

Opinion: Use pencil and paper for tests

By Rebecca Castillo

Remember the days when computers were a passing fad and information was derived from dusty encyclopedias after hours of searching? Me neither. I was born in 1998. By the time I was 14, my teachers stopped asking if we had a computer and Internet available because they had become a necessity. By now, at age 16, I can code a website, use Photoshop, and do more with an iPhone than the folks at the Apple Genius Bar.

But this spring I, like 11th-graders around the state, had to take the new California State Testing exclusively on computers. And my feelings about the testing, which started just this spring, are decidedly mixed.

To the good: having a computer was much handier for writing essays on the English section of the test, since I could type faster than I could write longhand. Editing text on a computer was so much easier. Of course, the questions felt dated – one part of our test examined the pros and cons of newspapers and blogs using social media, a decade-old question. And the software was definitely outdated – one classmate lost part of hers when her computer crashed. But overall, English went smoothly. Most people managed to finish in the time allotted. I didn't feel as nervous as I would have if I had to do the entire test by hand.

But testing math on computers? "Horrible and ridiculously hard," in the words of my friend and classmate Caleigh Zwahlen. The problem goes beyond computers. The new Common Core Standards make the questions more confusing and difficult than they need to be.

For example, we students could not respond to the geometry

questions by drawing out geometric figures – because the computer did not permit it. Instead, we had to write out our answers in words, and then explain, also in words (as opposed to graphs or figures) how we got the answer. This felt like testing a contestant's eye-crossing skills on the show "So You Think You Can Dance". It missed the whole point of the exercise.

Computer testing posed other challenges for my school in the San Gabriel Valley. Our campus only had a certain number of computers, fewer than the number of students tested. For months, we heard rumors that we would switch to a block schedule so all students would have the time necessary to test. Typically, classes are 50-minutes long with a 25-minute study hall, with seven periods in the course of the day; under a block schedule, each class is two-hours long – but we only have four classes a day. The rumors proved true – and when testing time came in April, the changes to the school schedule, affected my life schedule as well.

The testing took place over 16 days; during each two-hour testing period, a new class would come into the computer lab and test. The test consisted of two sections which were spread out over three or four days. Sometimes, students wouldn't finish so they would have to be pulled out of another class later on to finish. So, depending on how quickly the student could write essays, completing the entire test could take anywhere from four to seven hours.

I normally got out of school at 1:45pm. Unfortunately, the new schedule had me getting out at 2:40pm almost every single day. And that wasn't the worst of it. The schedule took away our study period, when we can reach teachers outside of class and complete various other assignments. There were weird holes in the new schedule – some days, I went to my first class, then had two hours until my next class. The administration suggested we go to the library and do homework. I have a lot of homework, but some of my peers, as you might imagine, were

not that happy about it.

The last straw for me was when they eliminated the late start for school that we had on Wednesday, forcing me to be at school even earlier. Because of testing, I spent more time at school last month than I ever had in three years of high school – even though I was spending less time in actual classes.

When you consider all the impacts, the cons of online testing far outweigh the pros. Yes, I love technology. Yes, my older brother is a web designer and my 12-year-old brother is already working on taking apart and putting together computers. And yes, my generation will bring forth a multitude of web designers, software developers, and mechanical engineers.

But that doesn't mean we're dependent on technology or unable to live without it. For all of technology's uses, there are times when it is better to honor time-tested traditions. And when it comes to testing, I think it's best if we stick to the good 'ol pencil and paper. If the state continues with the Common Core Standards and online math testing, they can expect scores to plummet as fast as the iPhone 3's popularity.

Rebecca Castillo is a writer who enjoys sunsets on the beach and rainy days. Her work can be found on HelloGiggles and HerCulture, and she participates in WriteGirl, a creative writing and mentoring organization in Los Angeles. She wrote this for Thinking L.A., a partnership of UCLA and Zócalo Public Square.

