

State budget not good news for LTUSD

By Kathryn Reed

While much of the news that comes out of Sacramento is school districts will fare better in the next fiscal year, this is not the message Lake Tahoe Unified School District Chief Financial Officer Deb Yates presented Tuesday night to the board of education.

Yes, there is more money. In large part the additional \$4.5 billion comes from November's voter-approved Proposition 30. But what changes for school districts is how the state will distribute the money. That is why LTUSD could be hurt.

Gone in the governor's budget is the \$1.4 million the district has flexibility with for categorical programs. Those dollars will be under the supplemental and concentration grants categories.

"That's a real problem for our district," Yates told the board May 28.

After the meeting, Yates told *Lake Tahoe News* when the initial budget came out in January using the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF); it looked like the district would benefit from the new spending mechanism.

She said now it appears districts like LTUSD that have a high percentage of English language learners, foster youth and those receiving a free or reduced lunch will be hurt. This is because of the formula for how the money can be spent, not that the overall pot is necessarily different between districts. Most education dollars come with strings attached, thus giving individual districts little discretion.

“Under LCFF we are not whole and we can’t spend it the same way,” Yates said.

The LCFF also proposes reimbursing districts \$723 per student for K-3 class-size reduction. Right now LTUSD receives \$1,000.

The state Senate has proposed implementing LCFF in 2014-15.

What is on the table is the funding levels would be restored to 2007-08 allocations. This means districts are still owed millions of promised funds by Sacramento lawmakers.

And with projections for revenue growth expected to be less in 2013-14, the financial picture is not getting brighter.

It’s possible some of this year’s “surplus” could be a one-time payment to help pay back what is owed districts instead of being sustained dollars.

Gov. Jerry Brown and the Legislature have until the end of June to figure out a compromise and pass a budget that takes effect July 1. The California Teachers Association is backing the governor’s plan.