# Teachers unions trying to retain clout

**By Stephanie Simon, Politico**

It’s designed to be an impressive show of force: Thousands of unionized teachers plan to rally today in cities from New York to San Francisco to “reclaim the promise of public education.”

Behind the scenes, however, teachers unions are facing tumultuous times. Long among the wealthiest and most powerful interest groups in American politics, the unions are grappling with financial, legal and public-relations challenges as they fight to retain their clout and build alliances with a public increasingly skeptical of big labor.

“I do think it’s a moment of truth,” said Lance Alldrin, a veteran high-school teacher in Corning who has split from his longtime union after serving for a decade as the local president.

The National Education Association has lost 230,000 members, or 7 percent, since 2009, and it’s projecting another decline this year, which will likely drop it below 3 million members. Among the culprits: teacher layoffs, the rise of non-unionized charter schools and new laws in states such as Wisconsin and Michigan freeing teachers to opt out of the union.

The American Federation of Teachers has been able to grow slightly and now represents 1.5 million workers – but because many new members are retirees or part-timers who pay lower dues, union revenue actually fell last year, by nearly $6 million, federal records show.

**Read the whole story**

# 2 nights of singing by South Shore youth

The 19th annual Holiday Extravaganza is Dec. 19-20 in the MontBleu showroom at 7pm.

Tickets are $10 for adults and $5 for students and seniors. Those younger than 5 are free. Tickets are available at the door.

The show consists of grades 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12 choirs, as well as a faculty-parent choir.

Also performing is the award winning Blue Ribbon Classical Choir.

The finale includes more than 260 singers.

Select performers from Marcia Sarosik Shining Stars dance troupe will perform.

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# STR branching out with what it recycles

**By Kathryn Reed**

No one is getting rich off recycling plastic. And come Jan. 1 with South Lake Tahoe banning grocery stores from handing out

plastic bags, there is bound to be much less for South Tahoe Refuse to collect.

“Film plastic from grocery bags to trash bags for lawn maintenance to plastic film that goes around your bread is all recyclable. But it is very volatile. It is like the lowest grade of plastic besides Styrofoam,” explained John Marchini, owner of STR.

By volatile he means there isn’t much return for it per pound.

“Our brokers won’t accept it from us at times because there is no demand for it,” Marchini told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Even those blue bags are recyclable.




South Tahoe Refuse collects a substantial amount of its recyclables via blue bags. Photo/LTN

Still, STR, like all garbage companies in California, is required to meet certain recycling minimums. State rules are 50 percent of trash must be recycled. That percentage is slated to go to 75 percent in 2020. However, several years ago South Lake Tahoe said the rate must be 55 percent.

For the first nine months of 2013, STR is at a 63 percent compliance rate.

If people don’t put their recycling in blue bags, workers on

the assembly line pick out the recyclables piece by piece. The problem is they can’t get everything. The blue bags come across the line separate from the garbage and are then sorted in appropriate recycling categories.

“Our employees target different material. Mixed paper is a stronger commodity and there is more of it than film plastic,” Jeanne Lear with STR explained. “There is a bigger bang for the buck if we pull off cereal boxes and mixed mail.”

Recycling goes well beyond what people on the South Shore put in their blue bags each week.

To get to 75 percent is going to require STR finding markets for nearly everything that comes through its doors. To increase the recycling by one percentage point it takes about 1,000 pounds of recycling.

“We are going to shoot for everything we can. Our focus over the last nine months to a year is really ramping up green, organic waste,” Lear said.

Contractors are given a drop box. Bigger projects separate the debris on site, while smaller operators bring in a mixed box. STR employees then sort through the bins, putting metal, wood, asphalt and concrete into separate piles.

“Construction has good weight and we have outlets for wood and metal. We will focus on that in the winter because there is not as much yard waste in winter,” Lear told *LTN*.

Insulation usually ends up at the landfill.

