

Multicultural event promotes Diné language through fun activities

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
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The first annual “FACES – Family and Community Engagement Series” took place June 6-7 at Rocky View Elementary for area teachers, parents, and students.

It was a multicultural-based family activity celebrating knowledge and diversity. The event was hosted by the Gallup McKinley County School Bilingual and Cultural Education Departments.

Area bilingual teachers helped with the activities while teaching Diné language through entertaining and educational methods. Numerous schools in the district participated in the event at Rocky View.

A \$25,000 grant from the Public Education Division for Indian Education has helped the district to sponsor cultural events for students.

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The first project was the evening parent language classes to help teach parents to speak Navajo, Vern Bia, director of cultural education said.

“We’ve had parents tell us that they can’t support their child because they couldn’t speak the language and asked us if they can offer classes to learn the Diné language,” Bia said. “We used that grant to provide that, and we had native language teachers get together and provide those classes for parents and we had a great showing.”

Bia says parents want that program to continue because they want to learn how to speak. An example of that is when the child comes home from their language class and speaks what they’ve learned and wants to learn more. They want to know more, but the parent can’t help them. The parent language program bridges that gaps.

“It’s all a part of language revitalization, it’s a little step in that area, but we’re working to do what we can,” Bia said.

The second part of the grant is FACES, which Bia hopes will continue next year as the intent is to get parents, kids and communities to work on cultural-related things. She says for the kids to succeed they really need to forge close bonds with their parents.

“If they can just bond to solidify that, then the student has better opportunities to learn to succeed in life. We want that to be a part of our community here in school.” Bia said.

Fun activities such as Diné bingo, weaving, emergence stories, were led by bilingual language educators such as Catherine A. Miller Elementary language teacher Maxine Chischilly. Along with fellow teacher, Carline Murphy, they both taught the meaning of *K’é* – Navajo kinship system – the extended family.

“We’re partnering off on teaching *K’é*, how to name in Navajo the members of your family in the proper Navajo terms. It means relationship, respect for all your family ... to know them by their clan,” Chischilly said.

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Fellow teacher Murphy said she wanted to relay the importance of preserving the language and culture through these fun activities.

“I’m here to do a cultural presentation,” she said. “Where to integrate, and infuse our language and culture into the math and science to academic; where they can understand how they can keep and preserve their language and culture.”

Murphy says it’s a matter of respect not only for the Diné, but also for other cultures and languages. To appreciate family members and to call to them in a respectful way.

Tobe Turpen Elementary Navajo language and culture teacher Linda Martinez had fun teaching parents and students Diné through Diné Bingo.

“I like what is happening here,” she said. It’s something new to myself, and I can definitely take some of these ideas back to my classroom.”

Martinez says it’s good for the new generation to learn this because they can actually speak their language as she demonstrated through Diné Bingo. She says it gives everyone the chance to see what the language looks like, and they can speak it through the activities.

“By going to all the tables with whatever means of teaching is going on, cultural learning is the primary goal, and to know where you come from and all that entails,” Martinez said.

For more information on FACES contact GMCS Bilingual and Cultural Education Departments at 505-721-1021.

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