

State's top educator promotes LTCC's Spanish institute

By Kathryn Reed

"The key to dreams is education."

That was one of the messages Tom Torlakson, state superintendent of public instruction, delivered Monday at Lake Tahoe Community College.

Not only was Torlakson the guest speaker on the first day of the college's Intensive Spanish Summer Institute, he was also one of the students.

He called the program a role model for the state – one he would like to see expanded to other two-year institutions.



Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson launches ISSI Aug. 6 at Lake Tahoe Community College. Photo/Kathryn Reed

"I feel this is a great institute. It is the gold standard of language learning," Torlakson told the group of students ready to start their week of intensive learning.

He is a firm believer that the more people who know more than one language, the better off California's economy will be because they will be able to communicate with the state's diverse population as well as the world beyond.

Torlakson relayed how 38 percent of Californians identify themselves as Latino, one-quarter and soon to be one-third of the state's students are English learners, and that one-quarter of the students in California grow up in poverty without health care.

All of those stats are why he believes an educated society is important.

He shared how one way the state is emphasizing the importance of being multilingual is by putting a bi-literacy seal on high school diplomas. This was the first year for the program, with 10,000 students receiving the designation.

While the LTCC program goes through Aug. 10, the California official was in town for two days.

On Monday after the opening of the Spanish immersion program, Torlakson received some language instruction, learned how to make tapas, went to Spanish through Storytelling and dropped in on a variety of other classes.

He had to be back in Sacramento today for budget issues and what he told *Lake Tahoe News* would be "three more intensive weeks."

What brought him to South Lake Tahoe was the opportunity to see what the summer Spanish program is all about, how the 400-plus students get an education, and how the college has been able to sustain it for 19 years.

Maxine Alper and Sue O'Connor who run the program (O'Connor and Diane Rosner started it) said they have had to pay attention to every penny.

"We are being very frugal," O'Connor told *Lake Tahoe News*. Staff cuts and cutting back on materials have been essential in this economy.

More changes are likely next year, with the potential of LTCC's Connect Ed being a more integral component as the state keeps taking away dollars.

A pre-institute course was offered Aug. 5 through Connect Ed that Torlakson attended. Besides two hours of learning verbs, the group went to Taylor Creek to explore the natural environment of the South Shore.

The coordinators are taking feedback to heart by offering for the first time a three-day Spanish institute Oct. 5-7, which will be through Connect Ed.

ISSI offers 12 levels of instruction, which is why nearly one-third of the students are returnees. Plus, new break out sessions are added each year.

More information about ISSI may be found online.

Information about Connect Ed is also online.