

Bijou school seeks \$300,000 grant to turn scores around

By Kathryn Reed



Money is so often touted as the difference between high and low academic performing schools.

Bijou Community School might get to test that theory. Bijou expects to receive a nearly \$300,000 grant in May that must be spent by Sept. 30. The grant may prove money does make a difference when it comes to education performance.

Bijou is in the lower socio-economic echelon in the district. For many, English is not their first language nor is it spoken at home.

Bijou is just one of many troubled schools in the state. On Wednesday, the Nation's Report Card was released. California shared last place for reading scores with Louisiana, Arizona, New Mexico and Washington, D.C. New Jersey and New York are at the top. Those states spend close to twice the amount of money per child than the roughly \$8,000 California doles out.

The South Lake Tahoe elementary is one of about 200 schools at the bottom of the rung, according California Department of Education stats released this month. Even so, it has made significant improvements, especially with the 64-point gain on the 2009 Academic Performance Index.

The API is part of the federal No Child Left Behind mandate. NCLB has criteria for schools to meet based on comparing

apples to oranges in that this year's fourth-graders' tests will be compared to last year's instead of each grade level showing improvement or a decline from year to year.

It's possible if Bijou does well on this year's tests, it would be off the federal watch list.

It was decided at the Lake Tahoe Unified School District meeting Tuesday that Bijou would bypass going after American Recovery and Reinvestment Act dollars because the strings attached mandate that by the first day of next school year, which begins in August, one of the following intervention models would have to be implemented:

- replace the principal and at least 50 percent of the staff;
- close Bijou and convert it to a charter;
- close Bijou and enroll the students at higher-achieving schools in LTUSD;
- transform the school by changing how students are taught.

"There's no logic involved. It's offensive," Jim Watson, director of Human Resources, said of the intervention models. "(Bijou) has taken on this challenge of improvement wholeheartedly already. It doesn't make sense to close, disband or give-away that school."

The \$300,000 the school is going after is a federal School Improvement Grant. The plan is to have 18 days of summer school starting in July for more than half of the 500 students. The school day would be 3.5 hours.

Principal Karen Tinlin and her staff devised a plan last week to bring in Guided Language Acquisition Development trainers to teach the staff for a couple days in this method and then have it used on the students in the summer.

"It's a program that really does help our English learners,

which is where we struggle," Tinlin said.

Parents would be part of the process. Technology like Netbooks and white boards could be bought with the funds. The grant pays for all supplies, teacher time, necessary meals, support staff and the coaches.

Bijou will know in May if was awarded the grant. Watson said there is no reason to believe the school won't get the money.