

LTUSD on verge of creating winter sports academy

By Kathryn Reed

Prom, football games, hanging with friends, a diploma. In part, that's what high school is all about.

But in Lake Tahoe, where some of the world's best skiers and snowboarders call home, they don't have those high school memories because they were on the slopes more than they were in the classroom. And some leave town to be able to get the training and education they want. That all might change for the next generation of Olympians and X Games competitors who hail from the South Shore.



On Tuesday night, the Lake Tahoe Unified School District board of education will have a one-hour study session about creating the South Lake Tahoe Mountain Sports Academy, with a vote to be taken later that night.

LTUSD expects to partner with Sierra-at-Tahoe, and Tahoe Sports and Entertainment, owners of the South Lake Tahoe Ice Rink.

(Board member Judy Cefalu won't be able to vote because her son, Chris Cefalu, is president of Tahoe Sports and Entertainment.)

The idea would be to create a schedule for students where they are at South Tahoe High School in the morning and on the slopes or ice in the afternoon.

"We have had to send a few of our alpine racers to Sugar Bowl to balance their education," John Rice, general manager at

Sierra, told *Lake Tahoe News*. This program would keep them on the South Shore.

Sugar Bowl is the closest academy, with one near Vail and others on the East Coast.

Sierra has a proven history of turning out world-class athletes – Travis Cabral, Travis Ramos, and Jamie and Joanie Anderson, to name a few.

Moving, ditching classes or home schooling are the choices skiers and snowboarders have today.

Maddie Bowman, who will lead the Pledge of Alliance at the March 27 meeting, is the rare exception of being a world-class athlete (silver in the superpipe at this year's Winter X Games and second overall in the Dew Tour rankings) and skiing for the high school team.

LTUSD Superintendent Jim Tarwater said parents and students for years have been asking for an academy.

"The timing is right. We have the strong educational facilities," Tarwater said in reference to the infrastructure and associated programs that have come with the 2008-voter approved Measure G.

The academy, which could be running by the start of the 2012-13 school year, would come under the district's alternative education program. Amy Jackson would likely be the counselor for the students. Between 20 and 30 kids are expected to enroll initially, with it growing from there.

It's anticipated students from the West Slope and Sacramento area may also be initial registrants. The district does not foresee getting into the business of housing academy kids.

While the cost of the programs is not finalized, the district will neither make money nor incur additional costs. But it will realize average daily attendance dollars – the way

California schools receive money from the state.

Rice expects the ski-snowboard program to cost less than \$10,000 per year. Tarwater said the hockey academy will be closer to \$15,000. (Neither Chris Cefalu nor Van Oleson of TSE returned a phone call.)

Incorporated into the fee will be the cost of busing students to their training locations and back.

Rice provided the following rough schedule for student-athletes:

Fall: September-November (first quarter)

Conditioning begins school calendar year

Baseline physical condition test (possibly tie into sports medicine component that will open at STHS in fall 2013)

Winter: December-January (second quarter)

Daily on mountain training

Events as qualified and registered

Spring: January-March (third quarter)

Daily on mountain training

Events, competition

Summer: March-June (fourth quarter) (resort closes mid-April)

School sports medicine lab, media

End of season progress report, summer training plan

Voluntary participation: social events, soccer, volleyball, beach days.

Tarwater said by breaking the academy into quarters it will

mean being able to compress some of the academics during the time when the slopes are bare.

Another component could be to integrate various aspects of the high school curriculum into the academy – for instance having students interested in digital media film the racers and tying in sports medicine classes.

Rice envisions working with Lake Tahoe Community College on backcountry awareness for academy students. He also anticipates this type of academy helping athletes secure scholarships to compete at the college level.

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Meeting info: Study session about the proposed academy begins at 5pm March 27. A vote on the proposal is farther down on the agenda. The meeting is at the district office on Al Tahoe Boulevard in South Lake Tahoe.