Drywall, though, is something the company recently started targeting. It’s a material that Full Circle Compost in Minden will take.

Wood often goes to Bentley Agrowdynamics in the Carson Valley.

Dirt is another commodity STR has started recycling.

Food waste also goes to Full Circle.

STR has been working with a handful of restaurants for several years to collect food waste. Last school year Sierra House Elementary came on board. After the first of the year Bijou Community School will be part of the program.

“We just need to make sure it is done well and that kids understand the whole process and we keep contamination levels down,” Lear said.

STR and Lake Tahoe Unified School District officials have talked about having a districtwide composting program. One holdback is the tipping fee at Full Circle. But if enough were recycled, then it would mean the district’s garbage fee would go down so it could pencil out.

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# Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe



Adoptable kitties

The shelter has four young kittens who will be up for adoption starting Dec. 11. Applications will be accepted beginning at 1pm.

They have been in foster care since they were born, and are your typical cute, playful, inquisitive kittens. Kittens usually aren't available at this time of year; there probably won't be others until late spring.

The kittens are spayed/neutered, microchipped, and vaccinated. They are at the El Dorado County Animal Services shelter in Meyers, along with many other dogs and cats who are waiting for their new homes.

Go online to see photos and descriptions of all pets at the shelter.

Call (530) 573.7925 for directions, hours, and other information on adopting a pet.

For spay-neuter assistance for South Tahoe residents, go online.

The last two photo sessions for people and their pets with Santa at Alpine Animal Hospital are coming up – this Wednesday and Thursday from 4-6pm. Donations (suggested $5) will benefit the Animal Coalition of Tahoe. Dates: Alpine Animal Hospital is at 921 Emerald Bay Road. Call (530) 541.4040 for more information. All pets are welcome.

*– Karen Kuentz*

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# Opinion: Holiday cards don't have to be impersonal

**By Eric Hoover**

Call me Grinch, call me Scrooge. Call me Lord Voldemort of the

Yuletide. None could be worse than sending me a holiday card with glossy photographs of your lovely, smiling family.

My wife, Emily, and I place your cards like trophies on our shelves, continuing an old-school practice that began about 175 years ago as a way of maintaining relationships as families and friends moved far and wide. Today's cards may appear more personalized – with photos of spouses, kids and pets, and distribution lists much smaller than a sprawling collection of Facebook friends. But when I flip over the photo cards, as if they were postcards bearing a greeting, I usually find no trace of ink, no original message.

Now that our lives involve sharing an abundance of pictures we once kept to ourselves – snapshots of parties we attended, sunsets watched, meals devoured – it makes sense that photos dominate the paper cards in our mailboxes. But these prefabricated greetings seem as empty as a stocking someone forgot to stuff. Are they meant as warm wishes or self-advertisements?

Six or seven years ago, almost every holiday card Emily and I received included a short handwritten note. Last year, half didn't have a signature. On many, we don't even find our own names. These mass mailings typically don't lend themselves to personalized messages. Everyone gets the same greeting: usually just "Happy holidays," but often accompanied by imperatives such as "dream," "smile" and "laugh out loud." Can't we wish each other well without giving orders?

At the very least, made-to-order card services offer convenience. "We'll stuff, seal, address and mail your cards for you," the Tiny Prints catalog says. Sorry folks, your sweet cousin might not have even touched the card she sent you.

Remember your uncle's obnoxious Christmas letter in which he bragged about his family's accomplishments? Now this preening

happens without a word. Here's our family at the beach in Maui! Oh, and here we are on the slopes at Aspen! Such prosperity.

The purpose of greeting cards has always been ambiguous. Part gift, part commodity is how a 1999 article in the Journal of Material Culture describes them. As Barry Shank explains in the book "A Token of My Affection: Greeting Cards and American Business Culture," the nation needed a way to keep people close — but not too close. The greeting-card industry flourished, he writes, "in the hothouse atmosphere of a status competition."

