

Tallac High focuses on prepping grads for work

By Kathryn Reed

A diploma doesn't mean much if you don't have any skills that translate to the working world. That is why Mount Tallac High School is changing its emphasis.

All the basics are still being taught at South Lake Tahoe's continuation school. But now there is a focus on making the instruction more pertinent to real world situations.

"We are getting out of the old textbook which had a lot of drill and kill," math instructor Jackie Tan told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I'm going to be able to make their math relevant."

Algebra lessons might come in the form of having students getting into groups to start a business and then needing to work out inventory, pricing and other factors.

Working in groups is a new concept in Tan's classroom, too. She is doing this because so often in the workplace it's about being a team, working collaboratively and not solo.



Adrian Ortega talks with Joy Barney from the U.S. Forest Service. Photos/Holly Greenough

The changes are the brainchild of Holly Greenough who is in her first year of being principal of the school. She had trained under Susan Baker, who retired in 2013 after 23 years in Lake Tahoe Unified School District. (Karen Tinlin was at Tallac last year and is now working out of South Tahoe Middle School on the School Attendance Review Board before she retires in December.)

“I’m working hard to change the program to become a work to career program so students are better prepared to serve our community in the service industry once they graduate,” Greenough told *Lake Tahoe News*.

She said most Tallac grads end up staying in the community. Being employable and then perhaps rising through the ranks to management positions is her goal for them.

The school is working with local businesses to make this successful. A job fair was conducted the first week of school to acquaint students with the type of work that exists on the

South Shore and for employers to tell students the skills they will need.

But it's not just about service industry jobs.

"We are looking for students with a positive attitude about working in the outdoors, who are committed to eight weeks of hard, physical work, and who are open to future opportunities or a career in natural resource management," Joy Barney, conservation education program specialist with the U.S. Forest Service, said.

The Forest Service through its Generation Green has a history of working with Mount Tallac.

"We have employed between one and seven of their current and former students each year for the past seven years of the program – 15 to 25 percent of our summer employment program," Barney told *Lake Tahoe News*.



Mount Tallac students talk with potential employers.

Harveys-Harrah's will let students take tours of the Stateline properties to get acquainted with the various jobs that are available. Different human resource specialists will be able to go to the campus.

Eric Campbell, manager at Bank of the West, is on board to teach students how to create a business plan.

"We don't want to limit them with what they learn. We want to

open doors and their minds to show them whatever they are interested in they can pursue,” Greenough said.

Developing certifications is something she is working on. This is so when students are learning to write resumes in Krista Serra’s class, they will have substantive information to put on it. Plus, it will be a relevant skill to use on a job. Certifications will range from CPR to 10 key to food safety. The school hopes to obtain grants to pay for the ones that require money to obtain, such as CPR.

Being bilingual, which many of the students are, is being promoted as a skill to hone. But it means proper Spanish and not just slang.

Many employers say issues they have with workers are soft skills – which translate to dressing appropriately, using proper language, being on time and not calling in sick on a powder day.

“If a student cusses, she says ‘you are fired’. It snaps you back to reality,” senior Joe Morales said.

The idea is for students to get in their heads what is right and wrong in the workplace.

While most have cell phones, if they have to take a call, it has to be done so outside. This makes them think if they should even be answering the phone.

Looking people in the eye, firm handshakes and the art of listening are being taught.

A big thing that is new is the students must clock in and out – just like some jobs require.

Adriana Aguilar, who is a senior, likes that things are much more structured this year.

“Having to check in every morning motivates you to be on time

every day. It's just like if you had an actual job," Aguilar said.