

STHS probationary accreditation appeal denied

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By Kathryn Reed

With South Tahoe High School losing its appeal regarding probationary accreditation, it likely means the school will have a new principal in the fall.

Last spring the Western Association of Schools and Colleges put the school on a two-year probationary status. Evaluators cited several deficiencies, including not implementing enough sections of Common Core.

Lake Tahoe Unified School District didn't agree with much of the report so an appeal was made. Three WASC members came back **last fall** – two newbies, one from the original team. This time they met with the superintendent, something that was supposed to happen the first time.

Their decision to deny **the appeal** came last month. *Lake Tahoe News* requested a copy of the letter from the district office, but has yet to receive it.

Sources tell *Lake Tahoe News* the response from WASC did not delve into specifics this time. While the evaluation team looks at hard data, members also do a series of interviews. They try to get a feel for the atmosphere on the campus. They care about a lot more than athletics, which some people believe has been a growing priority at STHS to the detriment of academics.

STHS is effectively completing the first of two years of probationary accreditation. The school is accredited and this will not impact graduating seniors.

The WASC team will return in spring 2018 to begin a brand new evaluation process.

In previous evaluations STHS has received a six-year accreditation.

The process is time consuming. Internally, it will begin next school. What remains to be seen is who will be principal.

All LTUSD principals have a year-to-year contract. Unlike other staff members, principals do not have to be notified by March 15 that they will not have a job in the fall. However, LTUSD historically has listed principal positions on April 1.

STHS Principal Chad Houck deferred comment to Superintendent Jim Tarwater. Tarwater is not available because he is recovering from leg surgery, an injury sustained skiing. Only board member Bonnie Turnbull responded to *LTN*. She said to speak to board President Barbara Bannar.

At the Feb. 14 school board meeting teachers and parents spoke highly of Houck. They said he has been telling people he won't be back as principal because he doesn't get paid enough. He makes more than \$100,000 a year.

Contractually, if the district were to ask him to step down, Houck would not have to be offered a teaching position because he did not start here as a teacher. If the board accepts his resignation, which some people have said could be on the March 14 agenda, Houck will be looking for a new job and the district for a new principal. Houck started at STHS in August 2014.

The board is expected to be updated on the accreditation issue at the March 14 or March 28 meeting – the agendas are not out yet.