# Opinion: State, union leave TTUSD no choice but to layoff teachers

**By Steve Jennings**

Financial news for school districts has taken a turn for the worse over the past month. School funding shortfalls at the state level have caused a mid-year drop in revenue for busing that will impact Tahoe Truckee Unified School District by about $500,000 this year and $1 million a year starting next fall.

The district had previously projected its 2012-13 budget deficit to be $4 million; now the deficit has grown to $5 million.

Currently the school board plans to address this deficit with $1.8 million in budget cuts as well as spending down reserves by $3.2 million. It is important to note that, because 80 percent to 90 percent of our expenses are in employee payroll, about $1.4 million of the $1.8 million will be a reduction in employment across the district.

There are two primary ways of reducing employment costs:

Reduce the amount of money being paid in wages and salaries – which must be negotiated with the district's employee groups, or

Reduce the number of employees – which is a legal process that occurs by action of the school board.

The district is taking action to rectify the financial crunch, and the goal has been to find solutions that will have the least impact on the students. The first step is seeking concessions from the employee unions. Negotiations have not

yet begun with the classified union (non-teachers). The district and the teachers union (TTEA) have met several times this year and discussed options including salary reductions, step freeze (which would halt the automatic salary increases based on years of experience), and, as a last resort (due the effect on student class days) furlough days.

At a Jan. 13 meeting the TTEA informed the district that it was not interested in pursuing any negotiated concessions. As a result of this and the fact that we have experienced a decline in enrollment we are beginning a layoff process. This will start with school board action at the Feb. 15 board meeting. The district is still hopeful that we can work collaboratively with our labor organizations on alternatives to layoffs.

The district is not viewing the negotiation process as a win-lose situation. Instead, it is approached as an opportunity to build trust with our union leaders and provide transparency to our employees and public. Regardless of the impact of negotiations on the District's future budget deficits, the district will go on. The district will hold high student achievement and financial stability both as high priorities. How we choose to obtain success in both of these areas appears clear – be open, honest, trusting and transparent. Getting through these difficult times and still having our teachers focused on the most important work for our future is the win-win opportunity that we cannot afford to miss.

In any financial cut back, inevitably there are tradeoffs for all the stakeholders. In this case, layoffs mean budget savings but also larger class sizes and a loss of jobs.

The district continues to pursue other saving including the reduction of utility costs, increased transportation charges to families, district office and administration cuts, etc.

There is still time to find savings and lessen the impact of

revenue reductions and budget cuts. We are hopeful that will happen as we proceed through the budget process.

If you'd like to email me with any comments or questions, my email address is sjennings@ttusd.org.

*Steve Jennings is Tahoe Truckee Unified School District superintendent.*

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# Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• The Rahlves' Banzai Tour, airing on NBC's Red Bull Signature Series, returns to Alpine Meadows Feb. 4.

• Chandler Monroe this month retired as manager of Bank of the West in South Lake Tahoe after working for the company for 44 years.

• Nevada phone customers will pay a 7-cent monthly tax on telephone lines to help fund phone services for up to 10,000 deaf residents. The tax will be collected from August 2012-June 2013.

• A video by Tahoe Pipe Club called The Story of Two Pipes was filmed at El Dorado Beach in South Lake Tahoe.

• A group of open water swimming enthusiasts, including Jamie Patrick, Karen Rogers, Rob Laurie, Garrett Harley and Brian Patterson, have established the Lake Tahoe Swimming Society. The society's website provides detailed information on courses, routes, safety, preparation, weather and local tips.

Swimmers can share stories, photos and videos from their swims on Lake Tahoe.

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# Tickets on sale for St. Theresa's crab feed

The 18th annual St. Theresa School Crab Dinner is Feb. 3.

Doors open at 6pm for this adults-only event. Childcare is available with advance reservations. Dinner starts at 7pm.

Tickets are $50 per person. A table for 10 can be reserved for an additional $100. Tickets available at 1081 Lyons Ave., South Lake Tahoe, or call (530) 544.8944 or email sttheresacrabdinner@yahoo.com.

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# RAOK: Giving up birthday gifts to help pandas

Jessika Roberts' daughter Mirella has a thing for helping pandas. Jessika nominated Mirella in *Lake Tahoe News'* Random Acts of Kindness because the youngster would prefer money be sent to help the pandas than spent on a material birthday gift for herself.




A Friend of Tallac membership for the 2012 Valhalla Art and Music Festival is their reward for being so generous.

Random Acts of Kindness is *Lake Tahoe News'* way to get people to take the time to be kind – and then write about it so everyone can be inspired. At the end of this story write about a RAOK you saw, did or received. Then you will be in the running for a prize donated by one of the many kind businesses in the basin.

All the stories posted this month about RAOK are at the top of the page under the Random Acts of Kindness category.

There are a few rules associated with Random Acts of Kindness. If you want to read them, check out this story.

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# LTCC reorg being mapped out in wake of state budget fiasco

**By Kathryn Reed**

"She has a very strong fiscal background, which is what we need."

That's what college board member Fritz Wenck told *Lake Tahoe News* in May when Kindred Murillo was hired to be president of Lake Tahoe Community College. When it comes to numbers, she keeps being tested.




Gov. Jerry Brown's budget that banks on voters agreeing to raise taxes that are estimated to generate $6.8 billion in November has the South Lake Tahoe two-year college and every entity in the K-14 spectrum scrambling to figure out what to do.

Midyear budget cuts are a reality. That's the immediate problem that needs to be addressed.

