



GMCS providing students a pathway to pursue an Associate's Degree

Free paid college bound opportunities are on the horizon for Gallup McKinley County Schools students.

That was the takeaway from a meeting recently held regarding a new program called "McKinley Academy Accelerating Futures."

The meeting was held at JFK Middle school auditorium Jan. 15 to a packed house of interested students, parents and local school teachers, and administrators.

Starting in August 2018, GMCS will partner with UNM-G to provide McKinley County students a pathway to pursue an Associate's Degree.

Students will able to pursue a degree while earning a high school diploma, and tuition would be paid by GMCS. The payment for tuition, books, and technology will be handled through Gallup-McKinley County Schools General Fun, according to GMCS College and Readiness Coordinator Alan Bingham.

“All tuition would be paid by the district to which the money would come out of the general fund. Free breakfast and lunch would be provided,” he said. “This will include transportation from the students’ high school to UNM-G, where the academy would be situated in Calvin Hall. If the student needs a laptop then we will issue them to those students who would need them.”

Students will be bused in from Crownpoint, Ramah, Navajo, Thoreau, Tohatchi, Tse Yi Gai. Transportation will be made available for all McKinley Academy students in county areas. One question asked was what if the student does not attend GMCS, will they be able to attend? According to Bingham, all students are welcome to apply.

“We want to eliminate previous reasons why college was one goal hard to reach, economics, demographics,” he said. “We want first family generations to have a better chance to succeed in obtaining and finishing college degrees.”

Although it may be open for every student, Bingham says it may not be a fit for every student.

“We have students that can achieve more than what they can do, and we want to give them that opportunity,” he said. “It’s not for everyone, not every student that comes into this academy is going to be successful … it may not be their interest, or they may be not ready for this type of experience, but we do have some students that are.”

One student who felt she is ready for this new program is 16-year-old Miyamura High student Johannah Castillo.

“It seems like a good experience to get ready for college and to be more prepared, as versus those kids who go into college, and not even know about college,” she said. “So, I just want to be prepared.”

Curious parents had their share of questions, and were curious to find out if this was for their child, such as Cheryl Quimayousie, who herself holds Bachelor and Master degrees.

“I wanted to find out more about this academy pathway so that my son has some options for the next school year to pursue an Associate’s degree,” she said. “It would be really helpful with college tuition for one thing.”

The more heavy duty questions came from local teachers and administrators such as Miyamura school counselor Lucia De Santis.

“It was somewhat informative, but many questions still need to be answered,” she said. “Such as financial aid funding, scholarships, the lottery, how will they handle the transportation from the schools back and forth. There still a lot of questions. If it was my child I would have to have a more information from what I heard tonight,” De Santis said.

Calvin Quimayousie, a concerned parent asked about the funding.

“It was interesting wondering about where the funding will come from and sounds like they will be using school district money,” he said. “If they are going to have enough funds to operate this extra program they are talking about, it’s interesting and might possibly work. But, they may be biting off more than they can chew.”

McKinley Academy launches in August. Applications must be picked up and filled out according to each student’s grade level. Eighth graders applications due April 13; ninth-11th graders applications due Feb. 2.

Visit: www.gmcs.k12.nm.us and GMCS Facebook page for more information.

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