

# On-deck Easthampton High principal eager to enter the game

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EASTHAMPTON - Easthampton High School's new principal, Vito Perrone, may have big shoes to fill, following a beloved principal who has worked at the school for 35 years.

His strategy to fill those shoes seems to be dreaming big.

Over a two-day visit to the city before he actually assumes the job, Perrone toured the building, visited with staff and students and made some promises. He will learn names, the building layout and work hard to get new equipment and better facilities.

"I'm quite excited about the prospects," Perrone, 44, said during an interview in Principal Jeffrey Sealander's office. His short visit included staff and program introductions, signing employment papers and searching for a home. Perrone was hired last month to succeed Sealander as principal of nearly 700 staff and students after Sealander retires in June.

Perrone, selected by a search committee, takes over July 1.

"The reactions have been very positive," Sealander said. "I support the committee's choice and I do believe he will be a very nice match for the school."

Perrone pulled out a stack of MapQuest directions and homes for sale in Easthampton, Westfield and South Hadley, compiled by his wife, Natasha. The couple decided to move to the area with their children Alec, 11, Tyler, 9, Maya, 5, and Audrey, 3, to be closer to family. They plan to move east sometime after June 5, the last day of Carson Middle School in Nevada, where Perrone is assistant principal.

Before his home search here Monday, Perrone said he planned to watch Easthampton students play baseball after school.

"It's all about the students," he said.

Perrone said he is excited about the Easthampton High School renovation project. He pointed to the drafts hanging on the wall in Sealander's office. The Massachusetts School Building Authority is set to fund at least 60 percent of the \$25 million project, which proposes a new technology wing, state-of-the-art library and a new auditorium. During his first visit Monday, Perrone said it is evident the library desks, metal shop supplies and physical education bleachers are dated.

"I'm sure the instruction's where it needs to be, but the technology and the facility are lagging," Perrone told about 40 people who attended a faculty meeting after school Monday.

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GORDON DANIELS

At Easthampton High School Monday, from left, Sue Mason, director of the early childhood department, shows incoming principal Vito Perrone and current Principal Jeffrey Sealander, who retires in June, a class under way.



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As assistant principal at Carson Middle School in Nevada for two years, Perrone can attest to how building upgrades improve the quality of education. He said he has seen advancements in attitude and ability since a renovation project at the Nevada middle school was completed last summer. Some 1,200 students attend the school, which comprises sixth, seventh and eighth grade.

"It looks like a community college; it doesn't look like a middle school," he said. The renovation "really changed the face of things. It causes excitement in students and staff. I can envision that here."

Partnerships with local businesses and professionals are also on the horizon in Easthampton, Perrone said. Specifically, he envisions a network in which professionals share their expertise with students and businesses donate time, equipment or funding.

"With the budget constraints everybody's facing, we need to find ways to better serve our teachers and students," he said.

Perrone said he also plans to get more classroom tools like SMART Boards, a type of interactive whiteboards.

"We are probably holding them (staff and students) back when I walk in the class room and there's a chalkboard," he said, noting that every classroom at Carson Middle School now has a SMART Board.

On Tuesday, Perrone continued his tour, meeting with central office staff at 50 Payson Ave. He also continued searching local neighborhoods in his quest to buy a home. He was to leave for Nevada this morning.

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