

Learning-English classes include parents

*By John Plestina
Ely Times Reporter*

At least 30 parents of White Pine County students who have limited or no English language skills will participate in a new, adult-language program.

Sandra Reed, the school district's English-as-a-Second-Language coordinator, touted early successes with the program to the Board of School Trustees last week.

She explained that the White Pine County School District recently received a \$31,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to purchase instructional materials and implement the program called Sed de Saber, which is Spanish for thirst for knowledge. The educational materials from Retention Education, Inc., are designed for native, Spanish-speaking adult learners and bridges the gap between English and Spanish for many. Goals include giving adults English fluency for employment skills and to better participate in the education of their children.

Thirty educational units were purchased and several parents are currently participating in the program, which is part of the district's goal of family friendly schools, Reed said. Each unit is a briefcase with six months of English instruction in tapes and booklets.

Reed said that many parents of ESL students either cannot speak English or their English language skills are minimal. "How will a parent help a child if the parent cannot speak English?" she asked.

Reed played a video from a CBS News story about the program.

Fluency in English is the key to better jobs for many immigrants and to eventually obtaining United States citizenship, she said.

Lack of English is a barrier for many immigrants seeking employment and others with low-paying jobs, many of which are in the food service industry.

Reed said she expects tremendous results. "Here in Ely we do have parents who want to learn English," she told the board. Reed then cited the formation of groups of Hispanic parents that study English under the program in McGill, Baker and other rural communities. "They're very dedicated. They want to learn English. They want to know what their children are learning in school. Before that, it would have been scary for many of them to come to a school," she said.

Reed said parents are not only learning English but are also developing skills to fill out job applications and other forms in English.

Early this year, Marriott International launched the program nationwide after a pilot program showed an 85-percent success rate. In May, President George W. Bush praised the efforts and invited Marriott to share the success with Sed de Saber.