CalPERS retirees flee California

By Jon Ortiz, *Sacramento Bee*

This city's Spanish name recalls grassy, spring-fed meadows that nourished the first farms here and gave laborers relief from desert heat.

Now Las Vegas draws a new generation of settlers epitomized by California transplant Joe Beck: CalPERS pensioners who have made Sin City their No. 1 destination for retirement outside California.

"Compared to California, Las Vegas was a no-brainer," said Beck, a former Southern California school district maintenance administrator who moved here in 2000. "I decided that if I could handle the heat three months out of the year, I needed to move to where my retirement check would be tax-free."

About 15 percent of the 561,000 pensioners in the California Public Employees' Retirement System live their golden years outside the Golden State, according to a first-of-its-kind analysis of fund data by the *Sacramento Bee*. The vast majority have flocked to low-tax or no-tax states, creating a veritable river of cash that flows out of California and into cities such as Las Vegas; Reno; Tucson, Ariz.; and Grants Pass, Ore.

Read the whole story

Old gadgets creating a wasteland

By Damon Beres, Huffington Post

Your iPhone isn't biodegradable.

Of course, you know that. But what you might not understand is the massive problem that electronic waste represents for our planet. A recent report from United Nations University in Japan declared that about 46 million tons of e-waste – discarded phones, computer screens, lamps, microwaves and so on – were produced in 2014 alone. That amount is only expected to rise in the coming years.

Many of these devices have toxic components. A lot of them could be recycled – but aren't. Instead, they're shipped to developing countries – sometimes illegally – where they end up in landfills, waterways or public spaces.

Since 2013, the jarring photographs of the BIT ROT Project have shined a light on the human price of electronic waste, showing civilians digging through potentially dangerous heaps or struggling to dispose the materials themselves.

[Read the whole story](#)

**Former senator seeks
protection from bear**

advocates

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

A former Nevada lawmaker who claims harassment by bear advocates at his Lake Tahoe home has filed a request for a protective order with Washoe County authorities.

William O'Donnell, who served as a Republican state senator representing Las Vegas from 1987 to 2001 and previously as a state assemblyman, filed a request Tuesday at the Incline Village Justice Court seeking an order for "protection against stalking, aggravated stalking or harassment" by members of the Bear League, including founder Ann Bryant.

O'Donnell contends members of the nonprofit bear advocacy group interfered with efforts by the Nevada Department of Wildlife to capture a bear that had damaged his Incline Village vacation home. It is the second such case to wind up in local courts in the past year involving claims that people seeking help from Nevada wildlife officials regarding problem-causing black bears were subjected to harassment by bear advocates.

Read the whole story

Judge: Abstinence-only curriculum is not sex ed

By Bob Egelko, San Francisco Chronicle

California's sex-education law prohibits school districts from indoctrinating students on the need to remain celibate before

marriage or teaching them that abstinence is the only safe way to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, a judge has ruled.

The decision by Fresno County Superior Court Judge Donald Black applies only to the 40,000-student Clovis Unified School District. But as the first ruling to interpret California's 11-year-old law on sex education and disease prevention, it should put schools on notice that "young people need complete, accurate health information required by law," said attorney Phyllida Burlingame of the American Civil Liberties Union, which took part in the suit.

"This is the first time that abstinence-only-until-marriage curricula have been found to be medically inaccurate," Burlingame said Monday.

Read the whole story

Ice House Road improvements may expand

Just as construction is about to begin on a 7.13 mile section of Ice House Road with a \$4.4 million grant awarded last year, El Dorado County Community Development Agency has received notice of a potential second grant award of \$6.75 million for phase two of the project.

The second grant would continue the work on Ice House Road for an additional 17.5 miles. Final grant scoping and approval of phase two is scheduled to take place this summer based on updated cost estimates.

The purpose of the Ice House Road Project is to improve and widen Ice House Road and provide safety enhancements including signing, striping and delineation. These grants are provided through the Federal Lands Access Program , which was established to improve transportation facilities that provide access to, are adjacent to, or are located within federal lands. The county will provide matching funds of approximately 11.5 percent, plus county staff oversight costs.

