

# Mixed results for LTUSD in statewide test scores

By Kathryn Reed

Tahoe Valley Elementary School's falling statewide test scores was in stark contrast to how most of the schools in Lake Tahoe Unified School District performed.

The Academic Performance Index is the measure the state uses to determine how students are doing from one year to the next. Results were released Monday. Overall, the state posted a gain of 13 points.

"While we cannot be satisfied until the achievement gap is eliminated and all students are well-prepared for college and careers, this significant progress should be celebrated," state Superintendent of Education Jack O'Connell said in a statement.



Bijou elementary students exceeded expectation on state test scores.

The problem with President George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind policy is that the scores do not compare apples to

apples. For example, results for this year's fourth-graders are compared to the previous year's fourth-graders, not to how they did as third-graders. President Obama, with his Race to the Top, did not change the accountability factor to make it more relevant.

In LTUSD all but the magnet school is Meyers is considered a performance improvement school. The reason is the subgroups.

The testing treats everyone the same no matter their language ability, primary language or if they are special ed. That is a complaint educators have had with the system since the get-go – it's not a level playing field.

"We do the same programs across the district," LTUSD Superintendent Jim Tarwater said.

But the test scores would not indicate this. The environmental school, where Tarwater is also principal, had a score of 919 last year and improved 20 points to 939 with the latest testing.

"It's not just the wealthy. We have problems like anyone else, though it is pretty homogenous," Tarwater said of the demographics at the magnet school.

To be PI means year after year not meeting the goal the state sets. The state says 800 points is where all school should be and then sets goals to reach that number.

Tahoe Valley's scores tumbled from 820 to 788.

"They have to zero-in and find out what the difference was, what happened between classes," Tarwater said. "The interesting thing is they did exactly what they did last year. They did the monitoring and the intervention."

LTUSD is not alone in having students in academically challenged schools. Between El Dorado, Placer, Yolo and Sacramento counties there are approximately 94,000 students in

PI schools.

A bright spot for LTUSD is Bijou Community School. For the second consecutive year it surpassed the state's target. It was supposed to improve upon last year's total of 689 by six points and instead did so by 29 for a score of 718.

"We are excited because that staff for three years has been committed to breaking the 700 mark. So now they are aiming for 800," Tarwater said.

This fall the district expects to hear from the state if Bijou will continue to be categorized as PI.

Tarwater told *Lake Tahoe News* the continued improvement at the school has to do with collaboration of teachers, drilling down with students, tracking academic performance on a individual basis to know what students need additional help with, and dedication of staff and administrators.

Sierra House also exceeded expectations. It shot up 14 points to 813 when the goal was a one-point increase.

"Their Latino population made some good growth," Tarwater said. "One thing I'm excited about at all the school is the numbers in the white population is well in the upper 800s, including Bijou. What you are seeing is language is an issue."

South Tahoe Middle School's scores were flat, dropping a point to 792.

South Tahoe High School met its goal – gaining nine points for a score of 759.

Obama's Race to the Top program, for which states must compete for dollars and California didn't get any, is going to have the same standards for all students in the academic year 2013-14. Tarwater said the federal standards do not dilute what LTUSD and California are doing.

A complaint often heard from parents, students and educators is the lack of diversity in curriculum. With so much emphasis on language arts and math, other core subjects and a substantive number of electives have been scratched.

The Lake Tahoe Unified board is expected this school year to discuss ways to re-introduce electives, especially at the middle school. The idea is then students will be better prepared for the array of offerings at the high school.

In these economic times and continued state take-aways, LTUSD is unique in California to continue its class-size reduction, music, physical education and sports programs. But the goal is to do even more.