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FEDERAL FILE

Math, Science, and Golf School

Spellings, Mickelson highlight academics.

There stood Phil Mickelson, one of the world's most accomplished golfers, atop a makeshift green, club at the ready. So why was Margaret Spellings doing the putting?

The secretary of education, it turns out, had joined the PGA Tour member in discussing the importance of math and science education to the nation—as well as the subjects' value in daily life, such as in lining up a putt.

Ms. Spellings and Mr. Mickelson appeared July 23 at an event to promote the Mickelson ExxonMobil Teachers Academies—summer workshops aimed at helping elementary math and science teachers improve their classroom skills. The event was held at the Irving, Texas-based oil company's offices in Fairfax, Va., the site of one academy. The others are in Louisiana and Texas.

Ms. Spellings' appearance was one of a number of events last week in which she discussed improving students' math and science skills as crucial to U.S. productivity—and gave a pitch for reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act. Renewal of the law faces many potential sand traps and water hazards in Congress.

"We have to embrace the new global world," the secretary said. The need for math and science talent, she said, is becoming "more acute by the year."

ExxonMobil has faced criticism from environmental advocates in recent years over issues of global warming. But the energy giant has also invested heavily in math and science education, including a new effort to support teacher training at colleges and access to advanced high school courses for students.

Mr. Mickelson and his wife, Amy, who was also present, founded the math-science academies with ExxonMobil in 2005. He has actively promoted them, including in TV commercials that air during major golf tournaments.

Students' lack of interest in math and science, he said last week, "puts our country, as a global scientific leader, in danger, unless we do something to end that trend."

Standing on artificial grass covering the podium, Mr. Mickelson asked Ms. Spellings to line up

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a putt, reminding her to use principles of science to keep good form.

The secretary, after an adjustment, hit her target, then challenged the tour's No. 2 golfer to give it a shot. Mr. Mickelson politely declined, noting that the putter and the setup of the stage were tailored for a right-handed stroke.

His nickname, as golf fans know, is Lefty.

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