

Whittell High's 4-day week schedule under scrutiny

By Kathryn Reed

ZEPHYR COVE – Would students or parents want to be at Whittell High School if it were to return to five days a week?

That was an overriding question by some of the more than 40 people who attended a 90-minute workshop Thursday night regarding whether the 7-12 school should stay with its four-day week schedule.

Superintendent Lisa Noonan is engaging the three main stakeholders – students, parents, school staff – to gather their thoughts on the now 3-year-old schedule so she can take that information to the April board meeting.



DCSD
Superintendent
Lisa Noonan,
left, and
curriculum
specialist
Kerry Pope
gather input
Jan. 19 about
Whittell
High's four-
day week.

Photo/Kathryn

Reed

The board will also be weighing academic achievement between four vs. five days of instruction.

It was noted that even in analyzing test scores, graduation rates and other academic criteria, the whys of the numbers could be harder to discern. Budget cuts, changes in administrators, closing of one of three schools, curriculum alterations – these are all factors in student achievement as well as how many days a week they have classes.

At the Jan. 19 session the parents, teachers, students and staff who were assembled at Whittell were broken up into three groups. Each had a chance to weigh in on what questions they would like asked on a survey that will be given to the three stakeholder groups, the impact of the schedule on families, and how student achievement has benefited or been hurt.

“The only thing we have to sell people on is the four-day week. Everyone else has a ton of stuff,” parent Kelly Gardner said in comparing Whittell to other high schools in the area.

This schedule is unique beyond the general region. Of the more than 14,000 school districts in the country, 120 have a four-day week.

“A lot of students have said they would leave without a four-day week,” sophomore Maggie Dean said.

Dean and everyone at her table were for keeping the schedule.

She said there is a greater guilt factor in missing a day of school because of the amount of instruction put into a single day.

Gardner said it has benefited her kids, in particular by missing less school when they are doing extracurricular

activities.

Looking at attendance is one thing parents brought up to compare to the former five-day schedule.

While the sports schedule was an overriding reason to go to the four-day schedule when the board voted to do so in spring 2009, since then the league has altered game days and may do so again.

Students said there is less wasted time with only four days; that teachers keep things more focused. More learning is going on because labs are able to be longer and other classes benefit from a sustained learning period.

They also said having Fridays off allowed for them to do homework that day; to actually spend more time on school work outside of class.

“There is less burn out and more family time,” parent Brenda Munn said of the current schedule.

Students seconded the sentiment, saying that Friday was like having a real day off – a mental day.

The district is taking written comments until Feb. 3. They may be mailed to DCSD Superintendent’s Office, 1638 Mono Ave., Minden, NV 89423.

A survey will be put together in the coming weeks and disseminated electronically at school to students and staff, and emailed to parents. An independent third party will collate the data for it to be presented to the board. Some open-ended questions will allow people to go into greater detail about their thoughts.

The board could make a decision at the April 10 3:30pm meeting at Zephyr Cove library.

