

**IMMOKALEE** — Immokalee parents and community members had the opportunity to have their questions about education answered Jan. 10 by the Center for Student Success and Services staff.

“We want to brainstorm about education with Tribal members,” said CSSS Director Randall Budde. “We also have new staff to introduce.”

This was the third such meet-and-greet session hosted by CSSS; the first two were in Brighton last year. Budde said it is up to the reservations to invite the department to make a presentation and share ideas.

In Immokalee, CSSS serves 12 students with tutoring, 10 to 15 with homework help, two are in the Work Experience Program and 16 are in higher education.

J. Webb Horton, Florida Gulf Coast University assistant director of community outreach, was the featured speaker. He explained the bridge program between FGCU and Florida SouthWestern State College, which allows students to earn an associate’s degree at FSW and transfer into FGCU to complete a bachelor’s degree.

“We are trying to raise the number of Tribal students on campus,” Horton said. “College is a great thing, it lets you grow. Education is the key.”

A discussion ensued between Horton, CSSS staff, parents and community members about how to retain students in college and ensure they graduate. Horton spoke of the importance of orientation and having a current FGCU student walk new students through the process of starting college.

“Students have to have a connection or they get overwhelmed,” Horton said. “It’s everybody’s job for retention. We have to care about the students’ well-being.”

During a discussion about communications between CSSS and families, the importance of parental involvement was emphasized. Email, flyers, phone calls and other methods of communications are currently used to get the attention of the students’ family members.

At the end of the evening, staff and community got to know each other a little bit, which should open the door to more frequent communications.

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