

# WHS, DCSD remain at odds about priorities

By Kathryn Reed

Whittell High School parents, teachers and staff spent months coming up with ideas about how the district could improve the 7-12 school. The top priority was to keep the integrity of the middle school and high school concepts despite the grade levels being under one roof.

This was the promise several years ago when the three lake schools were consolidated into two.

This week that promise was officially dissolved. The Douglas County School District board on April 14 agreed with the recommendations presented by Superintendent Lisa Noonan. (Board member Tom Moore was absent.)

No additional staff will be hired for WHS. To deal with an incoming seventh-grade class of more than 40 students, the committee recommended hiring another teacher. This large class will necessitate another section of classes at this grade level. That in turn will take a teacher or teachers out of high school sections.

WHS has 14 full-time instructors and four part-time. A dozen of them teach at the middle and high school levels.

Currently the enrollment at WHS is:

- 7th grade: 35
- 8th: 32
- 9th: 45
- 10th: 31

- 11th: 30
- 12th: 26.

Stacy Noyes, a parent on the committee, told the board the decision is not equitable, that the electeds are not doing their job and that the students deserve better than what they are getting.

Principal Crespín Esquivel is caught in the middle of trying to please his boss, the board, staff, parents and students.

Even before Tuesday's meeting he knew he was not going to have the luxury of more staff. He created the 2015-16 master schedule with that in mind. But what will be new is that all students will be on the same bell schedule. This means little kids changing classes at the same times the big kids are. They've always done so separately.

Esquivel was able to keep the lunch periods separate between the middle and high schoolers.

"My obligation is to do what's best for the kids," Esquivel told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He said he is open to new ideas, to being creative. To do so, though, takes the blessing of the district and possibly the state. Esquivel would like the board and district personnel to come to his Zephyr Cove school next year to see how difficult it is to put a master schedule together. He's made the offer, but doubts he'll have any takers.

To make things work, economics and speech will no longer be offered as standalone classes. And grade levels will have to be combined for some sections with teachers asked to essentially teach two classes in one period.

With Whittell being so small, it is hard at times to offer electives beyond graduation requirements, let alone what colleges are looking for. Parents often plot a student's four-

year trek starting freshman year to ensure the proper credits are attained because not everything is offered every year.

Noonan said she is doing the best she can. With the Legislature still in session, funding for the next school year has not been solidified. This is why she won't advocate for more staff at Whittell.

"We have a lot of needs and they have price tags and I don't have additional recourses coming in at this time," Noonan told *Lake Tahoe News*. "It's hard to see people sad and frustrated."

But it's not like the district has suspended all additional spending. The board this week approved the use of short-term substitutes to be used when the gifted and talented teacher is out. (Board member Robbe Lehmann's child is in this program.)

Other action taken in response to the committee include:

- Creating a memorandum of understanding with Lake Tahoe Unified School District so students in each district could cross the state line. Noonan said a draft has been created, but she has yet to meet with LTUSD officials. The goal is to finalize it by August, with implementation for the 2016-17 school year.
- An online AP computer science course will be offered in the fall. A teacher spearheaded this.
- Dual credits between high school and community colleges are an issue being contemplated by the Legislature.

Noonan said there is a possibility for more changes down the road if funding becomes available. She said the document serves as a blueprint for WHS and will be used like a strategic plan.