Committee and our building administrators. These accomplishments have been achieved as a result of Dr. Czajkowski leadership, commitment, and support."

Barrett maintains the MASCA Awards Committee was impressed with how well the Agawam Schools have progressed this year by using the Mass. Model as its guide. "Nowhere is there a superintendent who understands the Mass. Model better, or advocates for its implementation as aggressively and commits resources as Mary Czajkowski," Barrett said.

Added School Committee Vice-Chairman Anthony C. Bonavita, "The efforts of the superintendent will benefit the students of Agawam for years to come. I believe the new model is a great asset to the Agawam School System. This MASCA award for Dr. Czajkowski further substantiates the leadership qualities that she possesses. The citizens of Agawam should be proud of this achievement."

The new backbone in the delivery of guidance services in town schools is reaching as many students as possible. The role of school counselors now focuses on a program-centered formula for every student rather than the former service-center format that reached only part of the student population.

Schoenberger said Czajkowski has given school counselors the resources needed to implement this shift in services to the elementary schools, Middle School, Junior High, and High School.

"We now deliver school counseling curriculum in classrooms and in groups, which is preventative in design, developmental in nature, and most importantly, more students are receiving the benefits of these services," Schoenberger explained. "We have continuity in our programs and collaboration through the district, which helps us collect and access data which will be used to evaluate program needs and outcomes."

Czajkowski, added Schoenberger, was instrumental in obtaining grants that afford students opportunities to explore careers in biotechnology and engineering through the Agawam High School Career Center, creating the opportunity to augment education while offering students a diverse way to learn.

A Chicopee native, Czajkowski began her career in education as a high school science, math, and physical education teacher. She was an interscholastic coach as well. She joined the Agawam Schools in December 1996 as the director of curriculum after serving in a similar role for the East Longmeadow Public Schools. Czajkowski was promoted to assistant superintendent of schools on July 1, 1998 and was selected by the School Committee as the system's superintendent on Sept. 1, 2002.

In 2006, School Committee members extended Czajkowski contract for six years (through 2012), the longest pact allowed for a school superintendent under Mass. General Law.

Czajkowski credited the hard work of Schoenberger and her counseling staff, system-wide, for the success of the School Counseling Program here. "The frontline counselors are doing a great job and we must continue to work hard and remain focused on giving the students our best," she said.

The superintendent also sent kudos to School Committee members for their support and cooperation.

"This is a team effort. I am lucky to be surrounded by so many outstanding individuals," Czajkowski said.