

State take-aways could deplete LTUSD's reserves

By Kathryn Reed

Cutting the school year by 15 days. Bigger class sizes. High school teachers moving to the elementary level. Using all of the reserves. Bus drivers looking for work; students without a ride. Early retirements.



Some or all of those statements are likely to be a reality for Lake Tahoe Unified School District. Depending on the state budget and what the local board decides to do, all of the statements could come to fruition.

The school board on Tuesday night adopted the proposed budget reductions affecting this school year and for next as presented by CFO Deb Yates. More specifics will be forthcoming in future meetings.

“We’ve pledged to STEA and CSEA not to do a (reduction in force),” Superintendent Jim Tarwater said at the beginning of the discussion that brought out an unusually large crowd for an LTUSD meeting.

The teacher and classified unions are working with the district to keep jobs, which keeps programs, which provides students a broader education. But with the busing situation, at least today, it looks near impossible to keep that department at the current staffing level.

LTUSD must fill a \$424,000 hole the state just created by eliminating busing for special education and home to school transportation. Yates doesn’t know how the state can legally eliminate the spec ed busing when it’s a mandate. But state

agencies (think Lahontan Water board) are known for unfunded mandates (think TMDL) to local jurisdictions (think South Lake Tahoe, El Dorado and Placer counties).

Reserves will be used to fill this year's transportation take-away. With the state doling out those dollars on a monthly basis, it's easy for the state controller to not write that check.

The transportation hit for 2012-13 is expected to be \$834,000. To pay for the combined loss of more than \$1.2 million it would cost each student \$347. Students already pay to ride. But many on those yellow machines get a free ride – the same ones (about 60 percent) who qualify for a reduced or free lunch.

Not being touched is money to pay for athletic teams to travel.

The irony, as Yates pointed out Jan. 24, is if 200 students were not to go to school because the bus is the only way they could get there, that would be about a \$700,000 loss in average daily attendance dollars.

“So it doesn't behoove us to lose transportation,” Yates told the board. “First and foremost we are here to educate kids. We need to get them there to participate in their classes.”

Egregious, irresponsible and heartless are among the words she used to describe what the governor has brought forward.

A projected \$9.2 billion shortfall in Sacramento is being foisted upon local jurisdictions to bear. Gov. Jerry Brown has two proposals on the table to deal with the deficit. The better of the two for K-14 education is for voters in November to agree to raise the sales tax by one-half cent and raising personal income tax for those who make more than \$250,000 a year.

Because the outcome of that ballot measure won't be known until late on the night of Nov. 6 – if not for days after the election – school districts are planning their 2012-13 budgets for the worst case scenario.

“While we feel that there is a sense of urgency, we, as a district, cannot make hasty decisions that could affect education in the years to come,” Jodi Dayberry, South Tahoe Educators Association president, told *Lake Tahoe News* after the board meeting.

She said a collaborative approach is what the two unions in LTUSD want from district staff. Tarwater at the start of the night said it was going to take everyone working together to get through the financial crisis.

Dayberry went on to say, “STEA and CTA encourage voters to become informed and show and vote for tax fairness and restore the sales tax one-half percent in November. Californians have to prioritize and put education first.”

LTUSD is looking at a \$1.836 million shortfall for 2012-13. Three furlough days, early retirements, moving three teachers each from the middle school and high school to the elementary level, cutting the athletic director's hours in half, and increasing class size would help close that gap. That's what the board on a 5-0 voted OK'd Tuesday.

With a March 15 contractual deadline to let certificated employees know if they have a job for 2012-13, specifics need to be worked out before then, even though the state's numbers won't be solidified.