

Momentum to eliminate social promotion in LTUSD

By Kathryn Reed

It's going to get tougher to be passed from one grade to the next in Lake Tahoe Unified School District without knowing the material.



The board on Tuesday night agreed to direct staff to begin the legwork to revise the promotion-acceleration-retention policy.

Today's policy allows parents to have the final say if their child is held back. What is proposed is the district – through teachers and other staff – would have the ultimate say.

Early intervention is the key so students will progress with their classmates. The idea is by October educators have a good idea who is falling so far behind that it may be impossible to make up the work. South Tahoe Middle School Principal Beth Delacour at the Oct. 25 meeting relayed the story of a boy who had more than a dozen math assignments outstanding. He found out if he doesn't pass, he probably would be a year behind his buddies. He's turning in the work.

Superintendent Jim Tarwater said the threat of being retained is often enough to get some kids to apply themselves.

Two age groups often are most likely to be held back – at kindergarten because of emotional issues more than learning issues. This is one reason Preppy K has been successful; it eases youngsters into the rigors of school. The other level is middle school where youths start to make choices for

themselves, pull away from parents and sometimes end up making the wrong decisions.

Board members agreed consequences need to be in place if kids decide to slack off. A consequence could be repeating the grade. But they also want to make sure a safety net is there to catch them and spur them along, including providing academic help.

“You don’t want them to go through middle school and be three grades behind,” Tarwater said. “There has got to be some work ethics in this world.”

Delacour echoed that sentiment – saying school is a student’s job.

Four students at STMS were held back this year; all are doing well now.

Then there are the kids who for reasons that go beyond their control need support that doesn’t involve academic tutoring. Tarwater spoke about being at the middle school earlier in the day when a sixth-grader told him her friend was suicidal and needed help. The student told him the only place she feels safe is at school.

Those are the students who need to be reached so not only do they understand the importance of an education, but also that they are important.

Another issue that keeps coming up when standardized test results come out is those students classified as English learners at the elementary level are the same EL students at high school.

“Long-term English learners is a national problem,” Ivone Larson, South Tahoe High School principal, said. “Part of it is cultural. It’s such a complex issue.”

She equated it to anyone in that room moving to China and

eight years later only being at a conversational level with Mandarin instead of at an academic level. It depends on what language is spoken at home, the education level in the home and the individual's desire to learn.

The next step is for Tarwater to meet with the leadership team and staff to come up with a plan that essentially wipes out social promotion in LTUSD. Then the board will vote on the policy.