The LTCC and Lake Tahoe Unified School District boards tonight will be discussing their respective budgets and what the actions in Sacramento mean locally.

In addition to a presentation on the budget, an item Murillo will bring forward to get on the Feb. 14 agenda is reorganizing key positions at the college.

"The college cannot afford to not have a vice president of Business Services with the current situation," Murillo told *Lake Tahoe News*. "One thing I've learned over my 16 years with community colleges is community colleges fail for a couple of reasons. The first reason is finances of the organization. You have got to have someone running that area."

(The title of VP of Business Services will change to VP of Administrative Services when the new person is hired to reflect the job duties.)

The last person to officially have the Business Services job on a full time, permanent basis was Sue Niehoff. She was sent packing by the interim president the board hired for last school year. Niehoff has filed a wrongful termination claim against the college. She did not return a phone call.

After getting rid of Niehoff, then-President Steve Maradian expanded the job of Marc Sabella ,director of fiscal services.

With Murillo's background in business services for 11 years,

she knows the ins and outs of finance. Since her arrival she has been doing the heavy lifting, while Sabella has been responsible for lower level financial work.

As a college president, she has a slew of other responsibilities, thus one of the reasons the board agreed late last year to hire a VP of Administrative Services. Resumes are coming in. But by the time interviews are conducted, someone is selected, that person gives notice and eventually starts at LTCC, it could be late spring-early summer. With the fiscal mess California continues to be mired in – which trickles down to local bodies – Murillo said the status quo can no longer continue.

That is why in the interim before a VP is hired, she is recommending moving Aaron McVean from director of Institutional Research and Planning to interim VP of Administrative Services; putting Bill King, director of Technology, into a position focused on research, report writing and Datatel support; and creating an associate dean of Information Technology for Cheri Jones who now spends half her time on Datatel implementation and half as Admissions and Records director. The last piece would be to hire a dean of Student Services on a full time basis.

Changing jobs for the three employees mentioned above would not affect the bottom line. This is because the college is saving $13,229 per month without the Business VP. Salary upgrades would leave a savings of $8,000, which could be used for clerical support for IT.

Murillo presented the reorg plan to College Council last week. That body is expected to vote on it Feb. 9. The Academic Senate will hear the proposal Jan. 27.

Some college employees are questioning why McVean would be put in a position – even temporarily – that might appear to be out of his breadth of knowledge.

Murillo told *Lake Tahoe News* she could train anyone to do the VP job as long as they have the aptitude and desire. Since she became president July 5, she said everything she has asked McVean to do he has done at an exemplary level and has proved to her he is up to the task to do more – including being integral in forming the 2012-13 budget.

The LTCC budget update for this fiscal year and looking forward will be presented tonight to the board. The college needs to allocate $314,000 to get through June 30 in order to bridge the gap the state has created. Having put aside more than $430,000 divided between a rainy day fund and a contingency mid-year budget account is proving to be almost clairvoyant on the board and staff's part.

Without a crystal ball, it's hard to know what the state's economy is going to do.

But in South Lake Tahoe, the unemployment rate is dropping. Latest figures have it at 15 percent in the city – down from nearly 18 percent a year ago.

While some would say college employees should be lucky to have a job, the truth is they could be making more elsewhere. That's something the board is going to have to contend with soon – even in these economic times. Most agendas have a closed session item for labor negotiations.

LTCC's full-time faculty make between 3.4 percent and 9.4 percent less than the going salary; classified are 6.1 off the average; directors make 10.1 percent less than the market.

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The college board meeting is in the Aspen room at LTCC. Here is the LTCC agenda. The meeting starts tonight at 6:20.

LTUSD's meeting starts at 6pm at the district office. Here is that agenda.

# Learn what the Tahoe Rim Trail Association is all about

Learn about what the Tahoe Rim Trail Association does in regards to trail building, hiking and youth programs, as well as numerous educational programs.

The talk is Jan. 24 from 11:45am-1pm at Explore Tahoe, 4114 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe.

For more information, contact Shannon Skarritt at (775) 298.0235.

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# Speed Networking on the South Shore

Speed Networking is a combination of musical chairs meets speed networking. Participants have a couple of minutes to meet new people and share details like your name, what you do, where you are from, when you moved here, and what your career goals are.

Tahoe Regional Young Professionals is sponsoring the Speed Networking event on Jan. 26 upstairs at the Fresh Ketch on Venice Drive in South Lake Tahoe from 6-8pm.

Bring business cards for a variety of games.

For more information about Tahoe Regional Young Professionals, go online.

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# TRTA talk

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# LTFAC meeting

The Lake Tahoe Federal Advisory Committee will meet Feb. 9 from 9am-noon at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, 128 Market St., Stateline.

LTFAC will address issues related to federal activities at Lake Tahoe. Items on the agenda include reviewing and confirming the LTFAC Vision and Strategic Planning Session outcomes, and public comment.

LTFAC consists of 20 members representing an array of constituencies.

All Lake Tahoe Federal Advisory Committee meetings are open to the public.

For more information on the Lake Tahoe Federal Advisory Committee, visit the Forest Service website.

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# Get Fresh and Healthy workshops

The Community Education department at Lake Tahoe Community College is having a Get Fresh and Healthy workshop series in February. Take one, all four or any combination.

Cooking with Spices is Feb. 2 from 6-9pm.

Winter Soup is Feb. 10 from 6-9pm.

Food the Kids will Love too is Feb. 16 from 6-9pm.

Gluten Free Cooking is Feb. 28 from 6-9pm.

Register online.