

Campers get boost from Supriya Jindal

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HOLDEN — A camp full of little girls looked adoringly at Supriya Jindal Thursday morning as Louisiana's first lady viewed the scrapbooks each child was making.

Jindal took time to talk to each of the more than 30 campers — all between 10 and 12 years of age — before writing personal messages inside their creations.

“Follow your passion for math,” she wrote in one girl's scrapbook. Jindal, who has a degree in chemical engineering as well as a master's in business administration, espouses math education.

“Always believe in yourself,” she said in a note to another child.

“Follow your dreams,” she wrote to third girl after a short conversation.

Some of the girls waited restlessly for Jindal to get to them, while others barely looked up from their glue sticks until the first lady engaged them in conversation.

When one girl said she is about to start classes at McKinley Middle Magnet School, Jindal smiled and said that's where she went to school, as did her husband, Bobby Jindal.

Asked later if that was where she got to know her future spouse, Jindal said that didn't happen until they were at Baton Rouge High School.

“He had a crush on me, but I didn't find out until later,” she said.

Finally, the future governor asked her out, but she turned him down, because she and her family were about to move to New Orleans. Years later, he looked her up and asked her to a formal ball after someone else canceled on him, she said.

“I was the fallback,” she said flashing a smile.

Jindal told some of the girls about her own children and also asked about the campers' siblings.

“My 6-year-old daughter loves to help take care of her 2-year-old brother,” but not her 4-year-old brother, Jindal told one girl.

It's wonderful for the girls to see a woman "as accomplished as she is," said Suzanne Ponder, the camp's program manager.

The campers, who are from across the state, are attending a weeklong session put on by State Police.

Camp Win-a-Friend was formed by State Police some 30 years ago, camp officials said.

Counselors try to instill self-confidence, leadership, team building and the ability to make positive decisions, State Police Lt. Doug Cain II said.

This week's camp was devoted to girls.

The camp along the Tickfaw River, offers swimming, canoeing, hiking and other activities, Cain said.

"Did anyone fall out of your canoe?" Jindal asked one of the girls while looking at her scrapbook. The girl laughed and shook her head.

At the end of the first lady's visit, the girls followed along as she walked back to a waiting State Police helicopter.

Jindal exchanged waves with the children as the helicopter whisked her away.

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