

# FATHERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN ROSELLE

More than 100 men attended Roselle's first annual "Fathers Make a Difference: Fatherhood Empowerment Conference" on Oct. 13.

The conference featured seven guest speakers who discussed topics ranging from time management strategies for busy dads to proven parent-to-child communication techniques. Its aim was to inspire fathers to become more active in the day-to-day educational lives of their children.

"Traditionally, women have carried the educational burden in Roselle. It's time for the men to step up," said Dr. Elnardo J. Webster, a proud father and superintendent of Roselle Public Schools.

Shawn Dove, a guest speaker and publisher of *Proud Poppa* magazine, gave fathers advice on how to get through to their kids. Dove suggested dads "get better, not bitter" when faced with a communication challenge and also advised them to reach out to other fathers for help and support.

"The strongest parents are the ones who are active in their children's lives and who also realize it is okay to ask for help," Dove said. "Without question, children who have engaged, active parents are more successful not only in school, but in life in general," Dove said.

Dr. Webster had the idea for the conference and asked Matthew Stevens, of Empower Today's Youth, to



Roselle fathers listen intently as Joel Austin of Daddy University leads a discussion on parenting strategies for busy dads.

organize it. He was pleased so many fathers came out on a Saturday morning and encouraged the women of the Roselle community to attend a Women in Education conference, scheduled for the spring of 2008.

"It was a pleasure to see so many of the men in the

community taking an interest in the program. That needs to become the rule, not the exception," Dr. Webster said. "I understand that some fathers are busy working, but we all still have a commitment to our children, no matter how busy we are." ■

## STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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quiet study, a desk in the bedroom or simply a seat at the kitchen table.

"The most important thing is for Roselle students to have a place in their homes where they can focus 100 percent of their energy on their studies," Dr. Webster said. "I'm asking all Roselle parents to set up a home learning center and to make sure their children spend at least 10 hours per week in them."

A home learning center is equipped with pens, pencils, notebooks and appropriate textbooks. It should also be far away from the nearest television, computer, radio or other source of loud noise.

Parents will be mailed a management schedule that will make it easy to monitor the time their children spend studying. The schedule is a weekly grid that parents can use to set aside time for their children to

study, complete household chores, participate in extracurricular activities and enjoy free time at home.

Another place that should be free from distracting electronic devices is the classroom. Dr. Webster has asked parents to make sure their children leave their MP3 players and cell phones at home.

"I had one parent tell me that her daughter had 83 text messages during a single period. Having a distraction like that in the classroom makes it very difficult to learn," Dr. Webster said. "Parents can and should regulate their children's use of electronic devices."

The second component of the Parental Participation Program is for parents to commit at least 20 hours per year to school activities, such as Parent/Teacher meetings, school plays and athletic events. That small

time commitment can go a long way toward improving communication between parents and teachers and boosting pride within the school community, according to Dr. Webster.

The final component is for parents to attend community education conferences when possible, such as the recent Fatherhood Empowerment Conference and the Women in Education Conference, scheduled for this spring.

"It may sound like we're asking for a lot, but all we're really asking is for parents to be our instructional partners," Dr. Webster said. "I promise you that our teachers and administrators are all doing their part to give the young people of Roselle a quality educational experience. Not just an education, but an educational experience. With our parents all assisting in this effort, there is no limit to what we can achieve." ■