

LTUSD cuts 10 jobs for 2011-12; more possible

By Kathryn Reed

A counselor and two teachers at South Tahoe Middle School, two teachers at South Tahoe High School, two custodians, a teacher at the Independent Learning Academy, the human resources director, the English learner coordinator. Those are all the positions slashed Tuesday night from the Lake Tahoe Unified School District's payroll for 2011-12.



The cuts will save the district \$840,000.

Lake Tahoe Unified, like all districts in California, is grappling with state take-aways that are making it difficult to continue providing the services parents, the community and educators want and expect.

The district's approach has been to keep as many programs and people as possible. Class-size reduction is a luxury in most districts. LTUSD has stuck with the program, believing children learn better when the student to teacher ratio is reduced.

If LTUSD were to completely eliminate class-size reduction, it would mean 18 teachers without jobs.

"Our mission is to keep as many people as possible," Jim Watson, HR director, told *Lake Tahoe News* after the Feb. 8 meeting. "Employment is not only good for the community, it's good for the kids because it returns programs (to the schools)

we believe make a difference.”

But on the chopping block that night was his job. He admits to having mixed emotions about retiring after spending 37 years in California’s education system.

As dreary as the news was, in many ways the emotional part is just beginning. Now it’s time for district officials to look at who has turned in their paperwork to retire, balance that information against the cuts the board made Tuesday and fill in names for the positions that were eliminated.

At the March 1 special board meeting the names of the people increasing South Lake Tahoe’s 17 percent unemployment rate are likely to be known. State law mandates certificated employees be notified by March 15 if they will be receiving a pink slip.

Between now and then the principals at the middle and high schools will be looking at master schedules to see what classes are cut along with the positions.

Before the board voted unanimously for the cuts, STMS counselor JoAnn Hernandez expressed what life for her and colleague Roy Benavidez is like.

She questioned how the school of 860 students would cope with one counselor. She wonders what happens to the 100 special education students. She spoke of the 150 students each trimester who receive extra counseling because they have received a D or an F.

Nevada resident Kathy Percival told the board the expense of paying for her son to attend South Tahoe High is worth it, but stressed the need to keep the focus on quality teachers and programs. She told the board shortening the school year should not be an option.

But it is.

However, because it is something that must be negotiated with

the unions, the board cannot automatically vote on it. The same goes for implementing furlough days. State law allows the district to go from 180 to 175 days.

LTUSD can save \$100,000 for each day classes are not in session and teachers are not on campus.

Two things were stressed Tuesday night. One, is the 2012-13 cuts will be more painful if voters do not approve extending the taxes that will likely be on the June ballot. LTUSD faces another 10.5 positions being cut in a worst-case scenario.

The other fact that kept being reiterated is how districts cannot spend money however they want. Although the state in recent years has offered more flexibility with categorical funds, plenty of strings remain.

The district cannot take money from the voter approved Measure G or any of the matching state grant dollars to use them for items other than building facilities. Likewise, developers' fees have criteria for how they are spent. That is why the high school can get lights and a refurbished football field for next season – the district's share is from developers' fees.

CF0 Deb Yates said in her 28 years in the profession she has never seen the financial picture so bleak.

"I've absolutely never seen anything close to the level of reductions we are looking at and that we've sustained," Yates said.

The problems for school districts stem from the state reducing what it pays per student as well other cutbacks. The state is giving LTUSD almost 20 percent less than what it is owed. This equates to \$4.625 million for the 2011-12 school year, \$4.2 million this school year, and nearly \$4.5 million for 2009-10.

"Think what we could do with that kind of money," Yates said.