Brown gets rid of federal standardized test

By Sharon Noguchi, Bay Area News Group

SACRAMENTO — A bill ending the standardized tests that California public school students have taken in reading, math and social science since 1999 received Gov. Jerry Brown's signature on Wednesday, despite a threat by the U.S. secretary of education to withhold federal funds if the state moved forward with the plan.

Assembly Bill 484 replaces the pencil-and-paper, multiple-choice STAR tests with new language and math tests taken on computers. The new assessments, called Measurement of Academic Progress and Performance, were designed with other states to follow a set of national curriculum standards known as Common Core.

"I've said from the beginning, California needs tests that measure how ready our students are for the challenges of a changing world," said California Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson, who championed the rapid shift away from the STAR tests. "… we have taken a huge step in that direction by creating an assessment system focused on improving teaching and learning and by sending a clear signal about our commitment to this urgent work."

Read the whole story

Colleges struggle to communicate with students

By Courtney Rubin, New York Times

As a professor who favors pop quizzes, Cedrick May is used to grimaces from students caught unprepared. But a couple of years ago, in his class on early American literature at the University of Texas at Arlington, he said he noticed "horrible, pained looks" from the whole class when they saw the questions.

He soon learned that the students did not know he had changed the reading assignment because they did not check their e-mail regularly, if at all. To the students, e-mail was as antiquated as the spellings "chuse" and "musick" in the works by Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards that they read on their electronic books.

"Some of them didn't even seem to know they had a college email account," May said. Nor were these wide-eyed freshmen. "This is considered a junior-level class, so they'd been around," he said.

That is when he added to his course syllabuses: "Students must check email daily." May said the university now recommends similar wording.

So students prefer social media. So far, so 2005. But some professors do not want to "friend" students on Facebook ("I don't want to learn things about them I can't unlearn," said Thomas Tierney, an associate professor of sociology at the College of Wooster in Ohio) or do not think it is their job to explore every possible medium a student might prefer to use at 2am to find out about a test later that day.

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Athletes expected to be on the U.S. Olympic team posed for pictures Oct. 1 during the USOC media summit. To the left is freeskier Maddie Bowman from South Lake Tahoe. The photo is by Doug Pensinger/Getty Images.

• The Friday Kahle farmers market has moved to the front parking lot at Lakeside Inn. It will be there every Friday in October from 3-6pm.

• A celebration of life for 34-year-old Brandon “Mitch” Underhill will be Oct. 20 at 2pm at St. Theresa Catholic Church in South Lake Tahoe.

• If you missed the Tough Mudder event at Northstar last month, here is a video recap of the event.

• Here is the agenda for the Oct. 7 meeting with South Lake Tahoe, El Dorado County and Douglas County officials.

LTWC could have new home in 2014

By Kathryn Reed

In a matter of days Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care may secure a 27-acre parcel on the South Shore where it will move to and develop a facility that encompasses its current rehabilitation headquarters, and add an education center and a site where animals that can’t be released will live out their lives.

Tom and Cheryl Millham, who founded and have operated LTWC for more than 30 years, will be meeting with a representative of the property owner on Oct. 8 with the intent to cement a deal.

Until an agreement is signed the exact location is not being made public.



Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care has been rehabbing animals for more than three decades. Photo/LTWC

The plan is to enter a long-term lease agreement instead of the center buying the land.

Some of the money for the deal would come from a pot of cash that was left to LTWC by a South Lake Tahoe resident who died. However, it will only cover a fraction of the more than $10 million that the new facility plus lease is expected to cost.

Securing necessary permits from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and the jurisdiction where the property is located would still have to happen.

When LTWC was looking at the Echo Creek parcel at the bottom

of the Old Meyers Grade, TRPA was open to having the animal care center go there.

LTWC is now in the middle of a residential community on the outskirts of South Lake Tahoe. For years they have been looking to move.

The Echo Creek deal fell through when the property owner wouldn’t budge on the asking price and more areas were deemed stream environmental zones, which meant less land could be covered with structures.

The plot of land across from Lake Tahoe Airport where people sled in the winter has been considered. LTWC reps have looked at about a half dozen locations this year, including two outside the basin. But in the end they want Lake Tahoe be a place as much as part of the name.

The parcel now under serious consideration is flat and comes with more than 200,000 square feet of coverage.

If all goes as planned, the first phase would be built next year. It would include all of the cages, roads, maintenance garage and house for the caretaker. At all times someone will be on site.

In addition to increasing the number of cages of injured animals, many will be larger than they are today.

It’s possible the great horned owl at LTWC could become its first animal at the permanent care facility. With it being blind in its right eye, the bird may not be able to be released into the wild. That decision will be up to officials with the state Fish and Wildlife Department.

