

Opinion: Outlining importance of school superintendent

By Stephen A. Jennings

As we begin a new school year, I'm filled with a sense of enthusiasm and nostalgia. As you know, I have announced my retirement, which will be effective at the end of February, so I won't be completing the year with all of you. But that certainly doesn't change the fact each new school year is an exciting time for us all.

The search process for my replacement has begun in earnest, and as we go through this procedure it has come to my attention that many of you may not know exactly what a superintendent's job entails. I thought I'd take a few minutes to let you know what I do – and what my successor will be doing – in this very important position.

I think of a superintendent position as very similar to a CEO of a corporation. In the business world, a CEO is responsible for everything that takes place in his or her organization. So it is with the superintendent, and in our case, this corporation has a \$50 million budget with more than 400 employees. Our business and our passion is learning.

While every day brings a variety of tasks, encounters and challenges, my primary responsibility – in everything I do – is to ensure student learning, so that students may discover their abilities, embrace their talents, and explore their passions.

There are several key components to managing a school district. First and foremost of course is the educational and programming component, my primary focus each and every day. This is closely related to the financial factor: ensuring we have the appropriate resources to support our educational

programs is of utmost importance. Closely connected is the Human Resources component: we must ensure that we have the most highly qualified staff members and that they have proper working conditions and the appropriate environment to ensure learning at the highest level possible.

I also oversee many additional factors, such taking care of students who have special needs, as well as facilities, transportation, and other district departments—all components that relate to or support our learning community. Finally, ensuring that the district is following the appropriate procedures and regulations is perhaps as important as anything else I handle, because if this is not done, the educational and financial components can be compromised. It is a tightly interrelated system.

The school board is in place to set the policies for the district; this governing board – in our case a group of five people – hires the superintendent to make sure the policies are appropriately followed and that learning is taking place every day.

In many ways the superintendent is the face of the district, both within the community as well as outside the community as county or statewide business is conducted. Every day, a superintendent must focus on meeting the evolving needs of the students while providing the tools and the leadership for staff to provide the highest quality education. It's a challenging job but also extremely rewarding, and I'm honored to spend the last six months of my career in education here with you all at TTUSD. Let the school year begin.

Stephen A. Jennings is superintendent of schools for Tahoe Truckee Unified School District.