Douglas High School teacher Jim Meyers talks about the benefits of the career and technical education classes at the high school during the school board meeting on Wednesday.

SHANNON LITZ/The R-C

Budget

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like an increase because of current overstaffing.

"It would certainly be a reduction in electives," said Douglas High technology teacher Jim Meyers. "Cuts to electives would be a travesty to students. If you take away those opportunities, you're cheating students of a well-rounded education."

Douglas Art teacher Christine Groman echoed the concerns of her coworker.

"I have a real concern with what's happening to our programs," she said. "One art teacher would be five sections dropped, a hundred students that would need to be redistributed.

"Fine arts and electives give kids the skills to be problem-solvers. Art is involved in every aspect of our lives. Art is our humanity. It's not enough to do straight academics."

Douglas High senior Tara Paiement said the only reason some kids come to school is for their elective classes.

"Kids have electives and find their place," she said. "If you don't have them, the drop-out rate will go higher."

First-year Pau-Wa-Lu teacher Adam Johnson was worried cutting a new batch of teachers would create negative consequences in the long run.

"What will promote teachers to this Valley if the district is overstaffed each year and projections change?" he said. "People come here and they are excited to stay here and then they get RIF'd (reduction in force)," Johnson said.

The elimination of 14 teachers would save the district about $910,000. But school board members were still asked to cut about $2.8 million from next year's budget.

Board members actually cut $2.56 million after voting to take transportation funding for out-of-area athletic trips and field trips, a reduction in counselor contract days, and two gifted and talented program positions off the chopping block.

The budget hearing lasted more than six hours with hundreds of people coming in and out of the Douglas High School library. The $2.56 million worth of savings came from more than 30 items.

Left on the list was a measure to convert a vice principal position at Whittell High School into an athletic director position, for a savings of $32,000.

"We rely on that administrator support," said Whittell teacher Martha Williams. "Keep in mind this is a middle school as much as a high school."

Middle school students at the Lake were absorbed into Whittell after the closure of Kingsbury Middle School last year. Board members requested that Whittell staff and district officials be given some time to find the savings another way if possible, but that the overall dollar amount of the cut remain the same.

Classified and support staff throughout the district took significant hits.

One aide will be eliminated from the district's new ASPIRE alternative education program, and a part-time library aide at the high school will be eliminated.

Douglas High librarian Jim Polka said he will struggle to handle the entire library without an aide.

"We have 1,462 students who all use the library and who all take English and history and must write term papers," Polka said.

Board members suggested that volunteers from the community or students themselves take the place of the aide.

For a savings of $113,500, the district is cutting three elementary school computer technicians. Remaining technicians will have to rotate between schools.

"The district has made a huge investment in technology, and it will be a huge waste if there is not tech support onsite," argued Minden Elementary computer tech Sherry Lugone.

The custodial division sustained the largest cut, with the elimination of five full-time positions.

"Not only do these people clean our buildings and scrub our toilets, but they are mentors, friends and role models to our children, and losing five of them will be a huge disservice," said Douglas High teacher Kerry Stack.

The district is restructuring the custodial division under a new program called ProCleaning. The program increases the area one custodian must cover, resulting in the layoffs. It also creates a supervisor position to oversee all site operations.

Board member Randy Green said restructuring should be left up to the head custodians of each school.

"Mr. Green is right," said Gardnerville Elementary head custodian Joe Roybal. "We should have the opportunity to get together and figure it out."

But board members moved forward with the cuts, as they did with the reduction of employee hours at the district's warehouse.

"I'm just sad," said warehouse manager Rob Gitthens. "This affects people and their families. I'm so proud of what we've done out there and the service we provide for the district."

Board members constantly reminded the audience that there is the possibility of revision depending on how the state budget is worked out in the Legislature. The district must finalize its budget by May, but may make modifications in the future.

Grandmother Jacqueline Brown received applause trying to sum up the collective feeling in the room.

"How it saddens my heart," she said through tears. "The government just used our tax dollars to bail out the banks and auto industry, but the biggest disaster will be cutting education for our children."

Home

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learned."

Salama speaks three languages: Arabic, French and English. She described the French colonization of Morocco and the resultant blend of languages and cultures.

"It's a very exotic country," she said. "The north borders the Mediterranean and Atlantic, and the south is desert. It's very beautiful. But it's a developing Third World country. It's kind of like Mexico, where the poor are very poor, and the rich are very rich, and there is little in the middle."

Salama said she was one of the few in the middle. She grew up in a village in Fez with seven brothers and sisters, but her family later moved to Casablanca, the country's largest city. There she studied law and worked for a shipping company. She was planning to immigrate to Europe or Canada, thinking America too lofty of a goal, when she saw an ad for the U.S. State Department's annual green card lottery, aimed at countries with low immigration rates.

She applied.

"When I won, it was a huge surprise," she said. "It was magic, the opportunity of a lifetime."

But her family members had mixed reactions.

