

Furlough day for LTUSD, 13% spike in health insurance costs

By Kathryn Reed

To save \$200,000 in the 2010-11 Lake Tahoe Unified School District budget, three classified positions have been axed and 12.5 hours a day of elementary office assistants slashed.

The decision came Tuesday night even though it won't be until this afternoon that the California School Employees Association votes to ratify the one-year agreement.

The school board voted 5-0 to ratify one-year contracts with CSEA and South Tahoe Educators Association.



Lindsey Oakes tells the LTUSD board why Lia Story should keep her job. Photos/Kathryn Reed

It was a bit of an emotional process. About a dozen South Tahoe High School cheerleaders stood in support of Lia Story, who is their coach and works in the school office.

In the shuffle of positions, as of today she will be out of a job soon. Though the positions are set in stone, the people aren't necessarily locked out of a job. How things work, the most junior on the totem pole of the job classification being eliminated loses their job. On the flip side, that person rises to the top of the re-hire list over people from outside the district. That means people who believe they are out of a job, like Story, could end up with a job by the time the 2010-11 school year starts the week before Labor Day because it's possible others may voluntarily leave the district.

"She is kind of a like a mom to me," Lindsey Oakes said of Story. "She was directly involved in helping me graduate. I'm not sure I would have graduated (last week) without her."

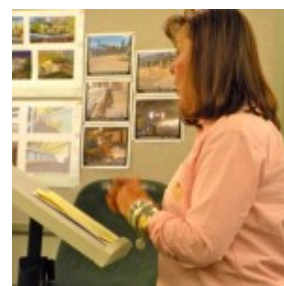
The students' teary pleas clearly moved the five-member board.

"We know if we let someone go in this community, there is no place for them to go," board member Sue Novasel said.

Novasel, Wendy David and Larry Green are expressed regret in having to cut positions.

Finding common ground

Bernadette Santana, representing the classified union and a former school board member, spoke of the amicable process in reaching consensus. STEA President Deb Johnson and Human Resources Director Jim Watson said the same.



Bernadette
Santana, CSEA

president,
praises the
negotiation
process.

This is a huge step forward in harmony among the district office, school board and bargaining units. It was only a few years ago that employees were picketing, filling board meeting with rancor and threatening to strike.

That's not to say everything is peaceful. STHS teacher Derek Allister said he didn't have a chance to vote on the contract and that it wasn't until Tuesday afternoon that he learned about the loss of classified staff. Allister said he and other teachers are willing to endure more cuts if it means saving jobs.

"If you take a little out of my paycheck to keep them here, I will write that check," Allister told the board.

(Per state law, teachers must be notified by March 15 of any layoffs. The district cut 5.688 positions at that time.)

The classified cuts include the attendance technician at STHS as of Jan. 30, administrative assistant at the district office, and half a position each of instructional aid tech and pupil services secretary at South Tahoe Middle School.

All employees will have one furlough day, which will be Nov. 24. This brings the number of instructional days to 184.

With health insurance going up 13 percent, that in effect brings the take home pay down for everyone. The district has a cap of \$9,232 that it pays for employee health benefits so it will not be picking up any of the costs associated with the increase. On average it will mean \$1,500 more per employee per year for health insurance.

Part of the contract is classified staff are protected from

mid-year cuts, except for bus drivers because routes can change based on enrollment.

Budget issues

Also at the meeting, the board approved the 2010-11 budget.

With this being the sixth time CFO Deb Yates has brought the issue before the board, not much was left to do but vote. Yates said she is hearing that further cuts by the state to education look unlikely. However, Sacramento for the umpteenth year missed its deadline to pass a budget.

Declining enrollment continues to plague the district. The loss of 139 students this year equates to \$720,000 the district won't receive next school year from the state.

The board has kept its commitment to class size reduction for K-3, though the ratio in grades 1-3 will go from 1:20 to 1:22.

Keeping cuts as far from students as possible has been the board's mantra.

Green said it's better to not have a new book than to make more cuts in staff. Books and supplies have been reduced from \$2.96 million in the 2009-10 budget to \$1.34 million in the 2010-11 budget. Supplies are all inclusive – including things like toilet paper, light bulbs, pencils and paper.