

# Glenns Ferry Gazette/Mountain Home News

Melanie Brown

Idaho- Studies have shown, and school administrators agree, that parents play a key role in how well their children do in school.

But all too often, parents fail to communicate with school officials, administrators, and teachers. In many cases, that is due to the lack of understanding about how a school system functions, and what impact parents can have in the development of their child's scholastic progress. Language barriers also present special challenges.

That is where parent organizations come into play. And in Glenns Ferry there are two such organizations—one is the Pilots Parents Organization (PPO), the other is called Parents School Partnership (PSP).

While the two groups differ in their methods they are bound by the same goal, to make Glenns Ferry School District the best it can be for their children.

PPO was founded in 2009. The group focuses on raising money to improve school facilities, and purchase items that make school more enjoyable for students.

In 2010, PPO raised over \$11,000 to purchase new playground equipment for the elementary school. The organization held a Harvest Festival last fall, and invited high school students to set up booths in order to raise money for their co-curricular clubs. The students were required to come up with their own ideas on what to sell, giving them an opportunity to learn leadership skills.

The PPO now is focusing its efforts on promoting leadership at the middle school by encouraging students there to elect student officers, something that hasn't happened in a number of years, pointed out PPO President Paty Hernandez.

The PPO is also looking toward raising funds to purchase picnic benches for middle school students, much like those on the high school side of the foyer, which middle school students are not allowed to use, Hernandez noted.

Superintendent Matt Murray has been an active member of the PPO. He noted that organization members work with the school to decide how money generated through fundraisers should be spent. Hernandez stated that ideas for other projects come from the community.



More recently, a group called Parent School Partnership, or PPS, has begun classes to help parents navigate their way through the Glenns Ferry School System. The group has three main goals: Raise the bar for academic proficiency; reenergize and support teachers; empower and educate parents.

The twelve-week course is facilitated by Claudia Guerrero, and course material is provided through the Idaho Commission on Hispanic Affairs. The course is open to both non-Spanish speaking and Spanish speaking parents.

After taking the ICHA class herself, Guerrero was asked to disseminate the information learned to members of her community. The twelve-week courses for Glenns Ferry parents began eight weeks ago, and although there are only four more classes left, Guerrero said anyone can join at anytime.

Empowering parents is a first priority for PSP. Parents are often confused and/or intimidated by the school system. As a result, they don't communicate with their child's teachers as often as they should, or engage in district activities and meetings. This is often due to language barriers, Guerrero noted.



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“When we got together, we started seeing issues that needed to be addressed,” Guerrero said of the PSP group.

One of those issues is a failure to communicate. During the group’s meeting last week, two women acknowledged that during parent/teacher conferences (held two times during the school year) they were not given adequate information on their child’s scholastic performance. They discovered that while their children were “passing” they were not performing at a high level of academic skill.

The group is advocating that parents meet with their children’s

instructors more often than twice a year. The group also noted that some educators appear to lose their passion for teaching. The group hopes that by giving recognition to teachers that passion can be reenergized.

The women believe that higher expectations for their children and educators will result in better educated students.

Guerrero hopes that once the classes have ended, her “students” will pass on what they have learned to other parents, and that the PSP will continue to meet.

Acknowledging that parents are key to their child’s academic success, PSP member Gabby Arevelo said “Education starts at home.

Murray says parent groups are vital, and is pleased to see these two groups working on behalf of students and the district.

“One of the things I think we need to do better is to provide a direction, a pathway for parents and students beginning in middle school really to college,” Murray said. That sentiment is shared by members of PSP. They, too, see a need to help parents understand what is expected and required of their children if they are to attend college.

Most kids graduating from Glens Ferry are not college ready, Murray stated. He sees a need to get as many students as possible ready for college, and one way to do that is by educating parents about what steps are needed to reach that goal.

By ninth grade parents and students should know what they need to get to college, Murray stated.

“We need to raise the bar with our teachers, and our kids,” Murray said, echoing the desires of PSP members. Some of the things the district is doing to meet that goal is to provide teacher training, and implement common assessment tests. The tests, held every few weeks, help the district gauge where students are in proficiency, and prepare them for the spring ISAT.

Murray encourages parents to visit with their children’s teachers more frequently than the two times each year when parent/teacher conferences are held. He says parents have a right to review their children’s class records, and encourages them to do so. This is especially important when a child is having difficulty, he noted. Murray said an Academic Council, consisting of parents, staff and community members, will be formed sometime during the current school year. The council will focus on academics and what is happening in the classroom, he said.



“That’s where we’d do the kind of planning to move our school forward.”

One of the first assignments he’d like the AC to consider is the development of a packet that would disseminate information about what is expected of students and what will be happening during their school career.

Motivating teachers, or renewing their passion for teaching, is another goal of PSP.

“I think there are a lot of different ways to do that [get the excitement back for teachers],” Murray said. “I think one is to be clear on the goal that we have and that we’re all working toward the same goal.”

The district has established a goal that everybody is participating in this year, and that is to reduce by 15 percent the number of students scoring below proficient on the spring 2011 ISATs in areas of reading and math.

Metaphorically speaking, Murray noted, “Without goals your treading water, running in sand. It’s helpful to be very clear what your goal is and what teachers’ role is in that”.

Murray believes that Superintendent of Education Tom Luna’s plan, which calls for “pay for performance” also, will motivate teachers.

He said that by forming teams, consisting of teachers, coaches, music instructors, and others that work with a specific grade level, could help to rekindle educators’ passion for teaching. He said teams that move their students ahead by a certain percentage each year could be eligible for monetary reward.

Parents could also get better acquainted with their children’s teachers by meeting on a social level; perhaps by inviting them to dine with the family.

Murray hopes that the PSP group will continue to meet after the 12-week course has concluded. Should that be the case, he would attend the meetings on a regular basis.



He believes that parent groups are as important as district allows them to be. In some districts, he noted, there is not much engagement with parents, or they are given “lip service”.

That is not what he wants to see in Glens Ferry. “I’m grateful for the parent interest, and I think that with parent input and motivation it can really move the district along. It really helps to have staff know that, hey, this is what parents want.”

The PPO meets the first Monday of the month in the High School Library at 5:30 p.m.

The PSP group meets every Wednesday at the Glens Ferry Public Library from 1:30 to 3 p.m. The meetings are open to everyone.