

Equality, equity topic of school district's quarterly community meeting

By Jessica Garcia
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Carson City School Superintendent Richard Stokes asked the community to consider making efforts to level the playing field for schools in terms of equality and equity for all students last week during the school district's virtual community professional learning community.

Approximately 65 community members attended last week's Professional Learning Community meeting. The quarterly meetings are an opportunity to engage families and community members in conversation with school officials on various topics regarding the district's strategic plan and suggest where it can improve to meet its goals and

objectives.

This quarter's topic of equity in education was meant to address current practices and patterns in the classroom or in institutions that are influencing the work educators are doing or should be adopting to be more effecting at helping students.

"It is important as educators that we acknowledge that unequal playing field," Stokes said. "Learners are different and the students attending our classrooms are different. We have students maybe that don't speak the same language or are learning a new language. They come to school with different needs."

Participants then were broken out into five breakout rooms to discuss topics including "Exceptional Staff," "Curriculum that

Matters," "Parent and Family Engagement," "Healthy Generations of Students" and "The Community in Full Partnership," each led by a district administrator.

In "Parent and Family Engagement," the room led by district spokesman Dan Davis, conversation revolved around strategies to approach families to make information more accessible and in less intimidating manners to diverse parents.

Carson High School counselor Bridget Gordon said it should be a priority for the district to reach out to multicultural families.

"As white educators in the district, we have to make sure we're listening," Gordon said. "I think about Back to School Night. A lot of my Spanish-speaking families aren't there. What can we do to invite those

families in? How can we offer a place that's safe for our families that are diverse so we can be better able to listen?"

Gabriela McNamara, a paraprofessional at Carson High, also in the breakout room, said some Hispanic parents aren't used to joining in many of the activities at their child's school.

"They haven't even gone to school," McNamara said. "They are so involved in their jobs, that is their main need. They need to work. They need to stay home while they are home, generally speaking. Sometimes it is very hard to change their mentality. That will happen in the second generation. ... A lot of Hispanic parents, they feel intimidated."

Some parents, however, said they are likely to change their minds when

they realize it makes their children happier being a part of social activities. Antonia Pacheco, agreeing with McNamara, said she had barely made it to her own high school graduation, but understood the value of work for her children.

"It's not going to make me richer, but it's going to make my kid happier," she said. "It changes someone's mind. ... It shows you are caring if you take one hour out of your day or 20 minutes. ... Therefore, I'm

going to make time."

Davis explained the district uses a number of communication tools in efforts to reach families and community members about district and school needs, noting feedback or new suggestions from the conversation on tools including ParentSquare, social media or frequent surveys. Participants also commented families shouldn't feel nervous about reaching out to teachers or principals about starting their own campaigns if they chose.

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