

Greenwich Time

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Child labor

Dundee students learn of laws, leadership from secretary of labor

By Andrew Shaw
Staff Writer

When Christine Chao heard her son, Ben Shaver, a third-grader at The International School at Dundee, would be studying a unit on leadership, she knew just the person to come speak on the topic.

She invited her sister, Elaine, who happens to be the U.S. secretary of labor. Secretary Chao spent more than an hour yesterday morning with the third-grade class, giving a slide presentation on her duties and on how the U.S. government works.

It was a visit that required plenty of legwork involving Secret Service agents, an advanced team coordinator and lots of phone calls from the government, according to Principal Teresa Ricci.

"We worked hard to prepare for her visit. We had every detail taken care of," Ricci said.



Bob Luckey Jr./Staff photo

U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao talks to third-graders at The International School at Dundee yesterday. Below, left, third-grader Elise Perry asks Chao a question during the visit by the first Asian-American member of the presidential cabinet.

The 58 third-graders also spent time studying the government and Chao's job.

"It was so worthwhile. I thought the whole experience was just monumental in all aspects," Ricci said.

Before the program, Ricci gave a tour of the school to Chao, who was confirmed by the Senate in 2001 as the 24th secretary of labor and the first Asian-American in the president's cabinet in U.S. history.

Ricci explained the International

Baccalaureate philosophy of teaching, which uses a global, inquisitive method to get children to think how the information they are learning affects other cultures.

During the IB unit on leadership, the third-graders are interviewing leaders around town, including Ricci. They used their time with Chao to ask about her role in a leadership position and write down her responses, which they will use as part of a project.



"The hardest part of being the secretary of labor is being a good leader," Chao said in response to a student question. With millions of working Americans to look out for, it can be difficult, she added. "There are so many of us. We are so diverse. So you have to try to communicate all the time."

Chao explained how her department was created in part to protect children who were being forced to work in unsafe conditions. Now, she explained, there are laws that prohibit child labor in the United States.

"One of the reasons the department was created was because of little children like you," she said as she stood a few feet away from her nephew Ben. His brother, Tyler Shaver, a first-grader at Dundee, also was in attendance. "And we want to make sure workers are safe at the workplace," Chao said.

Ricci pointed out to the students that at age 8, Chao, who did not speak English,

emigrated with her family from Taiwan to the United States. That's a story that should resonate with some of the students with international backgrounds, Ricci said.

"It's certainly motivating to hear her story of coming to America without knowing the language," Ricci said.

Having an international understanding of the world will be helpful for the children, Chao said afterward. As business becomes more global, new workers will be expected to keep up.

"I think it's good for more people to understand the world-wide environment," she said.

Education in the primary and secondary levels is a key to the country's success in the job market, she added. "The basic foundation that workers have is very important," Chao said. "So it helps to come visit our school system and see our magnet schools and the various educational opportunities offered."



Bob Luckey Jr./Staff photo

U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao takes a tour of The International School at Dundee yesterday with Principal Teresa Ricci, right, before meeting with the school's third-grade class to talk about leadership.