

LTUSD, California ready to be rid of NCLB

By Kathryn Reed

It might not matter that Lake Tahoe Unified School District didn't do well on the latest round of standardized tests.

On Sept. 4 the governor's office, state Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson, legislative leaders and the California Teachers Association agreed to amend Assembly Bill 484 so any school district could opt into the computer-based Common Core test this school year instead of just the 20 percent of the state's schools that were selected to be part of the trial.

"AB484 shows California's commitment to implementing Common Core standards and helping every student succeed," Evan Westrup, a spokesman for Gov. Jerry Brown, said in a statement.

While there is supposed to be one more year of testing under the federal mandated No Child Left Behind, California wants to end it one year earlier. This is because nationwide the move in education is to implement Common Core standards. People no longer see relevance to NCLB. That mandate called for all students to be at a proficient level by 2014. It has not happened. And most educators never believed it would in part because the numbers included special education and English learners, as well as it's unrealistic to believe everyone would ever be at a proficient level.

Only 14 percent of California schools made it to that level on the 2013 tests. Statewide, schools dropped two points on the Academic Performance Index to 789. The target is 800.

Lake Tahoe Unified followed the state's pattern by having all

but one school lose ground compared to 2012. And even then that school did not make the 800 goal.

Lake Tahoe Unified API scores	School	2012 score	2013 score
STHS		762	753
STMS		809	789
Bijou		697	720
Magnet		941	929
Sierra House		835	804
Tahoe Valley		814	786

Source: *LTUSD*

Part of the problem with the NCLB tests is that they didn't track a grade level. The results for this year's third-graders are compared to last year's. This doesn't allow for measuring a class' progress. Schools and districts were then penalized or rewarded for backward or forward movement that wasn't ever comparing apples to apples.

“It is unfortunate that officials in Washington continue to enforce a program they have acknowledged is deeply flawed and that paints schools with the same broad brush,” Torlakson said in a statement of NCLB.

The U.S. Department of Education is going to have to approve California's desire to abandon NCLB because it's supposed to be in effect through the end of the school year.

Lake Tahoe Unified started Common Core this school year.

"Common Core is a national objective where industry and colleges were saying they are having kids not coming in with critical skills they need," LTUSD Superintendent Jim Tarwater told *Lake Tahoe News*. "The government came up with Common Core standards across the nation."

What Tarwater likes about Common Core is that it teaches critical and strategic thinking, has students reach conclusions based on understanding the concept instead of rote memorization.

LTUSD is ahead of the curve compared to many districts because for years it has been incorporating technology into everyday school life. Students have computers in their classrooms and most have Netbooks to take home.

Part of Common Core is that tests would be online. The idea this could cut down on cheating (no taking pictures of test questions and texting friends) and it puts students in the digital age, which is where the professional world is.

The new test is called Measurement of Academic Performance and Progress. This year schools could voluntarily take the test. It will be mandatory for the 2014-15 school year. And for the first three years a paper and pencil version will be devised.

California budgeted \$1.25 billion this year to help school districts train teachers, acquire materials and upgrade their computer systems.

LTUSD is using the money at each school site for teacher training called Shared Decision-Making. Some of the money is also being used for instructional material for math that will

be for 2014-15.