

DCSD settles with unions – no raises



By Kathryn Reed

ZEPHYR COVE – Financial issues dominated Tuesday’s agenda for the Douglas County School District board of trustees.

The board on a 6-0 vote (Keith Roman was absent) agreed on a contract with the various unions that includes this school year and 2010-11. No raises will be given, but no one will be laid off because of budget cuts either. That was a critical agreement.

However, layoffs will occur because of declining enrollment. Those cuts should be finalized by the end of the month. Most likely three or four teachers will lose their jobs and possibly one classified position will be cut.

Susan Lacey, president of the Douglas County Professional Educators Association, said the dreary financial situation in the state led her group, the bus drivers, and support staff organization to settle now.

“We thought it would be better to get things wrapped up,” Lacey told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We thought it better not to continue with language issues (in the contract) and just get the salary wrapped up.”

The union had its eye on Washoe County where cuts have been harsh as well as Clark County because it may re-open labor negotiations.

No one is getting a raise. However, the district is funding the step increase (an automatic raise for teachers based on years of service) even though the state is not reimbursing it for this expense. The district is also funding a 0.5 percent increase to the Public Employee Retirement System for the two-year period.

The money for this is coming from a reduction in insurance costs. Employees don't pay a penny for their health insurance – it's call covered by the district, which is self-insured. The district is going to pay close to \$90 less per month for a total of \$575/month for each of the nearly 900 insured employees. The savings will pay for the other items.

"That freed up money to deal with budget cuts," Assistant Superintendent Rich Alexander said.

Employees will not see a change in their health care plans.

"We have a budget for this year and next that keeps us solvent," Alexander said.

With Nevada looking to make further cuts to education, the future is murky for the state's school districts.

Also on the agenda Tuesday was a revision of the qualified school construction bond language that then affected Ameresco's energy savings contract.

The board expects to have a public hearing May 19 on the 2010-11 budget.