

Whittell High trying to figure out its future



Brian Rippet talks Oct. 7 while task force member Stacy Noyes takes notes and facilitator Nancy McMillan listens. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

ZEPHYR COVE – While a group of concerned individuals is tasked with answering three questions regarding the future of Whittell High School, the chore is turning out to be anything but simple and straightforward.

The committee – made up of parents, teachers, and a community representative – came about after last spring's uprising regarding staffing and course offering issues at the Zephyr Cove 7-12 school. Staff, administrators and board members are often on hand to help or to answer questions.

Last week was the second time they met to discuss:

- What should/could the format and course offerings look like if Whittell stays approximately the same size?
- What should/could the format and course offerings look like if Whittell grows in enrollment?
- What should/could the lake schools' format and course offerings look like if Whittell/Zephyr Cove Elementary decline in enrollment?

Member Brian Rippet on Oct. 7 pointed out how prior to 2010 there was an opportunity for students in California (that goes beyond the Alpine County agreement) to attend Whittell. He said the board took that opportunity away unbeknownst to staff and parents. This has led to trust issues.

It was also pointed out that when programs start and stop it does not build confidence in parents to enroll their students.

(No board members attended last week's meeting, nor did the superintendent.)

Member Stacy Noyes has been talking to Lake Tahoe Unified School District Superintendent Jim Tarwater and Lake Tahoe Community College President Kindred Murillo about Douglas County students taking classes across the state line. The biggest roadblock was put up by Nevada when it eliminated the good neighbor policy a handful of years ago.

Only six credits from outside Nevada can be applied toward high school graduation. However, unlimited community college credits from a Silver State institution would be allowed. The problem, though, is that LTCC is closer for Whittell students than Western Nevada College.

Noyes said there is work being done at higher levels to rectify the California-Nevada enrollment issue so perhaps the local group should focus on other things.

Parent Carol Chaplin pointed out how her sons were promised

the opportunity to be able to take WNC classes, but that was short-lived. In fall 2008, Whittell had an agreement with WNC. Whittell teachers taught WNC classes in addition to their regular five periods. One was a section of composition and one of trig/pre-calculus.

She pleaded with the panel to find things in the short-term that would benefit her son who is still at Whittell, since one son has already graduated.

One of the more immediate measures that could be done, though it doesn't affect current students, is to look at a program that welcomes potential new students as a way to grow enrollment. There was talk of how people have called the school and been turned off before even scheduling a visit. A member of the parents club said she would look into whether that group would take on a more formal orientation program.

Task force members don't want money to be a reason not to consider an idea. They want to explore the idea for merit first.

Reaching out to area preschools was also broached because they are the feeder programs for the school district.

Also to be explored is why people who live in Douglas County are opting not to go Zephyr Cove Elementary or Whittell High schools, as well as finding out why new enrollees picked DCSD.

The next meeting is Oct. 21 at 4:30pm at Whittell High School.