

Judge sides with state; Kindertown to close

By Kathryn Reed

The last class of preschoolers may have graduated from Kindertown.

Kindertown Preschool and Daycare is being forced to lock its doors at the end of the day June 24.



Maria Barrows-Crist hands Danika Yuzbick her preschool diploma June 17.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

While most of Friday morning was about proud parents taking pictures of their little ones dressed in pink and blue caps and gowns, a meeting afterward had their faces turn almost ashen.

Maria Barrows-Crist read a letter to them and then handed each a copy. It talks about her day in court, the future, who they can write letters to, and suggestions for where to take their children if, in fact, this South Lake Tahoe institution does lock its doors for good.

Barrows-Crist has been fighting the state Department of Social Services since September 2009.

Just when she gets over one hurdle, another is put in front of her.

“I’m not perfect, I don’t do everything right, but I’m not a danger,” she told parents June 17.



Parents
receive the
news June 17
Kindertown
must close.

The state believes otherwise. The biggest issue is a child was able to get out the gate at the center and wander onto the walk along Highway 50. The state has no leniency for this child having a history being an escape artist at other locations.

Barrows-Crist won a stay in February, with the idea she would get her day in court again. With her lawyer Mike McLaughlin and his office trying endlessly to get the court to set a briefing schedule, time kept passing.

On June 2 a management conference was set of June 3. From there the June 16 date was set. Attorney Kara Thiel represented Barrows-Crist in El Dorado County Superior Court in Placerville on Thursday before Judge Warren Stracener because McLaughlin was out of town.

The thinking was Stracener would extend the stay, allowing Kindertown to stay open, and a date set to hear the evidence. Instead, Stracener said close and you can have your say later if you want.

McLaughlin, who called *Lake Tahoe News* from the road, said he isn't giving up. He plans to spend the weekend researching options.



Maria Barrows-Crist helps preschoolers to their seats June 17.

"I hope to get before him Wednesday and convince him of the error of his ways," McLaughlin said of the judge. "I think it would be hard for (Barrows-Crist) to keep up the fight once the doors are closed."

Barrows-Crist is unable to hold back tears on the phone or in person as she talks about the situation.

"This is not just my business. This is my life. These families are my family," she told *Lake Tahoe News* as she arrived at the center Friday.

One thing that might save her is the buyer who is interested in the 30-plus-year-old facility. If the business trades ownership, the doors would stay open.