**TULARCITOS SCHOOL – PRINCIPAL RYAN PETERSON**

Not only do students grow and develop as they go through school, teachers and administrators do as well.

Consider Ryan Peterson, principal of Tularcitos School since the start of the 2011-2012 school year.

After seven years as a math teacher in the Palo Alto Unified School District, Mr. Peterson joined the Carmel Unified School District at the beginning of the 2008-2009 school year as the assistant principal at Carmel Middle School. He spent three years in that position before moving over to Tularcitos.

Mr. Peterson has grown considerably over time as an educator, although as a teacher it was not his goal at first to become an administrator.

“But I began taking on more leadership roles in the school and district in Palo Alto,” Mr. Peterson says. “I had a principal who encouraged me.”
He began working more to impact curriculum and instruction.

“Those leadership roles pushed me to become a better educator,” he says.

The classroom experience also provided him with insights of those qualities that a teacher should have.

“A key role as principal is hiring top-notch teachers,” Mr. Peterson says. “I look for teachers who have a mindset of always improving and doing what’s best for the children.”

There are literally scores of applicants each time a teaching position opens within the CUSD, so Mr. Peterson spends considerable time, energy and thought on filling those spots and making sure the right people are selected.

“We are teaching students how to problem-solve and think and helping to foster their creativity, and we are teaching them how to work collaboratively with one another,” he says.

Moving from the classroom to the principal’s office has been an adjustment.

“It surprised me how different the jobs were. It was like I had switched to a different profession,” Mr. Peterson says.

A dozen years of experience in education has led to a definite philosophy on the role of a principal.

“It is to help develop people of character so they’re going to make a difference in other people’s lives,” says Mr. Peterson. “My main job is to help maintain a climate and culture where teachers and students want to come to school every day because they know they are cared for and they want to be challenged.”

He and his wife, D’Anne, are the parents of three children (8, 6, and 4 months).

How has being an educator made him a better parent?

“It helped me set better boundaries for my own children,” he says. “It helped me understand where my children are coming from and to better see things from their point of view.”

And, conversely, how has being a parent made him a better principal?

“I see the important role that the parents play,” Mr. Peterson explains. “The children’s No. 1 teachers are their parents.”

At Tularcitos, Mr. Peterson says, there is nearly 100 percent parental involvement.

He has also seen and taken part in changes in education.

“It is now a much bigger partnership with the family,” he says, perhaps reflecting on his own experience.

Ryan and D’Anne Peterson have also been foster parents to two very young infants in the last two years.

The first was only five weeks old, and three weeks premature, when the Petersons brought him into their home. They had fewer than 24 hours to prepare for the newest member of their family, and so, he says, a quick shopping trip took place “to get the thing we knew we’d need for the first few nights.”

The baby stayed with them until he was four months old and then his parents were reunited with him.

The second child, a girl, became the Petersons’ foster child when she was only three weeks old. The Petersons loved and nurtured the child for the next 14 months before it was returned to her biological parents when their lives were in order.

Giving back the child, who had truly become a part of their family, was hard on the Petersons.

“There’s a big heartache,” he acknowledges quietly.

But Mr. Peterson says they are ready to become foster parents again.

“It is something both my wife and I always wanted to do,” he says.

Mr. Peterson was born in Gig Harbor, Wash. He graduated from the University of Washington in 1999 with a degree in mathematics and an emphasis in education. He minored in Native American Studies. Mr. Peterson is part Native American. His lineage includes the Stielacoom Tribe of the Puget Sound area.

After college, he moved to East Palo Alto, where he worked in inner-city youth ministries while working on his secondary teaching credential. He was an instructional aide before becoming a teacher. Mr. Peterson’s first position was teaching middle school math.

Reflecting on his own career and what he has learned, Mr. Peterson says he has changed as well.

“I think I’ve realized how important it is to acknowledge the hard work that people do, and it’s reinforced how important relationships are,” he says.