

PAESSP High School Principal of the Year

Donnelly Named 2008 PAESSP High School Principal of the Year



James C. Donnelly, III, principal of Chichester High School in the Chichester School District, has been named the PAESSP High School Principal of the Year for 2008 in the MetLife/National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) Principal of the Year Program. Chichester, a suburban high school, has approximately 1,218 students and includes grades 9-12. It is located in Boothwyn.

Mr. Donnelly has served as principal since 2003. Prior, he was the assistant principal for grades 9-10 at the high school (2002-2003). He earned a bachelor's of science degree in biology from Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science and his master's in education from Widener University.

Mr. Donnelly began his career in education as a science teacher in the Springfield School District (1992-1993). From 1993-2002, he taught science at Chichester High School and from 1998-2002 he served in the Chichester School District as the K-12 science chairman.

He has been a member of PAESSP/NASSP for six years. He is a member of the Delaware County Principals' Association, the Association for Curriculum and Supervision Development, the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia (USP) Science Advisory Board and the Middle States Committee. He also served as vice president and treasurer of the Chichester Administrators Association.

In addition, Mr. Donnelly is a member of the Kappa Delta Pi International Honor Society and was a National Honor Society Dedication Award recipient in 1998. He was nominated for the Pennsylvania Teacher of the Year award in 2001 and was named to the Pennsylvania Chemical Industry's Education Top 40 Science Teachers in 1996. He received the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science Celebrating Excellence in Science Teaching award and the Chichester School District Science Teaching award.

Mr. Donnelly served as a mentor and cooperating teacher in his district, as well as for student teachers from USP and West Chester University; and for administrators from Immaculata University, St. Joseph's University and Wilmington College. He attended the National Science Teachers Association Conventions from 1998-2001, and attended the PAESSP Conference in 2003. In addition, he has coached several school athletic teams, including the junior varsity baseball team for eight seasons; and was the assistant coach for the girls' and boys' varsity basketball teams (for seven and eight seasons).

During Mr. Donnelly's tenure as principal, Chichester has been able to implement a building-level, three-year-long mentoring program for its teachers. This has enabled his young staff to quickly become acclimated to the school community and has increased teacher retention. It has also allowed inspired young teachers to pursue administrative careers. Two of his three administrative interns are currently administrators and the third will become one in the future as well.

Since he became principal in February 2003, Chichester's status in Pennsylvania has gone from Warning (2003) to School Improvement (2004) to AYP (2005), and their status changed from Making Progress to AYP in both 2006 and 2007. Their graduation rate has steadily increased from approximately 84 percent to 87 percent.

Over the past five years, major curriculum changes have been implemented to increase student achievement. New initiatives, programs and the infusion of new technology have narrowed the gap between special education and regular education students and created a very student-oriented school community. In addition, Chichester has totally opened the door to the community and there is regular contact with the Rotary Club, the clergy and other local charitable groups. This has made for a tightly-knit school and community.

These are all examples of "Raising the Bar" at Chichester High School. This phrase has caught on so successfully, it has become the district's motto.

"Without exception, every account of Mr. Donnelly's previous classroom teaching experience is marked by descriptions of excellence and the close personal bond he has shared with his students. These attributes extended outside the classroom to include his interactions with students as a baseball, girls' basketball and softball coach. Students and faculty alike still reference the 'Donnelly Dollars' that he utilized as a positive behavior reward system in his classroom."

--Michael T. Golde
Superintendent
Chichester School District