

Parents complain about lack of buses

By Kathryn Reed

Parents filled the Lake Tahoe Unified School District boardroom Sept. 8 to complain about the bus routes taking students living in outlying areas to Bijou Community School.

Liz Muckerman and Heidi Hill Drum spoke on behalf of the parents. Both said they understand the state has cut \$200,000 from the district's transportation budget, but they contend the changes from last year to this year are not equitable throughout the district.

Parents have scoured the bus route system to find ways to make it work to bus students enrolled in the two-way immersion program who live in Meyers.

They brought up a lot of information that pointed to the magnet school seeming to get preferential treatment. District officials said that's not the case.

However, board member Larry Green pointed out that the Spanish-English program went from two classes last year to four this, therefore it's likely more students would need to be bused.

Christy Blach, transportation manager, said she used June numbers when it came to making the routes.

She also said ridership is not normal the first couple of weeks as younger students sometimes don't ride the bus right away.

The board agreed 5-0 to have the transportation department work with Bijou parents to try to find a solution.

"I don't feel we got what we wanted. Ideally, the board would have said 'restore a bus to Bijou' or 'ensure more equity is brought into the equation so that Bijou isn't bearing the majority of the budget cuts' or something a little stronger," Drum said after the meeting. "But, we will stay on it until a satisfactory solution can be found. It is not OK that all students who attend the magnet school have the option to ride the bus, but we do not – especially since part of the reason many parents signed up for the immersion program was that transportation would be provided."

Another issue was when parents were notified about the bus routes. Superintendent Jim Tarwater said it was Aug. 11. Drum provided information after the meeting that showed the TWI stops intact in that email.

The parents don't want to add a route; they want to work with the buses that are in service.

Heather Kovac was about to buy two bus passes for her kids but was told her son who's a first-grader at Bijou would have to catch the bus at Magic Pine Tree. The day care center near Barton Memorial Hospital is halfway from her house in Meyers to Bijou, so driving all the way makes more sense to her.

Kovac said her son is devastated to not ride the bus because after watching his older brother ride he was looking forward to it.