

Former State Rep. Tomasso explains politics to students

Fourth graders dip into politics at Washington Oak during Tuesday visit

KENDRA LEIGH MILLER
kmiller@ricentral.com

COVENTRY — Students from the fourth grade at Washington Oak Elementary School received a dynamic lesson Tuesday when former District 29 State Representative Lisa Tomasso explained how a simple idea can become a law.

“When you have a problem you want to come up with an idea to fix that problem,” Tomasso, who represented Coventry and West Greenwich on Smith Hill, explained. “So maybe your first step is to talk to your friends about it, see what they think, then maybe the next step would be to bring it to

the attention of an adult, maybe a teacher.”

Tomasso used as an example recent legislation concerning every elementary school in the state having a recess period.

She encouraged students to consider what the next step might be and some suggested taking the idea to the principal, then starting a petition to gather signatures, which they can submit to the school committee.

“If you want to create a law that goes beyond the boundaries of the town, it has to go to the state,” she said.

Tomasso suggested going online

and doing some research on the Rhode Island General Assembly’s website to find out who their representatives are and reach out, either through a phone call or email.

“Once you get the attention of your representative, they take the information and bring it to a lawyer, who creates a bill, and from there that representative asks other representative to sign the bill where, from there, it is heard on the House floor,” she said.

Tomasso went on to explain that if other representatives get behind the bill, another lawyer takes it and brings it to the attention of a special committee, created to discuss

various types of bills regarding health, education, school regulations and many more.

“There are many committees and the bill can be discussed by more than one, depending on the subject it’s about,” she added.

The people in the community that originally came up with the idea still have a lot of work ahead of them, she said.

“When the bill goes to their respective committees, members of that committee are hoping to see those who are interested in the bill because that gives them a chance

See TOMASSO, Page A-3



Kendra Leigh Miller-Daily Times

Former District 29 State Representative Lisa Tomasso spent the morning chatting with fourth-grade students in Coventry about how government works on a state level.

Tomasso visits Wash. Oak

Continued from Page A-1

to testify why they think that idea is a good one," she explained. "This is where you reach out to your friends and spread the word for them to come and have a voice too. And just like here in the classroom, where not everyone always agrees on everything but you all make compromises, there are compromises in laws too."

She offered the example of instead of a 30-minute recess, students can get a 15-minute or 20-minute recess.

"If you really believe this is important, you're going to want to share with other representatives why this is important," she

said.

If everyone on the respective committees agrees it's a good idea, then it goes to the House floor.

Tomasso explained how the same process applies to the Senate side of the General Assembly as well.

"It is a process but this is what democracy is about," she said. "The community is the most important piece of it and we can all have different ideas and opinions but if we're all respectful of what each other is saying and each other's ideas, then that's how things are accomplished, when everyone is involved."

She pointed out that it's okay

to have questions about something and want to solve what you think could be a problem and questions because in many cases, another person has that same question

Tomasso also told the students that aside from lawmakers that people see in the news, there are many other people who work in the State House behind the scenes to help things run.

"I love seeing how excited the kids get when they realize how much power they have to influence our community and state," she said. "It's very important for children to learn advocacy and to have a view and a say in what matters."