Today LTWC has three bear cubs, the owl, some squirrels, a red-tailed hawk, and nine raccoons. The raccoons will be released Oct. 12.

Arthritis in shoulder can be treated

By Kyle Swanson

Arthritis affects approximately 50 million to 65 million Americans and those numbers will almost double by 2030.

Most people associate hips and knees with arthritis pain, but the shoulder is also commonly affected. Osteoarthritis is the most common type of arthritis. It is simply the breakdown or loss of cartilage over time. Without cartilage, the joint doesn’t move as well, causing inflammation and pain.

There are many factors involved in the development of shoulder osteoarthritis. These include trauma to the shoulder, repetitive high demand use, genetics and age. Most patients have been active throughout their lives and have sustained injuries to the affected shoulder.



Kyle Swanson

Symptoms usually start to present themselves after the age of 50. Many patients with shoulder arthritis have pain and stiffness. A majority of the time the stiffness occurs in the morning and motion will improve throughout the day. Pain is usually a dull ache in the back or front of the shoulder.

Sometimes there is catching or popping associated with motion. Pain is sometimes worse at night, especially when first lying down. Patients also notice loss of strength and function of the shoulder.

X-rays are usually adequate in diagnosing shoulder arthritis. They reveal loss of the normal joint space or osteophytes (bone spurs). Sometimes magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is performed to determine the status of the rotator cuff or other soft-tissue structures.

Nonsurgical treatment is usually tried first. Anti-inflammatories are good at relieving pain by decreasing the inflammation within the shoulder joint. Sometimes a cortisone shot is given. Cortisone is a steroid which acts locally in the joint to decrease the inflammation. Cortisone shots should be given every four to six months.

Physical therapy is important for maintaining and improving shoulder motion as well as strength and function. Many of the exercises done in therapy can easily be done at home with a well-designed home exercise program.

The goal of surgical treatment is to improve pain. If the arthritis is mild, a simple shoulder arthroscopy may be performed. Removal of bone spurs and loose bodies can be done arthroscopically and the down-time is usually minimal.

However, if the arthritis is severe, then shoulder replacement may be necessary. For this procedure, the arthritic joint is replaced with metal and plastic components similar to hip and knee replacements. There have been some major advances in shoulder replacement surgery over the past decade, leading to better outcomes.

Shoulder replacement surgery is technically demanding. If you’re suffering from shoulder pain, it’s a good idea to talk with an orthopedic specialist to discuss your options.

Kyle Swanson is an orthopedic surgeon with Tahoe Orthopedics & Sports Medicine.

Letter: Government actions don’t make sense

To the community,

After reading yesterday’s article on *LTN* of the USFS closing all of its parks and concessionaires, I thought it necessary to respond. I am a volunteer and on the board at Tahoe Tallac Association (Valhalla).

This move by the government agency is about as political as it gets and is just another ploy to try to get the American public to put pressure on congress to do their job and by doing so, our political leaders can shrug off their responsibility. The president has, I am sure, told all his department heads to shut down everything to make a point, and they are doing it quite literally ignoring anything that is self sustaining.



Bob Sweatt

I would also speculate that our local USFS leaders have their hands tied and are only following directions from above. The

old adage “Don’t bite the hand that feeds you” I think would be an appropriate response to the current decision to shut down Valhalla and other self sustaining concessionaires.

Valhalla, a nonprofit, is totally independent of the USFS. We operate under the auspice of the USFS, caring for, providing access to and maintaining the site facility for the USFS. This is just the surface – we are here for the public, running the summer festival which includes affordable theater and music venues at the boathouse not to mention the free music on the lawn concerts. There is no paid USFS staff at the facility and we run the site on the income that is generated by the events that are put on here.

All maintenance and upgrades to the site are done by that income. We also pay the utilities and staff that are necessary to run the site. By cutting our ability to generate income for the site, the USFS is diminishing our ability to properly take care of the historic site we all love.

Now, we have to tell the wedding parties, etc., who have had reservations for no doubt a long time, sorry you can’t come here. Does this make sense?

Bob Sweatt, South Lake Tahoe

Bob Sweatt, South Lake Tahoe

Study: Toxic chemicals cause

reproductive problems

By Catherine Pearson, Huffington Post

Toxic chemicals in the environment are detrimental to the reproductive health of both men and women, according to a new joint committee opinion written by two major medical organizations.

In an opinion paper published last week in the journal Fertility and Sterility, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and American Society for Reproductive Medicine called for further research into the potential impact of environmental contaminants on fertility and pregnancy. The groups also urged policymakers to provide consumers and workers with clear information about potential risks.