Just look at the gorgeous card we got last year: a professional photograph of a couple and their three young children, dressed to the nines. It's affixed to a thick piece of paper with a gold border. Even the font seems smug.

Each year another couple sends us a refrigerator magnet with a picture of their son on it. Were I this youngster's doting uncle, maybe I'd want to see his mischievous face on my freezer each day. Which makes me wonder: Can licking too many envelopes make you delusional?

Two Christmases ago, some old friends took the child-as-holiday-card theme to a new frontier. The back of their homemade card included — surprise! — a sonogram, their first child's first glamour shot. Yes, this glimpse inside our friend's uterus made me feel closer to her. Much too close.

Of course, she was just doing what most of us do online, where a warped intimacy reigns. "Look at me" is the law, and people post photographs to everyone and nobody in particular. But at least you find evidence of reality on social networks, including pictures of crying, frowning and snot-covered toddlers amid the posed selfies and group shots.

Emily and I aren't blameless in this holiday ritual. Each year we pay an artist a modest fee to draw an image for our holiday

cards, based on a scene we dream up. Last year, it was a snowman wearing a Washington Nationals cap. The previous year, it was a sketch of us curled up with our beloved cat while reading a newspaper together. (We're both journalists, you see.) And similar to our friends advertising their beautiful families, we're highlighting how clever and creative we think we are.

Still, for us it's more than that. Emily and I sit down night after night with our pens and blank cards, writing a few messages at a time to the 60-some folks on our mailing list. We don't say anything profound, but we try to convey our affection for friends and relatives, as if we're talking to them and nobody else. Perhaps the key to this ritual isn't what one writes so much as deciding to spend a moment writing anything at all.

We don't have children, so we have free time that others don't. Yet even some of the most harried parents we know manage to spend several hours a week on Facebook, usually posting updates about their kids. Why not log off and spend a few minutes writing something personal?

As a writer, I may attach more importance than most to the act of choosing words for someone else to read. I've got boxes of old cards and letters from family and friends. One especially moving note, written by a dean at my alma mater, was just two sentences.

It might be naive to think it matters whether a card arrives with or without a greeting. But I know how I feel – good and downright human – when I read someone else's handwritten words, like the warm note our neighbor Dana sent last Christmas, describing his wish for us to spend more time together in 2013. And you know what? We did.

This season's cards are starting to trickle in, and most are holding true to form, including one from a family we've long

known – let’s call them the Davidsons. They placed five photographs of their offspring on a blue background, and the flip side has a dozen three-word commands, including “Thank your mother” and “Try something new.” My favorite: “Write a letter.”

That’s a great idea. I’m going to write a long letter back to them. I’ll include some advice of my own, such as “Drink more eggnog.” Also, “Bring me some figgy pudding.”

I promise to put a picture of myself eating it on next year’s card.

*Eric Hoover is a senior writer for the Chronicle of Higher Education.*

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# USFS to pile burn at two locations

U.S. Forest Service fuels management crews will begin prescribed fire operations south of Homewood on Dec. 9.

Crews will burn approximately 5 to 10 acres per day on the south side of Meeks Meadow near Meeks Bay Avenue. Weather and conditions permitting, operations will continue through the week and possibly the weekend.

In addition, operations will continue on Lower Kingsbury Grade near Meadow Lane. Crews have completed 5 acres and will continue to burn until they complete the 19-acre unit.

Smoke from these prescribed fire project areas can be expected, is normal, and may continue for several days after the initial ignition. All prescribed fires are monitored

regularly for burning and smoke dispersal and action is taken to mitigate concerns as they arise.

Forest Service staff will post road signs around the areas affected by the prescribed fire, send email notifications, and update the local fire information line at (530) 543.2600, ext6. To receive prescribed fire notifications, send an email to pa_ltbmu@fs.fed.us.

