

LTUSD standing up for immigrant students

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Unified School District is doing everything it can to help families who feel threatened by the federal government's attack on immigrants.

"We are going to follow the law. We all know if a child is going to come to school afraid, they aren't going to learn," board member Larry Reilly said at the March 14 meeting. "We are going to take that (fear) away."

The law Reilly referenced is Plyler v. Doe, the 1984 U.S. Supreme Court decision that said public schools must enroll all eligible students regardless of their citizenship or immigration status. State and federal laws prohibit schools from disclosing student information to law enforcement without the consent of a parent or guardian.

The resolution that was unanimously approved Tuesday night does not change any policy. It essentially put an exclamation point on the matter.

To underline the district's beliefs even more, board President Barbara Bannar read the entire resolution into the record. Normally resolution titles are all that are verbalized.

The staff report said, "This resolution is intended to make clear to staff, students, and their families that all students have a right to attend school regardless of their immigration status, and aims to make families and students feel safe at school, so that they continue to come to school."

Cindy Martinez, principal of Bijou Community School, said, "The needs for families are very unique and very diverse."

She said some have received letters for possible removal from the United States. Then there are the attorneys who have called families saying they will help, which scares people more and could just be a scam. Rumors are flying; two weeks ago people were chattering about agents from ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) coming to town.

People are confused and scared.

Martinez's goal is make Bijou be as comforting of a refuge as it can be. Working one-on-one with people has been the best, she said.

Bijou is the main focus because it has the largest concentration of Hispanic families who could be affected by any roundup by the feds.

The Family Resource Center has also been a big help to provide information to concerned residents. That agency is working in concert with the school district.