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San Marcos Elementary students raise money for college

By: NOELLE IBRAHIM - Staff Writer | Posted: Saturday, October 20, 2007 12:00 am

SAN MARCOS -- With a toss of loose change into a clear plastic jar, student leaders at Knob Hill Elementary School kicked off their "Coins for College" campaign Friday morning, one that will help San Marcos students attend Cal State University San Marcos.

"Raise your hand if you dream to go to college," the student council president, fifth-grader Ashley Washburn, told a sea of students who gathered around the flagpole, along with parents and teachers for their weekly assembly. Nearly all her peers raised their hands.

"Bring your pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters and let's raise \$1,000 for college," Ashley told the crowd, adding that jars will be placed in each classroom so students can donate their change throughout next week.

The campaign is meant to raise money for the district's Partners Advancing College Education (PACE) Promise, a guaranteed admissions program with Cal State San Marcos that also aims to help students focus on college at an early age and prepare them for the rigor of college work.

"Our district is so excited to have this relationship," said Principal Steve Baum. "Anything we can do at the elementary level to foster that relationship, we definitely want to be involved. I think we have a wonderful community that supports the expectation of going to college."

The program guarantees all qualified graduating seniors in the district who meet basic college prep requirements automatic admission to the university, starting with the class of 2009.

In addition to providing students with tutoring and mentoring, university campus visits, test preparation and financial aid information, the program will help students with financial need attend the university on four-year scholarships.

"It's a fabulous opportunity for our students," said Baum.

In August, the school district received a \$6 million endowment from the Rancho Santa Fe-based Leichtag Family Foundation to support the scholarships.

The school board also kicked off the PACE Promise Community Challenge, a fundraising effort to support the partnership, by presenting the district with a check for \$1,000. Board President Mary Borevitz and her husband, Richard, contributed an additional \$1,000.

Any business, organization or individual who meets or exceeds a donation of \$1,000 will be recognized with a plaque with their name displayed on a donor wall at the entrance of the district office, said partnership coordinator Bill Singh. So far, the district has received about \$35,000 in donations, including a \$15,000 check from an anonymous donor, said Singh.

Knob Hill hopes to raise \$1,000 in a week's time, said Baum. He and Assistant Principal Carrie Geldard each donated \$50 Friday morning to get the campaign started.

"We'll be excited to be the first elementary school to say we raised the money to support our students going to college," he said.

Singh said he has made presentations on the opportunity to every sophomore and junior in the district during 24 small group high school assemblies, in addition to presenting to the district office and staff at each of the district's 17 schools.

"The message is getting out there," said Singh.

Because one of the program's main goals is instilling the idea that college is an attainable goal, the fact that Knob Hill students raised their hands and said they have a dream to go to college is a good start, he said.

"The sooner you at least get kids thinking about college and practicing good study skills, the odds go way up that that's going to be a goal they have," he said.

Involving students in the fundraising is another way for Knob Hill to enhance its focus on building a college-going culture, Baum said. Teachers wore T-shirts, hats and sweat shirts representing such universities as San Diego State, Harvard and USC on Friday as part of the school's spirit day.

Parent Lisa Allen, whose son Eric is in second grade, thought the campaign helped remind students that education doesn't end in high school.

"A (bachelor's degree) is not going to cut it anymore in the technological world we live in," said Allen.

Contact staff writer Noelle Ibrahim at (760) 740-3517 or nibrahim@nctimes.com.