

Gallup Middle School teacher helps gifted students soar

Written by Molly Ann Howell Managing Editor
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Each month, Camille’s Sidewalk Café recognizes one local teacher within the Gallup area for his or her determination to help students go above and beyond. Prospective teachers are nominated by students who feel they deserve to be recognized.

This month’s award went to Greg Cavanaugh, a teacher who works for the Gifted and Talented program at two Gallup-McKinley County Schools middle schools – JFK and Gallup. He also spends some time at Tope Turpen Elementary.

PATH TO GALLUP

Cavanaugh grew up in a family of teachers – his mom was a teacher at a school district in Michigan while he was growing up and his father was a college professor. He said they encouraged him to go into education, but that he truly “gravitated” toward it on his own.

He attended Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Michigan, which is a part of the Christian

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Reform Church, which has a partnership with Gallup's own Rehoboth Christian High School. Cavanaugh student-taught at Rehoboth, and over a decade later he's still in Gallup.

After student teaching, Cavanaugh got a job at JFK Middle School in December 2002 teaching history. He also taught the subject at Chief Manuelito before transferring over to the Gifted and Talented program, which he has been a part of now for over a decade.

HELPING THE STUDENTS ACHIEVE

Cavanaugh found his niche in the Gifted and Talented program. In an interview with the *Sun*, he explained what he likes most about the program and teaching in general.

"[Teaching is] really about seeing students push through challenges and be successful," he said. "In the Gifted and Talented program that is all the more necessary. These are students who tend to find a lot of parts of school easy, [and] they become a little disenchanted and [I am] looking for ways to keep those kids motivated and challenged."

The Gifted and Talented program looks at students who score high in math, reading, or other school subjects. If a student is eligible for the program, they will be pulled out of their classes for one-on-one focused instruction.

"Gifted and Talented is looking to enrich. We accelerate, we try to improve or increase rigor, and that can look different depending on the age group or the model the school district uses," Cavanaugh explained.

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With the one-on-one instruction, the students' needs can be met on a more case-by-case scenario. For example, if a student excels at math, they may move up a grade or two in the curriculum.

Cavanaugh said one thing he's found really helpful for his students is project-based learning.

"What I've found most successful is program or project-based learning where there's a lot of choice and freedom for kids to kind of figure out what they're interested in and want to try and tackle and grow in," he said.

One of the programs Cavanaugh runs for his students teaches them broadcast journalism skills. Students put on a weekly livestream on YouTube, and they have to develop news stories, create video, interview people, and learn all about the technology that helps them do so.

Gallup Middle School principal Lindsey Mingus has worked with Cavanaugh for a multitude of years, and she said that the projects he creates really help the students.

"I think that the students really enjoy the enrichment projects that he does with them and that he is always trying to push them to be the best version of themselves," she said.

When asked what skills help him teach middle schoolers, Cavanaugh said having tough skin is a must.

"You do have to have a thick skin with middle school, you kind of have to have your own sense of self and be able to kind of let things roll off and be a little self-deprecating. Students, at least for me, have always seemed to identify with that," he said. "... Middle schoolers don't have a lot of tolerance, especially with the Gifted and Talented kids; they don't have a lot of tolerance for anything that's phony. They just want people to be real."

Diana White, Cavanaugh's direct supervisor, said it's that realness that makes him a great

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teacher.

“He deserves the award because he is all in for his students. When he is at work he is on his best game providing the best educational opportunities for the kids who pass through his influence every single day,” she said. ““He listens to the students and then guides and directs them in order to keep them challenged and focused on learning.”

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