"My father thought it would be too dangerous," she said. "But then he changed his mind. He said, 'Going to America is like having a crown.'"

Salama said the green card earned her a certain amount of celebrity.

"In my village in Fez, it was a very big deal," she said. "I was considered very special and lucky to have a green card and a chance to live in America."

After nine months of paperwork, interviews and physical examinations at the American Consulate in Morocco, Salama left by herself for New York City.

Her first destination was Harlem, where she stayed with fellow immigrants, but her first impression was not a good one.

"It was filthy and dirty and I couldn't believe that this was America," she said. "I was crying, but I told myself that I couldn't go back home. So I got up at five or six in the morning and took the subway to Manhattan. There I got out and just stared at the buildings. Then I thought, 'OK, this is the right place.'"

Three weeks later, an employment agency helped Salama find a job in Lake Tahoe.

"My sister's name is Tamou, so I thought Tahoe was a woman's name," she said. "I needed a job badly. I needed to be independent."

Salama can't recall the exact route she took, but said the farther west she went, the more the country looked like the "Little House on the Prairie."

When Salama reached California, the coastal landscape and stucco homes reminded her of Morocco. Then she was driven into the Sierra.

"Normally, I get car sick and can't look out the windows, but I had to," she said. "The mountains and the trees were so gorgeous, like they didn't really exist on earth."

Salama ended up working at Harrah's and Harveys casinos in South Lake Tahoe for eight years. She worked as a cashier, a 21 dealer, a cocktail waitress, and helped in accounting.

"In 1997, there were three Moroccans I knew of in Tahoe," she said. "Now there are more like 30. Still a lot of people are coming to this area, to Reno and Las Vegas, for the opportunities."

Salama eventually moved to Carson Valley.

"Coming down Kingsbury, it was just beautiful," she said. "It's small, quiet and peaceful, not crowded like New York, or like Highway 50 in Tahoe, which is getting crazy. There, people are a little cold. Here, people interact, and they're warm."

In 2003, Salama applied for and achieved U.S. citizenship. She said she wanted all the rights and protections afforded Americans while she traveled back to Morocco.

Although her marriage to an American didn't work out, Salama had a son named Celime, now a second-grader at Minden Elementary School.

"He acts like a typical American kid," she said. "He always wants mashed potatoes and gravy."

Salama wants to teach Celime about his heritage, and teach him other languages besides English.

"For me, it's an honor to speak English and try to improve," she said. "Things are moving so fast internationally, that we have to keep our doors open. The next generation, our kids, are going to travel outside the U.S., and it's not a good idea to know only one language."

Salama views language as a bridge between clashing cultures. She acknowledged the increasing conflict between the Muslim world and America. She was born Muslim, but does not practice.

"I consider myself a human being living on this earth who opens her eyes and finds out she's Muslim," she said.

Salama said people on both sides are often misrepresented and misunderstood.

"America and Americans are not what they (Arabs) see on the news," she said. "It's the same with every country. You have to actually interact with the people."

SPECIAL TO THE R-C

Sierra Lutheran High School broke ground for their new campus in North Douglas County on Feb. 8. From left to right, Kathy Hone, building committee chair, John Hamer, capital campaign chair, pastor Eric Borchers, there on behalf of all churches in the association, Julia Bonafede, president of board of directors, Norm Brauer, executive director, Jonah Young, Sierra Lutheran student body president, and Debbie Conner, principal.

Campus

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the new East Fork Fire Station," Sierra Lutheran Executive Director Norm Brauer said. "In addition to having spectacular views in all directions, this is an ideal location in the heart of the area's population. Families seeking both a college preparatory education, and an environment where teenagers can continually grow in their understanding of Scripture and in their personal relationship with the Lord, will find this new site to be easily accessible from all directions.

"Whether young adults reside in the Carson Valley, Carson City, Lyon County, or even up around Lake Tahoe, this campus will be centrally located for all."

Since the fall of 2002, Sierra Lutheran has grown from 23 students to 72. That includes a 40-percent enrollment growth the past year despite economic challenges facing families.

"During tough times, it appears as if families are prioritizing what is truly important to them, and making sacrifices accordingly," Brauer said. "These are, arguably, the most formative years of life for youngsters. Think about it. College preparatory education, in a setting where young adults will develop spiritual, moral and ethical values for the rest of their lives while engaging together in extracurricular sports and the other activities appealing to teens, is an investment Christian parents are eager to make.

"A realization that teachers and coaches are highly trained, dedicated men and women of God, and that their teen will be surrounded by other youngsters from faith-based households, furthers their commitment. What greater opportunity can you give your son or daughter before they embark upon their adult lives?"

Students from 19 different area churches currently attend Sierra Lutheran. Due to space limitations at the current site, enrollment in 2009-2010 will need to be limited to approximately 80 students. Since 66 teenagers have already been accepted into next year's student body, families who wish to consider applying for enrollment are encouraged to do so before waiting lists will need to be established.

Call 782-0060 for further information.