

Enrollment surge may mean Al Tahoe reopens

By Kathryn Reed

Enrollment in Lake Tahoe Unified School District is escalating to the point that officials are wondering if Al Tahoe Elementary School might need to be reopened.

The South Lake Tahoe school closed starting with the 2004-05 school year because of budget deficits and declining enrollment.

There are currently 3,988 students in the district, which is 100 more students than a year ago. The district had 4,544 students in September 2005. The numbers peaked in 1996-97 at 5,978 students.

The biggest growth continues to be at the high school. In 2014-15 there were 911 kids at South Tahoe High School and now there are 1,088.

"They like the career piece push," Superintendent Jim Tarwater said of why parents want to enroll their kids at STHS.

Between the \$64 million facilities bond approved by local voters and more than \$30 million in matching funds from the state, the district in the last few years has had a bit of a renaissance. The bulk of the money revamped STHS. With the buildings came a slew of programs.

South Tahoe Middle School has seen enrollment go from 745 students to 830.

The elementary schools are also seeing more students.

"It's why you never get rid of a school," Tarwater told *Lake Tahoe News*.

While the district has good enrollment numbers, it would like to see the attendance figures increase. Ninety-five percent is the goal. It's at about 93.7 percent.

The district loses \$60 a day per student when they are not in school.

Today the Al Tahoe site is used mostly by the Lake Tahoe Boys & Girls Club. Before it could be put back into service as an elementary school Tarwater said it needs a new boiler and flooring.

The state owes the district \$1.4 million for improvements made to STMS. When the reimbursement comes the district could use it for Al Tahoe.

A state school bond is expected to be on the November 2016 ballot. That is where the state would get the money to pay back LTUSD.