PALMS OFFERS ELEMENTARY STUDENTS THEIR FIRST LOOK AT MIDDLE SCHOOL LIFE

By Palms Middle School Parent Maura Howe

While this is the traditional time of year for high school juniors to tour their favorite college campuses, Palms Middle School is doing their own version, offering its first ever elementary school tours. The intent is to help younger students with their transition to the next grade level and also to reveal the challenging and innovative programs that Palms offers.

This unique tour is the brainchild of our principal, Dr. Derek Moriuchi. He felt that while the more typical tours for parents and students were effective, it didn’t allow fifth graders much more than a superficial glance at the school. Students on these special campus tours talk at length to the older middle school kids, visit and participate in classes, eat in the cafeteria and have that “real life” experience.

“We wanted to create more interest and generate excitement as our student’s transition to their neighborhood school,” said Moriuchi. “We appreciate our future parents and students coming to visit us, but we wanted to personalize a visit just for the elementary students that feed into our school.”

Part of the personalized tour was hosted by the Palms student leadership. Eighth grade student leader Adrian Castillo said he was pleased to introduce the kids to the quiz program KaHoot in science. “I thought it was pretty cool; the kids seemed to have a lot of fun, especially when they were doing the KaHoot activity and Robotics. We heard quite a lot of cheering and shouting when they got the answers correct.”

The day was tightly scheduled as a fun-packed adventure for 150 - 250 students from neighborhood elementary schools: Clover; Castle Heights; Charnock; Palms; and Mar Vista. Palms parents, leadership students, and staff lead the younger students on a tour of the 6th grade area, through electives classes and over to the PE field and much coveted & appreciated weight room. After the tour and classroom demonstrations, the youngsters were treated to a hot lunch provided by the Café LA cafeteria. They also received a Palms t-shirt, pencils and wristband, and were entered into a drawing for gift cards.

As expected, visiting fifth grade students were excited to learn about the different electives they would be able to choose in middle school. Palms is known for its high performing music electives. Interested students can audition into the bands or orchestra, or they are welcome to start as beginners and discover what instrument they love. There are also auditions for chorus; performers sang for the visitors at the end of the day. The visual arts program is also key at Palms, with several art classes, as well as video production, computing, graphic design and much more. Student Ballet
Folklorico Dancers are preparing for an upcoming demonstration and competition. Palms Middle School students also have additional after-school art and music options.

Students also have choices when it comes to robotics; both in class AND after-school. Others spoke to the visiting 5th graders about their experiences with the advanced math and logic club, while others mentioned creating projects and competing with the Bruin Experiment Science Fair, where Palms kids work with college students from UCLA.

The visiting fifth graders also heard directly from Palms Leadership Students about the leadership elective, and the Tall Ships sailing program that sixth grade student leaders participate in annually.

Eighth grade student leader (and school president) Aminah Aliu noted that at the beginning of the tour, “The kids didn’t really ask me anything out of the ordinary because I don’t think they knew what to ask. They were just walking around and (were) surprised by the campus and the fun stuff in the classrooms.” She and Adrian Castillo think that the new kids will be much more comfortable when they come back for the official Camp Palms that will happen over the summer, before school begins. Camp Palms is a two-day exploration of the campus, with the help of teachers, and familiarizes students with the faculty, and facility, and such mind-bogglers as using a combination locker for the first time.

It does appear that the departing 5th graders were pleased with this special experience. They knew that there are exciting challenges waiting for them in middle school, they had the chance to see many interesting classrooms at Palms, and they seemed to have a boost in self-confidence as they move into this next chapter.