

Penn Literacy Network and The Springfield School District, Vermont: Results

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BF, Springfield schools recognized

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As students in Bellows Falls and Springfield begin to settle into their regular classroom routines, the two high schools districts have been recognized for improvements to their education systems.

Springfield High School has been asked to present at the annual NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges) Model Schools Conference next month to tout the recent progress made while the U.S. News and World Report has honored Bellows Falls Union High School with a national bronze medal.

The Report, a news magazine known for its education ranking, listed BFUHS in the top 25 percent of high schools in Vermont and in the top 27 percent nationwide, earning it a bronze medal.

"I am very pleased with the work that the teachers, staff, and administrators have done over the past few years to make BFUHS one of the top-notch high schools in the area," said Christopher Kibbe, superintendent of the Windham Northeast Supervisory Union. "It is very nice that they are receiving recognition for their hard work."

The 249-student school was near the state average in math and reading proficiency while finishing slightly below in terms of college readiness. Seventy-one percent of BFUHS students are listed as proficient in reading and 29 percent in math; the college readiness was tallied at 8.9 of an index score of up to 100.0- based on the percentage of seniors who were tested and passed the advanced placement exams- to put the school much lower than the state average of approximately 30 out of 100.

According to the 2014 rankings, Vermont has eight silver and seven bronze medal schools. The top-ranked schools in the Green Mountain State were in South Burlington, Montpelier, and Essex.

Up the road in Springfield, representatives from the high school are preparing to attend the NEASC conference along with others from around New England.

David Cohn, director of Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment in the district, said this is the first time a Springfield schools will present as a "model" institution.

"In years past, SHS has sent staff to this annual model schools conference to hear what successful schools are doing to take back ideas to the school," Cohn said. "[SHS Principal] Bob Thibault was expecting to send a team once again this year but, must to his surprise, received

an email from the organizer of the event asking Bob to assemble a team to present based on recent improvements.”

According to Thibault, the high school staff has been working tirelessly for the past five years to collaboratively develop a common vision of how to improve student learning.

“We can offer ourselves as a model of a process for change- the specifics of what was changed is important, but having a common vision, persevering with that focused approach, and keeping kids at the center of our thinking at all times are really the important takeaways,” he said.

Cohn said the recognition is a testament to the work of the entire staff and their consistent focus on student engagement and literacy development in each classroom.

“Springfield High School teachers have bought into the fact that collaboration and consistency lead to increased student achievement,” he added. “The entire atmosphere has shifted at the high school and it’s been really rewarding to witness.”

An additional note from the Springfield School District:

In September 2014, Springfield School District administration conducted a teacher survey to determine the factors that were most influential in improving Springfield High School. Penn Literacy Network (of The University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education) and the establishment of a common language of instruction was the top initiative identified (71% of teachers believed it was one of the most effective initiatives at improving SHS in the past 5 years). Teachers also identified PLN 20 (Curriculum Backmapping) as a strong influence on improvement.