

CLINTON SCHOOLS

'District of Distinction' award evokes pride

BY BRENDEN WEST

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CLINTON — District Administration magazine may not be well known to the masses, but in the education community, Clinton School District's superintendent likened the publication to her New York Times. For the first time ever, this year, DA published its school districts of distinction list.

The Clinton School District was one of 49 nationwide making the ranks.

Since the list was unveiled this month, praising CCSD for student achievement, Olson has received congratulations from many in her realm of educators.

"That we were honored as one of 10 or 11 does me very proud," she said.

She credited her district's response-to-intervention (RTI) push as the main reason why CSD stood out among applicants. "When you look at all the interventions we put in place, it's something we do K through 12." Olson said she and administrators attended a state seminar reflecting on RTI several years ago. RTI is an educational approach that seeks to identify struggling students and personalize education. From that day forward, she knew it was an area to strengthen her district.

Over the last three years, CSD has seen an upswing in both school attendance and its high school graduation rate. Olson said that's in direct correlation with RTI installation.

DA recognized this as well, tagging its write up on CSD with "Every Face and Name to Graduation." The article highlighted the district's reduction of course failures from 2011 to 2013 from 1,055 to just 268.

"About 75 districts have visited Clinton Community's high school and many of them are now replicating its Rtl model," states the article.

Olson called the recognition a highlight. Before instituting the RTI program, she said educators were "reactive" to students' needs.

Now she feels teachers and administrators are proactive, which is helping improve important indicators toward future success.

The district has a goal for third-graders to have a mastery of literacy. That starts at younger ages, Olson said. With more students feeling they are successful at curriculum, behavior and attendance follow suit with higher numbers.

“You have to chip away at the exterior and find where the student is at,” Olson said. “It becomes up to us to identify students. If children are successful, their chances of misbehaving are much less.” Olson said she modified RTI to fit what her district requires. Other districts who have visited Clinton are modeling their curriculums off CSD’s.

In most cases, students succeed, Olson said, adding 80 percent of students understand material with relative ease. Another 10 to 15 percent need a slight nudge in the right direction.

The remaining 5 to 10 percent are who need specific attention, which is where RTI kicks in.

“You have to develop a personalized plan for them,” Olson said. “It’s personalized learning that gets students to where they need to be. It used to be one-size-fits-all. Now, we’re not going to leave people behind if they don’t understand.” The Clinton School District was one of three districts in Iowa recognized by the magazine. The others were Des Moines Public Schools for energy efficiency and Keokuk Community School District for graduation rate.

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