

WHS test scores on a steady decline

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Despite the show of support from staff and board members, the news out of Whittell High School is not good. Student test scores are going down.

Principal Crespín Esquivel delivered the numbers April 8 at the school board meeting. Math and reading scores have been tumbling at all grade levels to the point that most are not at the proficient level in reading, math or science.

Esquivel said in part it has to do with seventh- and eighth-graders being in some combined classes. This is because the student population is so low – there are 208 kids in the 7-12 school – grade levels have to be combined. It means the rigor is not there for all students.

The Zephyr Cove school in many ways is run as though it is two schools – as a middle school and high school.

Asked by board member Cindy Trigg if there is one thing that could make a difference to help turn things around, Esquivel said a vice principal. He also said it's imperative teachers are retained even if fewer students are on the attendance roll. He said having someone else on board would give him more time to focus on critical issues, even visit classrooms more often.

While hiring another administrator is not likely to happen based on budget constraints, money is being spent to assess some of the issues that are going on and to help come up with solutions. Ray Sidney's entire donation for the basketball renovation was not spent and he said it would be fine to use it on other things.

One of those other things was hiring consultant Bev Ducey to “examine successful small schools and identify several for further research into their keys to successful student learning outcomes.”

Those schools that Esquivel will be contacting are in Telluride, Colo., Chester and Quincy. The goal is to dig deep to see what they have done to be successful and to ideally find ideas that would work at WHS.

Esquivel also recognizes the need to get some mentoring for himself to help learn how to satisfy the ongoing mandates from the state, balance the need for better oversight of teachers, and focus on getting students the help they need to achieve at a higher level.

The positive info delivered Tuesday afternoon was that in 2013 93 percent, or 40 of the 43, students graduated. This year the school earned state championships for the girls’ ski and boys’ basketball teams for the first time.

In other news:

- Nancy Cauley, principal at Zephyr Cove Elementary, said her students are making progress in growth and proficiency on standardized tests.
- No offers have been made to purchase Kingsbury Middle School. The item will be back on the agenda in May.