



Leadership students get schooled in education

By Sarah Rohrs/Times-Herald staff writer

Posted: 04/18/2009 01:02:56 AM PDT

Because cities are often judged by their schools, Leadership Vallejo members put on their listening ears and paid close attention during a crash course Friday on local schools and community issues.

Sixteen members of the Leadership Vallejo class focused on the city's education landscape, beginning at Solano Community College's Vallejo satellite campus where they also heard about the school district's efforts to improve student learning.

Members also toured California Maritime Academy, and went to Touro University where they learned about student public health and pharmacy programs.

Leadership Vallejo is a yearlong training program for those who want to improve the town. This year's class has 16 members who meet regularly to learn leadership and team-building skills. In monthly daylong sessions, members focus on government, business and economic development, labor, education and social service needs, among others.

Leadership Vallejo board president Doug Webster, California Maritime Academy's director of public relations, encouraged class members to serve as ambassadors for local schools.

Vallejo school district superintendent Mary Bull said education is a critical community component.

"Schools are part of the community and their problems are not just school problems; they are a community's problems. They are, perhaps, your biggest problem," Bull said.

Bull, who has served in the top administrative spot for 18 months, said much work is still needed to improve student learning. A lot of effort has gone into elementary school improvements in previous years, and this year the district has put more effort into middle schools, she said.

Students are required to pass classes before going to the next grade. This summer, for the first time, they will have summer school sessions geared to them.

"What was happening is that kids were floating through middle school with fourth- and fifth-grade-level skills," she said. When these students got to high school, they often failed ninth grade, she said. More effort also is needed to beef up high school test scores, particularly in math, she said.

Leadership Vallejo members also got a rundown on Solano Community College's challenges in retaining its accreditation, and coping with incoming students with rudimentary academic skills.

Of all Solano County high school graduates, those coming from Vallejo need the most help getting up to collegiate levels in math and English, Vallejo Center Director Jerry Kea said.

"We love them, support them and we fight for them," Kea said of Vallejo students.

Friday's session was Leadership Vallejo's last class.

Members graduate 5 p.m. Wednesday at Farragut Inn in a ceremony in which they outline what they've learned and make pledges to continue their work. The session is open to the public.

Applications are being taken through May 15 for the third annual Leadership Vallejo class which will convene in September after summer interviews. Those interested can go to www.LeadershipVallejo.org, or call (707) 644-5551.

Contact staff writer Sarah Rohrs at srohrs@thnewsnet.com or (707) 553-6832.