

Tahoe elementary to be mountain academy

By Kathryn Reed

Sierra House Elementary School is taking the federal Let's Move initiative a step further.

Principal Ryan Galles this week told the Lake Tahoe Unified School District about his goal of transforming the K-5 school into the Sierra House Mountain Academy.

"I envision a physical transformation," Galles said.

The goal is fitness, health and mountain sports will be emphasized.



Sierra House is being transformed into a mountain academy. Photo/LTN

The initial Health and Fitness Night will be May 1.

The first phase is in place, so the transition to the themed school will not be difficult. It helped that the field was replaced last summer. A grant from Vail Echo had all second-graders at SHES on the slopes this winter. Third- and fourth-graders ride at Sierra-at-Tahoe. The ice rink allowed students to skate in a morning fitness program.

But it's not just about doing things off campus.

Galles told *Lake Tahoe News* it's about creating a more rigorous fitness based physical education program. This will in large part fall on the shoulders of Seth Martin.

"When you are exercising, even as short as 20 minutes, you have a better connection in the brain," Martin told the school board. He is a physical education specialist for the district, with this being his first year exclusively at SHES.

In 2010, the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports named Martin physical education teacher of the year. When Martin was at Tahoe Valley Elementary School in 2011 he had the students try to set a world record for jumping jacks. In 2012, he was instrumental in Lake Tahoe Community College and Barton's Tahoe Center for Orthopedics team sports performance summer camps.

The March 25 staff report says, "Research on fitness and the brain indicates that, increased levels of activity stimulates brain activity and increases student achievement. Fitness activities also provide improved attention span, memory and learning, thus reducing stress and the effects of ADHD."

The goals of the academy are:

- Re-orient to a fitness-based physical education program
- Bring in schoolwide fitness and health events
- Provide access to mountain sports
- Increase parent involvement/communication
- Promote healthy lifestyles, cooperative skills, critical thinking and problems solving.

The next phase is to get the growing dome installed. That could be a reality this spring. Approvals from the state are

still needed as well as some coverage issues need to be ironed out.

Last March when Galles was before the board he said the dome would have multiple educational purposes. For one, it would be a hands-on science lab where students would be growing vegetables year-round. It would complement the composting program. It would show kids that food comes from someplace else before it reaches a grocery store. And it will give them something healthy to eat. The state has curriculum in its Garden in Every School program that could be used.

Staff members are going to Truckee in May to visit the dome there and find out about how best to use it as a teaching tool.

A walking path around the school will be the third phase. This will allow for more activities when students are at recess.

Fitness stations and a traverse wall will be in the final phase.

In other action:

- The board delayed action on the proposed preschool center at the former Al Tahoe Elementary School. This would be for transitional kindergarten. It would help with the overcrowding issue at Bijou and Sierra House elementary schools. But parents of little ones are not thrilled with the idea and want more info. The board said more outreach is needed. The topic should be on the April 22 agenda.