

'Probationary' removed from STHS accreditation

By Kathryn Reed

A stressful two years has ended with South Tahoe High School now being fully accredited.

"Sometimes in crisis comes the opportunity for reestablishing a focus," Superintendent Jim Tarwater told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges had placed the school on a two-year probationary status in 2016. Lake Tahoe Unified School District appealed the decision to no avail. Chad Houck, principal at the time, did not have his contract renewed.

The new accreditation is for six years, but only goes through June 2022. This is because the two-year probationary period is considered part of those six years. As is custom, there is always a site visit from WASC officials at the midpoint. That means they'll be back in spring 2019 – the three-year mark in how they count.

The letter dated May 3 to Principal Carline Sinkler from WASC says, "South Tahoe High School is required to prepare an in-depth progress report for the mid-cycle visit. The report and visit should demonstrate that the school has:

- Addressed the critical areas for follow-up through the schoolwide action plan;
- Made appropriate progress on the implementation of the schoolwide action plan; and
- Improved student achievement relative to the schoolwide learner outcomes and the academic standards."

Tarwater said two main things changed between the outcome two years ago and receiving the good news. One, is the increased parent involvement with better communication and including their vision into the school's philosophy. The second, is more staff involvement so "everyone has skin in the game."

"They liked the facilities, programs and technology. They wanted more professional development, more implementation of Common Core, and collaboration with staff," Tarwater explained.

The district gave each school \$50 per student to be used for professional development. This is an ongoing line item in the budget. Training has been acknowledged as a necessary component to keep teachers and staff updated on the latest trends, technology and other nuances needed in a classroom.

In the last four years the district has hired 84 new teachers. They and the veterans all need that support.

STHS changed what needed changing, brought in outside help like that of former Principal Ivone Larson, and engaged more people – including students – for what turned to be the correct combination to have accreditation acknowledged without an asterisk.

"STHS is on a clear path toward being a school as extraordinary as the place we live," Principal Carline Sinkler said in a community email. She did not return *LTN's* call.

While on the probationary status STHS was still full accredited and there was no risk to students going onto college.

The Viking Graduate Profile was created in the aftermath of the probationary notice. The goal is to promote six enduring qualities – critical thinking, collaboration, curiosity, communication, character, and healthy independence. Those traits are also now being focused on younger grade levels as

well.

In assessing the culture, academics and other issues at the high school, it led to an evaluation of the entire district. After all, if things are not going well at the feeder schools, it's likely to carry-over into the high school.

The district as a whole is focusing more on the entire student and not just academics. Starting next school year there will be a nurse at every school site. This is not a common practice in districts.

"I think it will help support the critical needs kids," Tarwater said. He added it should help with attendance as well.

Something else coming to the schools is a social worker.

"It will give support to parents during trauma times," Tarwater said. "We want to do a whole wrap around."

It's no longer just about academics in schools. The social and emotional well-being of students now lies with the schools. The world has changed and school districts are trying to catch up to be way more than the three R's.