

Action teams support education

Learning Curve

By Robert Nott | The New Mexican

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"One person can make a huge difference," said Ruthanne Greeley of Santa Fe Partners in Education. Greeley is the chairwoman of the Parent and Community Engagement Committee for the Santa Fe Mobilizing for Education Excellence Action Team, one of three teams created out of last June's Mobilizing For Education summit at the Santa Fe Community College.

About 180 people (educators, parents, students, etc.) took part in that two-day event, sharing ideas on how to unite the community behind a few goals. The summit was convened by United Way of Santa Fe County and facilitated by members of New Mexico First, a nonprofit group committed to engaging citizens in public policy issues.

At that time, United Way CEO and President Katherine Freeman said she didn't want to see the assembly come up with some good ideas and then pack those ideas on some shelf somewhere, never to be touched again. Some six months later, Freeman and company have organized three action teams to pursue three low-cost or no-cost initiatives to support education in Santa Fe County.

The Education Hero Campaign encourages local businesses to help via a series of options, including finding a way to give employees time off to attend a parent/teacher conference; hosting book or school-supply drives; mentoring a student; or providing internships.

The Parent Involvement Committee is looking for representatives from all the district's schools; this group is slated to start meeting early this year.

Finally, the Hooked on Books campaign is a literacy program already up and running thanks to the leadership of Santa Fe School for the Arts and Sciences, which formed a student Alliance for Literacy to get this "read, read, read" campaign moving back in October. The alliance began raising money for prizes to continue offering incentives via reading contests. It raised \$10,000 from the Albertsons Community Partners Challenge.

"My big dream is that all the leaders in the community come together and agree on some collective actions with these committees — in tandem with Santa Fe Public Schools and the Board of Education — to make a difference here," Freeman said during a December interview. The action team is definitely seeking volunteers: "This is not a private club," she said. "This is an open invite to the public to participate."

United Way's Allison Gregory emphasized that there are a number of things that Santa Feans can do — at no

cost — to help maintain the momentum of the education summit. "You can make an impact just by stepping up," she said.

You can call Craig Strong at United Way at 216-2975 or visit www.uwsfc.org and click on the Mobilizing Education link to find out more or get involved.

Speaking of Hooked on Books — which is encouraging kids to read through a variety of means, including offering incentives — its student-driven Alliance for Literacy meets every other Saturday at the Santa Fe School for the Arts and Sciences, and any youth may attend one of these meetings. The alliance announced the winners of its initial competition, in which students wrote essays pitching "Great Ideas" to encourage reading: Ella Rappaport of the Academy of Technology and the Classics took first place and won an iPad; Jeremiah Aguirre of César Chávez Elementary School took second place and won a BMX bicycle, and Jason Romero of ATC took third place and won a Kindle. Jennifer Kennedy's third-grade class at Agua Fria Elementary racked up the highest number of entries from one class and was rewarded with Hooked on Books wristbands and a gift certificate from Baskin Robbins. See the website, nmallianceforliteracy.org, for more information and to read the winning essays, or call 438-8585.