

GMCS launches new plan to engage parents in kids' education

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
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The Gallup-McKinley County Schools District is introducing Academic Parent Teacher Teams in its elementary schools to get parents more involved in their children's education.

In a presentation at the Nov. 15 school board meeting, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum/Instruction Wade Bell and APTT overseer Shannon McFarland explained how the program works.

There will be four APTT meetings in an average school year, two in the fall semester and two in the spring. The first session allows parents to look at classroom data to see if their individual student is struggling and if so, in what areas. Parents are given personal data that shows where their student ranks overall and whether his/her scores are higher or lower than average.

The teachers focus on the lower scoring students for their grade level and give parents tools to help them bring their children's lessons home. In an interview with the *Sun*, Bell gave an example of using a deck of cards to improve math skills.

Bell used the centuries-old card game "War," which typically involves two players and a standard card deck. The objective of the game is to win all of the cards. The deck is evenly divided and each player reveals the top card of his/her deck at the same time. The player with the higher card takes both of the cards.

In Bell's version of the game, players take the two numbers that are turned upright on the two

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card stacks and either add, subtract, multiply or divide them, giving the players arithmetic practice.

He also mentioned that the parents' everyday life skills could help support learning in the classroom. He suggested letting students budget how much their family spends at the grocery store to help them understand how math and money are used every day.

McFarland explained that one of the biggest goals of the program is actively engaging parents in their child's education.

"I think a lot of times parents are unsure if they have a part in the school, and our goal is to make sure they realize they are still their child's first teacher and they are very important in the learning process," McFarland said.

Bell stated that the first APTT meeting of the year will give parents a chance to see where their child stands academically and gives them a chance to schedule separate meetings with the teachers to discuss any issues in more depth.

GMCS Superintendent Mike Hyatt showed his support for the program during a meeting on Nov. 15.

"This is not a replacement for what's going on in the classroom," Hyatt stated. "This is a place we can enhance and get parental buy-in and actually equip parents with skills to help their students."

Hyatt said he saw it as a way for parents who may have thought they couldn't help their students in the past, to step up and be a part of their child's education.

"If a parent may not be able to help with a math problem, through the game they can still reinforce the skills that the child is learning in school," Hyatt said.

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According to McFarland and Bell's presentation, students spend 55 percent of their time away from school, whether that be evenings, weekends, or vacations. Only 12 percent of their time is spent in school, and the other 33 percent is spent sleeping.

Bell and McFarland argued that the learning and support students receive at home is significant because of the large amount of time they spend outside the classroom.

The next APTT meetings are scheduled for the last week in January.

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