“This is a call for awareness,” said Dr. Jeanne Conry, president of ACOG, told Huffington Post. “We want men and women to know there are concerns, but we’re not trying to hit a bell and alarm everyone.”

As of 2006, there were roughly 87,000 chemical substances registered for commerce in the U.S., according to figures cited in the opinion. Common environmental pollutants include pesticides, heavy metals such as lead and mercury, and endocrine disruptors like bisphenol A (BPA).

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Phyllis Shafer, chairwoman of Lake Tahoe Community College's Art Department, has an exhibit at the Stremmel Gallery in Reno from Oct. 10-Nov. 9. There will be an artist's reception Oct. 10 from 5:30-7:30pm.

• The South Lake Tahoe Lodging Association is looking for board members. For more info, email secretary@sltla.org.

• The Tahoe Donner Association has withdrawn its appeal of the Planning Commission decision on the Tahoe Donner Facility Improvement Project.

• Truckee Police Department on Oct. 8 at 5pm is recognizing new employees at the town hall.

• The South Lake Tahoe Republican Women Federated Club will have its first meeting on Oct. 7 at 5:30pm in The Loft of the Blue Angel Café at 1132 Ski Run Blvd. Lt. Pete Van Arnum of the El Dorado County Sheriffs Department will talk about the Secret Witness Program.

Real estate agents earn local certification

With the intent of providing a higher level of service to South Lake Tahoe home buyers and sellers, the South Tahoe Association of Realtors created the Area Specialist Certification program for its members.

To achieve the certification, a licensed Realtor must demonstrate sufficient knowledge regarding the following local agencies and industries:

Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, U.S. Forest Service cabins, building departments ,California Tahoe Conservancy, vacation rentals, South Tahoe Refuse, South Tahoe Public Utility District, fire districts and homeowner’s insurance.

Speakers from the agencies listed above present information and provide updates they believe important for Realtors to be knowledgeable about to best represent their clients in South Lake Tahoe. After each presentation, a test is given.

To qualify for the certificate, which has been approved by the California Association of Realtors, one must pass with at least an 80 percent accuracy rate. The certificate is valid for two years.

The following people passed the test given in September:

James Fain III, Erin Spicer, Scott Fair, Pamela Francis, Jessica Hirsch, Sam Holmes, Vicki Inferrera, Jill Teakell, Larry Finkel, Brent Johnson, Laura Lyle, Jon Rodriguez, Jim Wire, Kathleen Fagan, Madeleine Gutierrez, Teri McKinney, Mike Owen, Janine Raney, Jackie Weaver, Scott Jones, Tiffany Grimes, Michelle Reynolds, Gwen Niccoli, Ellen Camacho, Craig Woodward, Natalie Yanish, Dominique Westlake, Rani Calderon, Rhonda Keen, Brenda Knox, Kelly Flaherty, Gail Kolb, Linda Szendry, John Ward, Barbara Shriver, Dan Spano, Ryan Anderson, Michelle Benedict, Fernanda De Paula Dozier, Gisela Haskins, Dennis Lindsay, Theresa Souers, Lyndsay Bryant, Amanda Adams, Molly Blann, Jonathan Lemen, Heather Lew, Michael Luis and Scott Wadsworth.

USFS firefighting air fleet inadequate

By W.J. Hennigan, Los Angeles Times

The blaze near Yosemite National Park had incinerated scores of acres and was spreading fast. It was time, federal officials decided, to attack it from the air with all the resources at their command.

As the nation's armada of air tankers began landing at a staging area near here, it was clear that this was a fleet from another era.

The planes showed their age. Propellers coughed to a stop and smoke spewed from their piston engines. Many of these restored tankers were built during the Eisenhower administration.

The Forest Service fleet, which drops retardant to give firefighters on the ground crucial time to put out raging wildfires, is too old, industry and government officials say. Because there are so few planes, critics contend, the fleet is no longer capable of doing all it should to contain fires. Over the last decade, the service reduced its fleet from 47 to just 12, all operated by businesses under federal contract.

Critics also say the planes are dangerous. Since 2001, tanker crashes have killed 22 aviators. Six died last year.

"It's pathetic," said Tony Kern, former Forest Service chief of aviation. "We have brave aviators using ancient technologies and as a result they're losing their lives. It's a horrifying fact that won't change unless government action is taken."

Since 2001, tanker crashes have killed 22 aviators. Six died last year.

Demands that the Forest Service replace these planes have come from former pilots, government officials, firefighter advocacy groups and CalFire.

Read the whole story