Ice House Road provides a connection for forest visitors to access the Rubicon Trail, Desolation Wilderness, Ice House Reservoir, Union Valley Reservoir, Loon Lake and various attractions within the Crystal Basin Recreation Area in the Eldorado National Forest.

Ice House Road Pavement Rehabilitation phase one will begin the first week of June, and will provide resurfacing, restoration, and rehabilitation to 7.13 miles of roadway from the junction of Wentworth Springs Road to the end of the pavement near Loon Lake. Traffic delays are expected, and will be limited to a 30-minute maximum for the duration of the project.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Lahontan Water Quality Control Board on May 14 signed off on Heavenly Mountain Resort's Epic Discovery plans. Construction should begin this summer.

- “Looking for a Log Cabin Vacation Home in Lake Tahoe,” will air May 27 at 7pm on HGTV.
 - The 14-year Snapshot Day report along with the comprehensive database of samples collected since 2001 for each of the South Shore monitoring sites is available online.
 - Local artist Terry Easley is an award-winning author, songwriter, and photographer. He will show his work May 23 from 5-7pm at Elevation 6225 Sports on Kingsbury Grade in Stateline. He will be offering signed prints.
 - Hoopa and Salyer left Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care on May 14 on their way to the Hoopa Indian Reservation. Both bears gained 48 pounds in the 4½ months they were at LTWC. Salyer arrived Dec. 24 at 24 pounds and Hoopa on Dec. 31 at 20 pounds.
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Brown's budget good news for education

By Jessica Calefati and Josh Richman, San Jose Mercury News

SACRAMENTO— Gov. Jerry Brown released a revised state budget proposal Thursday that sinks billions in better-than-expected tax revenues into California's public schools and some tax relief for the state's poorest families. But it still didn't satisfy Democratic lawmakers who want to mend the state's shredded social safety net.

The budget also includes a deal with University of California President Janet Napolitano, who had demanded more than the \$120 million increase for her system in Brown's January budget

to stave off 5 percent tuition hikes in each of the next five years.

Tuition will remain flat for the next two years, in exchange for the state paying down some of the university's long-term pension liabilities, Brown said.

The governor is also proposing creating a state Earned Income Tax Credit that's expected to help close to one million of the state's poorest working families. It will cost \$380 million the first year and provide credits of up to \$2,653 annually.

The state's public schools will receive the bulk of the rest under Proposition 98, the statewide ballot measure passed in 1988 that establishes a minimum annual funding level for K-12 schools and community colleges. And another chunk of change must be saved for a rainy day under a constitutional amendment voters approved in November.

The budget is "definitely on the rebound" after years of being mired in red ink, Brown said Thursday, and is focused on "the fundamentals of what government is supposed to do, health and education."

Read the whole story

Squaw replacing Siberia chairlift

One of Squaw Valley's most popular chairlifts is going from a four-pack to a six-pack this summer.

Siberia Express is being converted to the larger capacity lift in time for the 2015-16 season.

The ski resort said the new chairlift will improve reliability, efficiency and operational effectiveness. It is being designed to handle winds better. The current lift is often not operating on windy days.

ZCTC expands youth summer sessions

Because of the high demand for the summer youth program at Zephyr Cove Tennis Club more sections have been added, which has changed the schedule.

The sessions are Mondays-Wednesdays-Fridays during the weeks of June 8, June 15 and June 22. Those who are in grades 1-3 (for the 2014-15 school year) will play from noon-1:15pm, while grades 4-6 will be on the courts from 1:30-2:45pm.

Cost is \$100 per student. Register online.

Meet outside the clubhouse (next to Zephyr Cove Library) 10 minutes prior to the start of each program.

Zephyr Cove Tennis Club is on Warrior Way off Highway 50 in Zephyr Cove. For more info, email zctennisclub@gmail.com or call Bob Beut at 530.314.3588.