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# U.S. women turn it around in super G

**By USSA**

LAKE LOUISE, Alberta -– Four-time World Cup champion Lindsey Vonn (Vail) skied confidently into the top five in the Lake Louise super G Sunday, showing her strength and ability to mount a podium challenge for the first time since her return to the World Cup circuit Friday.

“This is exactly what I wanted to take away from this weekend -– to know that I could ski for the win. I’m happy with today,” Vonn said. “I scrubbed some speed in a few spots, but it still showed me that I can ski for the podium. I’m going to be selective in my races this season, and I’ll take a few days home, talk to the coaches and determine a plan.”

Leanne Smith (North Conway, N.H.) finished just behind Vonn in sixth, finding the familiar form that exemplifies the U.S. Ski Team’s speed squad.

Swiss skier Lara Gut won the race, her third victory on the season.

Olympic gold medalist Julia Mancuso (Squaw Valley) finished 17th while veteran Stacey Cook (Mammoth Mountain) finished 18th, her best World Cup super G result since 2008.

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# Museum to feature state parks artifacts

**By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee**

Most Californians know their state parks as a place to camp, walk on the beach or stare with jaws gaping into a canopy of giant redwoods. Fewer know the state parks system also guards one of the largest troves of historical artifacts in the nation.

Soon, Californians will be able to walk through that remarkable assembly of artifacts for the first time. They can survey one of the largest collections anywhere of American Indian basketry, behold racks of ornate furniture once owned by big names straight from the history books, and eye curiosities – such as Kit Carson's name carved into a tree stump.

All these and a lot more are held by the California Department of Parks and Recreation at its Museum Collections Center, a vast storage and research facility unveiled Wednesday after more than four years of preparation.

The center is housed at a cavernous concrete warehouse at Sacramento's McClellan Park, a former U.S. Air Force installation. The state parks system spent four years and $15 million refurbishing the building. In total, more than a million artifacts are stored here – and millions more

documents and photographs – most of which have never been displayed in a state park or museum. Parks officials said they have as much responsibility to protect these remnants of California's past as they do the parks themselves.

Starting Jan. 7, the Museum Collections Center will be open to the public.

**Read the whole story**

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# LTCC looking for wide age range of actors

The theater department at Lake Tahoe Community College is seeking children and adults to perform "Still Life With Iris" by Steven Dietz.

Auditions are Jan. 7 at 7pm in the Duke Theatre. Performances will be March 14-23.

"Still Life with Iris" is a fantastical adventure that centers on a young girl's search for the simplest of things: home. Iris lives with her mom in the land of Nocturno, a magical place where workers make, by night, all of the things we see in the world by day. The rulers of Nocturno, the Great Goods, are determined to have the "best" of everything on their island, and therefore take Iris away from her home and bring her to Great Island to be their daughter.

For the roles of Iris, Hazel, Elmer, and Mozart, the department is seeking actors to play 10 and 11 year olds. The character of Annabel Lee may be played by a teenager or young woman. Men and women of various ages and types are needed for

the adult roles.

Auditions will consist of readings from the play. Scripts are available on reserve in the LTCC library, and audition sides and character breakdowns are available in the theater lobby.

For more information, call (530) 541.4660, ext. 240.

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# Holland has clavicle surgically repaired

**By USSA**

VAIL -– Six-time X Games snowboardcross champion Nate Holland (Squaw Valley) underwent successful surgery with Tom Hackett of the Steadman Clinic Saturday in Vail for a fractured clavicle.

Holland sustained the injury during training for this weekend's World Cup opener in Montafon, Austria. According to U.S. Snowboarding Medical Director Kyle Wilkens, Holland could be back freeriding this month.

"I'm keeping a positive outlook on the whole situation. Two years ago I broke my clavicle and was back on snow racing within a few weeks," Holland said. "I know what I need to do to get back in the start gate for Olympic qualifiers, and I'm am meeting that challenge head on."

The Olympic team will be selected in late January based primarily on World Cup results. Holland has been a member of the 2006 and 2010 Olympic SBX Teams.