

EDUCATION

Sunset Elementary sees the guiding light

Garcia, Feamster champion Leader in Me program



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Josiah Jiron, a second-grade student at Sunset Park Elementary School, helps hold a sign on stage Friday during a Leader in Me school program.

BY ANTHONY A. MESTAS
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

We have two ears so we can listen twice as much as we speak.

Sounds simple enough. Students at Sunset Park Elementary School used that statement to explain one of the 7 Habit Principles.

The school's administrators and teachers hosted a fun-filled and lively assembly Friday to

demonstrate the leadership and life skills that their students have been learning through The Leader in Me program.

Sunset Principal John Hull explained that the program teaches leadership and life skills to students, while also creating a culture of empowerment. It is composed of seven different habits designed to teach students leadership.

During the assembly,

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staff and students at the elementary school were able to showcase just how the seven habits have made an impact on the students.

State Sen. Leroy Garcia, D-Pueblo, and local businessman and philanthropist Dave Feamster spoke at the event.

Feamster, a former

hockey player, talked about the "fifth habit," which is: "Seek first to understand, then be understood." He told the calm 450 students to never give up, and he shared a story about how he was cut from the first hockey team he played for.

"I didn't make the team because I wasn't good enough. I was probably the worst guy on the ice. But you know what? The

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coach said something to me. He said, 'Dave, it's all right that you didn't make the team, you are just learning how to play. The key is not giving up,' " Feamster said.

"All of the sudden something in my brain and my heart went off, saying I understand that I am not there yet, but if I work hard, things will open up for me. Opportunities will come my way if you just keep working hard."

Garcia spoke about the "third habit," which is to put first things first.

The lawmaker and former U.S. Marine asked students what was most important to them. He told students to put others first and also to put homework first.

"Ask yourself throughout the day if you are leading by example in your school life and at home," Garcia said.

Hull, who has been principal at Sunset for 13 years, said the two speakers fit well in demonstrating leadership skills.

Sunset received a grant from the Leader in Me program through Panda Express restaurant, to initiate goals and to introduce the 7 Habits into the classroom. With that, the school has become a Leader in Me school.

There are close to 3,000 Leader in Me schools worldwide. Sunset is the only school in Pueblo that is in the program.

"We started working on the grant last fall and received the grant in the spring," Hull said.

Staff at Sunset participated in four days of professional development seminars over the summer to learn how to teach the habits and to create a culture of leadership in the building.

"The staff did this entirely on their own time.



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/JOHN JAQUES

Dave Feamster (left) talks to Sunset Park Elementary students, staff and parents during the leadership rally that was part of Friday's program. State Sen. Leroy Garcia (seated to the left) also was a main speaker at the rally.

It's ongoing, as we still have more to complete," Hull said. "We have taught the habits in the classroom and now we are in the second phase, which is starting to

apply them and release leadership roles to our students.

"It's been, so far, exactly what we have hoped for."

Friday was set aside to

celebrate the program and to give students a chance to showcase what they have learned. Each grade level — through song or skit — demonstrated each of the habits. They danced, laughed and even saw Garcia and Feamster bust out some dance moves.

"Today was a celebration that we received the grant, and we wanted a chance to showcase that this is not just a subject in school that you learn," Hull said. "This is what leaders do. This is what productive citizens do every day.

"We would appreciate any community support and we invite any of our community to come in and share their greatness with us. We are calling all leaders."

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