

LTUSD students keep pace on test scores with peers in state

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Unified School District is mirroring the state when it comes to having an achievement gap among Latino, English learner, and low-income students compared to the rest of the student body.



But the good news from Friday's announcement of the 2012 Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) test results is this is the ninth consecutive year California students improved in language arts and math.

Statewide, 57 percent of students in grades 2-11 were proficient or advanced in English language arts, while 57.5 percent of LTUSD students were at those levels.

While the state superintendent of education in a press release boasted how wonderful it is students are increasingly testing better, the reality is a huge segment of California's students are not doing grade-level work.

One thing that continues to bother LTUSD Superintendent Jim Tarwater about all the tests associated with No Child Left Behind is test score comparisons don't reflect the actual improvement or decline as students go from one grade level to the next. Instead, today's third-graders are compared to last year's third-graders instead of to their test scores as second-graders.

In LTUSD, officials take the data provided by the state and

then calculate how students do as they get older.

"I'm proud. We're continually making gains," Tarwater told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Bijou Community School remains the trouble spot in the district. This school also has a population of 84 percent low income, 75 percent Latino and 66 percent English learners.

The state and feds, while they separate the numbers into subcategories, the finger pointing or accolades are based on cumulative scores. Extenuating factors such as 62.5 percent LTUSD students receiving a free or reduced lunch are not considerations. This, despite the fact that study after study proves low income students often don't have the academic help at home that their more affluent peers do and many may only be getting a hot meal at school.

Comparing Bijou to the magnet school proves this point. The magnet school has 20 percent low income, 8.2 percent Latino and 2 percent English learners.

(These are the percentages of students who are at proficient or advanced on the STAR test.)

			2011-12
Bijou	2011-12 Magnet		
Second Grade LA			
22			94
Second Grade Math			
41			93
Third Grade LA			
22			77
Third Grade Math			
50			94

Fourth Grade LA	47	95
Fourth Grade Math	45	95
Fifth Grade LA	29	91
Fifth Grade Math	51	84
Fifth Grade Science	9	85

(Complete results of the 2012 STAR tests are on the state Department of Education's website.)

While all teachers are using the same pacing guide and curriculum in LTUSD, not all students learn the same.

Tarwater is a strong proponent of technology helping students learn, adding that improvement is evident in the schools and classrooms where teachers consistently have kids working on their netbooks.

In grades 3-12, each student has a netbook, in all the second-grade classrooms there is a full set, and in first grade there is one computer for every two kids.

Instead of students tuning out, they are engaged. They have work to do when the teacher is helping others. They download and upload data to their teachers. Books are downloaded like adults use Kindles and iPads.

Tarwater likes to embrace the quote by John Dewey: "If we teach today's students as we taught yesterday's, we rob them of tomorrow."

At the end of the month the Academic Performance Index scores

will be released. This is how the schools and districts are judged on a federal level. These results also indicate if a school or district is listed as "performance improvement". All but the magnet school is PI.

With Bijou dropping by 17 points a year ago, all eyes will be on this year's results to see which direction the school is going. Tarwater would not comment on whether a change in leadership at the school is necessary.

With Tahoe Valley and Sierra House elementary schools making substantial gains a year ago, another year of being over 800 (1,000 is the maximum) could take them out of the PI category.