

LTUSD students post double-digit test score gains



LTUSD test scores are rolling forward.

By Kathryn Reed

Superlatives were rolling off educators'™ tongues when the annual test scores were officially released Tuesday.

Lake Tahoe Unified School District surpassed everyone's™ expectations as well as state and federal minimums.

If Tahoe Valley Elementary and South Tahoe Middle schools maintain this level of performance for one more year, they will no longer fall under "program improvement" status.

Of the district's™ six schools, half met the state's™ Academic Performance Index goal of a score of at least 800. Sierra House hit 799.

All of this testing is part of the federal No Child Left Behind. Instead of following the progress of a class of students, one third grade is compared to the next third grade " so improvements are not an apples to apples comparison.

However, the district has the capability to do that type of longitudinal analysis to know if a class or individual student

is regressing, progressing or at a plateau.

Students in grades 2-11 take the language arts-math tests.

One thing Superintendent Jim Tarwater points to as being a plus is all-day kindergarten and preppie K.

“The second-graders were the first class with full-day kindergarten and they scored about 20 percent better than the other grades (without all day K),” Tarwater said.

Tarwater, who is in his fifth year at the helm of the academically challenged district, said it would take three years to see improvements once the district and most of the schools hit PI status. His prediction was spot-on.

Teaching, looking at how well a student learned the material, and then re-teaching made the difference, Tarwater said.

He said during the last year more intensive math instruction was part of the game plan. Using a pacing guide so the instruction was completed before the standardized tests were given also helped.

A component that is missing for many students because of all this testing is instruction beyond English, language arts and math.

Tarwater hopes if test scores keep going up, social sciences, arts, science and the other disciplines that make for a well-rounded student will be incorporated back into the curriculum.

He admits that without learning science or subjects at middle school “and many are not” that those students are at a disadvantage when they reach high school.

Because South Tahoe High School is now in year three of being PI, it’s possible a District Assistance Intervention Team will come in to assess what the school is doing. It could mean losing a bit of autonomy.

Tarwater believes the 20-point API gain when only five were required will show the powers that be that the school is on a corrective course.

All eyes are also on Washington because President Obama has said he wants to overhaul NCLB because the goals are unattainable and funding for mandated programs was never in place.

2009 API results:

Bijou went from 625 to 689, gain of 64, state had set a minimum gain of 9;

Magnet went from 881 to 919, gain of 38, no gain required;

Sierra House went from 768 to 799, gain of 31, state had set minimum gain of 5;

Tahoe Valley went from 743 to 820, gain of 77, state had set minimum gain of 5;

STMS went from 772 to 800, gain of 28, state had set minimum gain of 5;

STHS went from 730 to 750, gain of 20, state had set minimum gain of 5.

“I don’t think we’ll always make double digit gains like this, but we won’t ease up,” Tarwater said. “We will continue to increase, but probably not as dramatically as this.”