

Adopt a book

Written by By Beth Blakeman Associate Editor
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GMCS gets community feedback on future textbooks

Gallup McKinley County Schools calls its annual event to get community feedback about textbooks — book adoption.

They do it every year, but this year, it will be done virtually.

Ashley Ryan, the director of curriculum and assessment, who is originally from Gallup, and has been with GMCS since 2016, said it's not a program per se.

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“I guess you could call it parent-community feedback and review,” she told the *Gallup Sun*, Nov. 10.

Ryan said this is required by the state and is designed to get all the stakeholders involved in the process of choosing the textbooks that will be used. It calls for the Public Education Department to ensure that parents and other community members are involved in the adoption process at the state level.

The state’s Instructional Material Law was passed in 2011.

The New Mexico Public Education Department Bureau of Instructional Materials’ mission is to vet what instructors use to be sure it is aligned with state content standards and benchmarks.

New Mexico uses a High Quality Instructional Materials resource manual to identify and select these materials.

The manual describes HQIM as being “content-rich, fully accessible, culturally and linguistically relevant, free from bias, research-based, and aligned to New Mexico state standards.”

Ryan organized the book adoption for each of the four years she has been with GMCS. In that time she recalls one of the most useful feedback comments she received, was that a book series did not respond to the needs of area students.

“That was two years ago,” she said. “It [the series] wasn’t voted on as an option.”

“It’s [the adoption process] generally an all-day event from 8 am to 5 pm. They [parents, community members] come in whenever they can and look through the books and fill out a form for their feedback,” Ryan explained.

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She said it feels different every year, because different subjects are being considered.

“When we adopted science, parent feedback varied and interest varied,” she said. “Last year we looked at math feedback. There seemed to be a little more interest last year because it was math. Every year is unique.”

For the 2020-2021 year, the feedback will be about seven textbooks for grades nine through 12 for English Language Arts, Spanish, and English language development (for English language learners).

Ryan said the ranking is based on publishers, not specific textbooks and for the sake of continuity, GMCS likes to select series’ that have been ranked nationally by Ed Reports.

EdReports.org is an independent nonprofit designed to improve education by providing reviews of K-12 instructional materials. Its team is made up of professionals with backgrounds in education, law, marketing, policy, and data analysis.

Before COVID, Ryan said, the district held in-town days for review and also conducted reviews in all of the rural communities including Crownpoint, Tohatchi, Navajo, Ramah, Thoreau, and Gallup.

Ryan said the process will be different this year, since parents and community members can’t come in and look at actual books.

“I’m going to be playing a video from each of the publishers and have parents fill out a survey, so that I can gather the feedback,” she said.

What if the video has high production quality? Will it get more rave reviews? Ryan said it’s

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possible. She said that even happens sometimes with flashy books.

She said it can take between two and six months to go through the entire process and decide what textbooks will be adopted. In addition to the parents and community members, each high school has a committee reviewing the books, and sometimes even students participate.

“We’ve actually had students review the books in 2018-19 [and] 2019-2020,” she pointed out. “We usually do it around February, [but] because we don’t know what’s going to happen this year, we bumped it [the schedule] up a little bit.”

This year’s virtual book adoption will take place using Zoom on Nov. 17 - Nov. 18 from 2 pm - 4:30 pm. Links will be provided at the GMCS website.

By Beth Blakeman
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