

LTUSD working to help homeless students

By Kathryn Reed

Thanksgiving weekend so often is about gatherings of families in a warm home with an abundance of food.

That isn't the case for 300 Lake Tahoe Unified School District students. They are homeless. Another 44 are in foster families.

The school board this month voted to expand the duties and hours of the foster-homeless student advocate. This person will now be full time and will work in the elementary schools, not just at South Tahoe Middle and High schools.

"The current staffing is insufficient to meet the needs of these students and further does not allow time to service the elementary schools where early intervention would be ideal," the staff report from the Nov. 17 meeting reads. "Additionally, the number of homeless students typically increases by 20-30 throughout the school year as local seasonal employment is gained and lost."

Through the state's McKinney Vento program the district receives \$34 for each student who is identified as homeless or in foster care. Homeless means living in a non-traditional residence like a hotel, car or multiple families in a dwelling designed for one family.

While the money from the state is not much, the district will tap community organizations to help supply the basics – from toiletries to clothes to food. The thinking is that by reaching students sooner they will more likely do well in school at an earlier age.

“A lot of those kids are resilient. They don’t want to stand out. They want to fit in. We try to give them that opportunity,” Superintendent Jim Tarwater told *Lake Tahoe News*. “By identifying them early we can continue up through middle school and high school. The hope is they are better prepared.”

The aide helps the child and his or her parent/guardian be acquainted with the social resources that are available. This includes getting vaccinations, dental checkups and other medical care.

The district is able to provide added tutoring and counseling when appropriate, as well as school supplies and backpacks.

When the basics are taken care of students are more likely to attend school as well as perform at a higher level.

While enrollment has been increasing, the percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunches remains at about 60 percent, or 2,370 students.