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## Top teacher offers advice

By CATHERINE BAUM  
Staff Writer

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WESTHAMPTON - In his keynote address at the Hampshire Regional convocation Tuesday, National Teacher of the Year Anthony J. Mullen said 21 years of work in the New York City Police Department gave him the foundation to be a good educator by equipping him with passion, professionalism and perseverance.

Mullen, a special education teacher in Greenwich, Conn., shared stories with employees in the Hampshire Regional district, which opens its doors to students today.

"You're all good at what you do," Mullen said to his audience in the high school auditorium Tuesday. "I can feel it in the room."

The greatest challenge in education today is not fulfilling standardized test scores, Mullen said, but keeping the dropout number to a minimum. One million students will drop out of school this year, he said, a costly problem. He said that translates to more than \$300 million in lost productivity and accompanied expenses.

It is up to teachers to go beyond teaching the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic to prepare students with social and behavioral skills, he said. It is up to the rest of society to ensure jobs will be there for students after they graduate, he added.

"The students that we teach today live in a world that is pretty uncertain," Mullen said. "But what is certain in the world is the object in the rearview mirror, and the object in the rearview mirror is a student in India or China or Eastern Europe who is chasing our prosperity and seeking the same jobs. That is why teaching today is more important than ever."

Teachers have the ability to make a child happy or sad, confident or unsure, he said, urging teachers to call parents when their children do something positive; to advocate for education funding in discussions with lawmakers and politicians; to form educational partnerships with businesses.

As a longtime police officer, he said, he was struck by the fact that often when young people got into trouble, they didn't have involved, supportive parents. He carried that lesson with him as a teacher - to look beyond a student at risk to see what challenges they face at home.

When Mullen the teacher was approached by a teenage mother who told him she wanted to drop out at age 16, he spent time with her. He learned that her father had left her when she was born; her mother put her in foster care, and she was angry because all she could see was that she would be entering a the world without much to offer it.

Mullen talked with her one-on-one - a piece of advice he offered to all teachers with troubled

1



CAROL LOLLIS

National Teacher of the Year Anthony Mullen, speaks at the Hampshire Regional convocation Tuesday morning.



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students. Mullen said he tried to help her see she could rise above her life circumstances.

"Slowly but surely that perseverance worked," Mullen said. Eventually, he said, she completed an internship answering phones at a law firm and went to college.

But she had help. "She opened up to a teacher," he said.

As for teachers, he said, they need to do more than concern themselves with grades and tests.

"People need to be more than good," he said. "People need to do good things."

The story resonated with Hampshire Regional teachers.

"I'm always concerned about the students that have difficulties beyond the walls of the school," said Lisa Peloquin, a sixth-grade teacher at the Anne T. Dunphy School in Williamsburg. "I like how he makes people aware of the whole child."

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