

75-minute bus ride home possible for LTUSD students

By Kathryn Reed

School has been out for more than an hour. Do you know where your child is?

The answer next school year might be: “on the school bus”.

Lake Tahoe Unified School District board of education members on Tuesday heard two proposals of what the bus schedule could be for the 2012-13 school year. They didn't like either and asked staff to come up with something else.



LTUSD buses may be in the barn more than on the streets in the fall.
Photo/LTN file

One scenario had some students riding a bus home for 75 minutes. The longest route now is about 45 minutes. Considering it's 12 miles from Meyers to Stateline, that's one long trip to get from school to a bus stop.

Students in the Tahoe Keys could be faced with a longer walk because buses for students in grades 6-12 might be eliminated. They would have to walk to Eloise or Washington to find a

school bus.

Board members were adamant that having students arrive at South Tahoe Middle School 20 minutes before classes start is a horrible idea.

The district has been subsidizing the bus program for years. It costs \$1.2 million to bus about 1,900 students a day. The state reimburses LTUSD \$830,000.

The district has an ongoing deficit of \$1.2 million to deal with what could grow to \$2.5 million if voters say no to a measure on the November ballot that would fund education in California.

So, the cuts to LTUSD transportation are for two reasons – to deal with the current shortfall, and plan for a possible take-away by the state.

Because the district accepts state transportation dollars it must provide busing for K-8.

Twelve of the 16 bus drivers the district employs were at the May 1 meeting.

“It looks like six may be cut,” Steve Morales, facilities director, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Parents who have the means already pay a fee for their child that starts at \$150 a year. About \$60,000 is collected each year in bus fees, according to Morales.

“I think parents would be open to a sliding scale or paying more,” parent Karen Fink told the board.

Asked by *Lake Tahoe News* about using BlueGo as a means to transport students, Morales said there is “no appetite” to do that. He added that school buses are designed differently than municipal buses and that drivers having different training.

“A lot of students ride the bus who wouldn’t have another way to get to school,” parent Alice Jones told the board. “Not only do they make it to school, but they are there early enough to get the free or reduced breakfast.”

Jones also brought up the adverse environmental impacts of having more vehicles on the road if fewer buses are rolling.

The district runs 12 full size buses that can seat 84 and four smaller buses with a capacity of 20. The smaller buses are used for special education students. Federal law mandates public schools accommodate these students, often not having them co-mingle with the larger student population. The district cannot save money with spec ed even if it wanted to. Districts must provide for spec ed students even at the expense of the majority.