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TORLAKSON AND THURMOND UNITE FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL HANDS-ON LEARNING

Pittsburg, CA – Boilermakers Union Local #549, in partnership with the Torlakson Whole Child Institute, welcomed students and their families from the Antioch and Pittsburg Unified School Districts for an action-packed *Family Day* on Saturday, November 16th.

Founded by Tom Torlakson, State Superintendent of Public Instruction (2011-2019), the Institute's *Innovation Generation* field trips bring middle schoolers to building trades training centers for a great day of hands-on learning. Launched in the 2023/24 school year, to date the program has inspired students from 12 schools in six districts at apprentice training centers of IBEW Electrical, UA Plumbing & Steamfitter, Sheet Metal and Boilermakers workers unions.

“The dismantling and termination of shop classes at the middle school level was a big mistake that now results in tens of thousands of our students never experiencing hands-on learning or becoming aware there are alternative career paths to traditional college degrees,” noted Torlakson, a former Mt. Diablo Unified School District teacher himself.

Having achieved outstanding response from students, educators, and the participating unions, the next step was to develop ways to involve the parents. Given the strong support the *Innovation Generation* has already received in the Pittsburg and Antioch areas, the Boilermakers Local #549 union made the investment of time, staffing and funding to create the first-ever *Family Day*.

The event featured interactive demonstrations, virtual welding competitions, live hands-on learning, kid zones, and a free BBQ! Over 250 attended the event, including students from local middle schools who had previously taken *Innovation Generation* field trips.

To mark the specialness of the occasion, a great turnout of school district trustee board members, principals, and teachers were joined by Tony Thurmond the current State Superintendent of Public instruction and Congressman Mark DeSaulnier. They actively support vocational learning and noted the timing was perfect as Governor Newsom has designated November 17-23 as “Apprentice Week.”

“Through initiatives like *Family Day*, we aim to educate parents about the apprenticeship pathway—a route to the middle class that provides practical skills, career opportunities and even college credit. Their children can make \$36 per hour at

age 18, then go on to earn good, living wages making as much as \$140,000 annually as Boilermaker journeypersons, as young as age 24,” says Johnny Baca, Director of Business Development Initiatives at the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers.

Key benefits of the *Innovation Generation* also include creating great partnerships between unions, school districts and local communities, plus inspiring students there is real value to academic subjects, such as math. Now in the second year of a three year pilot plan to eventual statewide scaling, the Torlakson Institute will add additional trades through its new partnership with the State Building and Construction Trades Council, representing 157 affiliated unions from 14 different construction craft trades across California.

Middle schools who want to participate in the *Innovation Generation* can contact mike@wholechildinst.org or call 925.338.5786

Established in 1880, the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers & Helpers is a diverse union representing workers throughout the United States and Canada who are employed in industrial construction, maintenance and repair; ship building; manufacturing; railroads; cement; mining and related industries. More information can be found at www.boilermakers.org.

Founded by State Superintendent (2011-2019)The mission of the Torlakson Whole Child Institute is to identify, develop, and serve as a catalyst to successfully scale innovative, whole-child and whole-community solutions to key challenges facing California public school students. Presently, the Institute’s main emphasis centers on supporting students, their families and educators at the middle school level