

Schools chief wants to update classes

THOUSAND OAKS:
She tries to replace old books, improve technology use.

By Richard Warchol
Staff writer

State schools chief Delaine Eastin darted straight for the Colina Intermediate School's library shelf and yanked out "Exploring the Planets."

She figured it would be there and knew it well. The soon-to-be 50-year-old read it when she was a kid. The book was published in 1958.

"We've got to get you some new books, guys," she said to three eighth-graders who joined her on a tour of the Thousand Oaks school on Thursday.

Eastin's morning visit kicked off a daylong swing through Ventura County, part of the superintendent's effort to visit at least one public school each week. After a luncheon speech before Thousand Oaks Rotari-

ans, she toured Mesa Union School in Somis.

At Colina, Eastin marveled at the school's computer rooms, after-school study programs and technological advances that allow administrators and parents to track student grades, effort and behavior with the punch of a few computer key-strokes. She said such performance-tracking technology should make the school a statewide model.

But while the school outpaces many California public schools in test scores and technology, class sizes are still too large and too many classrooms are without computers, she said. Nationwide, California schools rank 44th out of the 50 states in providing computers to students.

"I call that adult malpractice," Eastin said.

Later, while touring a Mesa School computer lab, she said California's computer-to-student ratio is 1 to 73.

"You wouldn't ask students

to share one pencil. Why ask 73 of them to share a computer in this technological age," she said.

And then there are those dated, cash-deprived library collections, the likes of which she finds in nearly every school she visits.

She's got a whole collection going in her Sacramento office. Her favorite: a gem she uncovered a few years ago at Beverly Hills High School that describes the "eight" planets that circle the sun. For the record, there are nine planets in the solar system. No. 9, Pluto, was discovered in 1930.

Colina spends less than \$1,000 annually to update library collections, said PTA President Peggy Buckles.

"When you have nothing to replace (outdated books) with, what do you do?" Buckles said. "It's important that we get technology in the schools, but you can't have every kid on a computer. You have to have books they can check out."

Referring to the likes of out-

dated book collections, Eastin told the Rotarians that "nothing looks as much as it did 50 years ago as the schools in this state."

She challenged the business leaders gathered at Joseph's on the Green to lend a hand to area schools and see the connection between education and work-force preparedness. Ninety percent of the jobs in the next century will be dependent on computer technology, she said.

And with students in Asia and Europe attending up to 88 more school days annually than their American counterparts, Eastin vowed to introduce legislation this year to extend California's school year. She also called for minimum state standards at every grade level.

"For better or worse, America's most aggressive people, men and women, big business and small, are in the driver's seat," Eastin said.

—Staff writer Rex Waggoner contributed to this story.