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Former Antioch Assemblyman Tom Torlakson is sworn in as state Superintendent of Public Instruction at Mt. Diablo High

By Theresa Harrington
Contra Costa Times
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CONCORD -- Returning to the campus where he once taught, former Assemblyman Tom Torlakson on Monday was welcomed as a hero during his inauguration as the state's top education administrator.

"Tom Torlakson is a public servant with a teacher's heart," said Mt. Diablo High School vice principal and teacher Liana Cismowski. "And now that he's going to hold the highest office in the state as Superintendent of Public Instruction -- teacher rock star!"

Mt. Diablo school board President Gary Eberhart said the campus was proud to host the event honoring Torlakson, who is officially a "teacher on leave" in the district.

"We stand together to welcome one of our own," Eberhart said to a crowd of Torlakson supporters during a ceremony in the campus gym, which included the presentation of the colors by the school's Junior ROTC students, the national anthem sung by the Ladies First Concord High School choir, performances by the Dublin High School jazz band and inspirational remarks by former San Francisco 49er William "Bubba" Paris Jr.

Teamwork was the theme, with Torlakson and many speakers referencing his mentoring of students as a teacher and high school track coach. Torlakson went on to become an Antioch city councilman, Contra Costa County supervisor, state senator and assemblyman, where he continued to work with others to improve the community, speakers said.

His discipline as a track runner in high school provided a solid foundation for

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Former San Francisco 49er William H. "Bubba" Paris Jr. conducts a blessing following the...



After Napa County Superintendent of Schools Barbara Nemko administered the oath of office, Torlakson revved up audience members like a sports coach. He encouraged them to chant, "Yes!" after he asked if they were ready to help him take on the challenge of bringing education in the state back to its once-envied national status.

To help get things done, Torlakson said he looked forward to working with area legislators at every level of government.

"We know the ingredients of success," Torlakson said. "But we've lost a significant amount on the investment side."

He stressed the importance of more counselors, smaller class sizes, preschool for all students and expanded career technical education.

After the ceremony, Torlakson said the event felt like a homecoming. He recalled the joy of inspiring students and being inspired by them.

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He also promised to soon reveal strategies to spur investment in education.

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