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## Mayor Pro Tem Plays Role of Principal for a Day



Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Tonya Burke, center, stands with students who produce the Lakeside Middle School daily news broadcast, which is broadcast to the 1,200-student body campus.

Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Tonya Burke went back to middle school this week, spending a day at the campus where one of her daughters graduated and the other one currently attends.

The event was “Principal for a Day” at Lakeside Middle School and Burke got first-hand experience in the sorts of issues full-time principal John Parker frequently encounters.

She sat in on a meeting with a student struggling to complete his academic work, got a behind-the-scenes look at the student-produced daily newscast and read Dr. Seuss to a class of seventh and eighth-graders. She also chatted with an instructor whose students built a model submarine that one day might serve as an undersea mining platform.

Burke’s job as a vocational counselor with the Department of Rehabilitation regularly brings her in touch with former students who have dropped out of school or ended up in prison. For many of those men and women, the problems started in middle school, Burke said, so it’s important to do well during those years to maximize the chances for success later in life.

“Middle school is a make-it or break-it time for many students,” Burke said. “They are growing into young adults and this is a time when friendship and peers mean a lot to them.”



Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Tonya Burke reads Dr. Seuss to a class of Lakeside Middle School student during her March 2 stint as Principal for a Day.

Lakeside holds a special place for Burke. Her daughter, Brianna, graduated from the school before heading off to high school where she has excelled academically, earning an acceptance letter from Harvard, among other university. Her youngest daughter, Jaylyn, currently is a seventh-grader at Lakeside.

Burke toured the North Perris campus with Parker serving as guide. They chatted with Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) instructor Samir Tehseldar. His students are building a model submarine. The project requires a team of students to create a craft using skills in mechanical engineering, design engineering, operational engineering and electrical engineering, Tehseldar said.

The Lakeside team will go against other middle-schoolers in a regional competition.

Then Burke dropped by the music room and heard a group of students sing with piano accompaniment by instructor Matt Taylor. She said she was pleased to know that music and chorale are an important part of the curriculum at Lakeside, as arts and music classes have faced cutbacks because of recent tight budgets.

Later, she and Parker dropped by the classroom of William Winter, which serves as the school newsroom. Students write, edit and read news of the day, which included trivia, the weather forecast and where to pick up tickets for an upcoming tennis match.



Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Tonya Burke and Lakeside Middle School principal John Parker chat during her visit as Principal for a Day.

“Very impressive,” Burke said of the news team. “Their level of professionalism was outstanding!”

Burke wrapped up her day by reading the Seuss book “Are You My Mother?” Her day wrapped up at Parker’s office where she summed up the experience.

“It was great to get the perspective of the principal and talk to teachers, counselors and students,” Burke said. “I’m honored.”

Then she graded her day at Lakeside: A+

That made Parker’s day.

“It’s tremendously rewarding to be a principal at this level and have the opportunity to make real gains in the lives of students—both academically and behaviorally. I feel privileged to have Mayor Pro Tem Burke spend the day with us. I’m honored she gave her the time.”

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