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ANTIOCH -- Louie Rocha doesn't normally take calls during staff meetings.

But it was the day after the November election, and Tom Torlakson was on the line. So, the Antioch High principal excused himself to talk with California's superintendent of education.

Torlakson called to congratulate Rocha on the passing of Measure B, the \$56.5 million bond to modernize the 58-year-old historic campus.

"That call meant a lot to me," Rocha said.

It meant even more that Torlakson kept a promise to come to AHS, and last week visited the school to chat with students and see the school's learning academies in action.

Also on the recent visit were myriad dignitaries, including Antioch Schools Superintendent Don Gill, school board members, such as president Joy Motts, and a parade of other elected officials like Congressman Jerry McNerney and Assemblywoman Susan Bonilla.

"It was a very special event to have (all these notables) participate," Rocha said. "I am so proud of the team work by our school staff and the outstanding professional conduct of our students."

AUSD's Gill agreed that it was an honor to have Torlakson on campus.

"(He) took time to learn, first hand, the reform efforts occurring within our district ..."

While Gill was pleased with the entire event, he particularly enjoyed it being a homecoming of sorts for Torlakson.

The state official, who coached the Panthers' cross country teams in the early'80s, shared some old tales with the large group during a lunch break.

Torlakson has strong ties to East County as a former Antioch councilman, county supervisor, assemblyman and senator before being elected state superintendent in 2010.

"It was gratifying to hear the words of acknowledgment and praise (he) offered to the teachers, administration and staff for their innovated reform efforts that have been recognized throughout the state," Gill said.

In addition to praising Antioch High, Torlakson also acknowledged the board and district members for its team efforts "to move forward in a positive and comprehensive way ...

"This is the wave of the future. I'm so proud the school I (have ties to) will (help) lead the way," Torlakson said.

Rocha was happy to welcome back Torlakson and have "him observe the Linked Learning Academies ... It was a validation that (AHS) is a school being recognized by Department of Education in California and United States."

The day's big focus was on the budding academies and the students, many of whom had a chance to explain their projects to Torlakson and others.

According to Rocha, Linked Learning Career Pathway Academies is a partnership between public education and industry with "a focus on engaging students with a relevant and meaningful education via a focus on a career pathway the students have selected." AHS features engineering design for a green environment (EDGE), media technology, environmental sciences, and leadership and public services. (Deer Valley High houses a law, medical, business, science research and an arts academy).

"To receive praise from Tom was very special because the work we are doing is in alignment with his 'Blueprint on Education' ... It was a huge success; one that I will always cherish."

The day also included a \$5,000 award from PG&E for the EDGE academy. It was presented to teacher Brandy Thompson, who wrote and submitted the grant, which will be used for a field trip to the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant.

Allan Cantando, Antioch's police chief, was also on hand and posted praise on Facebook. "To say I was impressed with the work our young people are accomplishing would be an understatement. The technology being used and the comprehensive learning model were remarkable. Kudos to (AHS and AUSD) for the dedicated commitment to our children and future leaders. Collectively, our community is making positive change."