School districts extending time kids are in class

By Motoko Rich, New York Times

The school day and year are about to get longer in 10 school districts in five states, where schools will add up to 300 hours to their calendars starting next fall.

In an effort to help underperforming students catch up on standardized tests and give them more opportunities for enrichment activities, 35 schools that enroll about 17,500 students will expand the school day and year in the 2013-14 academic year. Forty more schools that enroll about 20,000 students will also extend classroom and after-school time in the next three years.

The effort is being coordinated by state education officials; the National Center on Time and Learning, a nonprofit research and advocacy group; and the Ford Foundation, which is committing $3 million a year in grants over the next three years. The districts will use state and federal financing to pay for all of the operating costs, including extra teaching time and coordination with nonprofit groups.

Already, more than 1,000 public schools across the country, including numerous charter schools, have added more time to the school day and year. A growing group of education advocates is pushing for schools to keep students on campus longer, arguing that low-income children in particular need more time to catch up as schools face increasing pressure to improve student test scores. Advocates also say that poor students tend to have less structured time outside school, without the privilege of classes and extracurricular activities that middle-class and affluent children frequently enjoy.

Research on the benefits of adding time to the school day has so far been mixed. Detractors in teachers' unions, who say they need fair compensation for working more, have said that more hours and days in the classroom is not enough.

In a statement, Luis Ubiñas, the president of the Ford Foundation, said the initiative was not "about adding time and doing more of the same. It's about creating a learning day that suits the needs of our children, the realities of working parents and the commitment of our teachers. It's a total school makeover."

Participating in the extended learning initiative are districts in Colorado, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York and Tennessee, including Denver, East Hartford, Fall River, Rochester and a special school district including the poorest-performing schools in Memphis. The time will be used for core academic instruction, extra tutoring for struggling students and cultural activities like art and music.

Ski report: Have a good outer layer

A winter weather advisory for elevations above 6,500 feet is in effect until 10am. Snow level will be rising to 8,000 feet. Three to 8 inches is predicted about 7,000 feet.

Mixed precipitation reported at most resorts.

The word for today – Gore-Tex.

Here is the Dec. 5 ski report.

— Curtis Fong

Tell us about a house or business with holiday lights worth driving by.

Placer County has sno-park passes on sale

With the early snow, Placer County Visitor Bureau/California Welcome Center has sno-park passes for sale along with a map and directions to the 19 sites.

The center is located at 1103 High St. in Auburn. The phone number is (530) 887.2111.

A permit is required for each vehicle parked at a sno-park site from Nov. 1 through May 30. Day Permits are $5 for a single day. Season permits are $25.

Opinion: Law enforcement abuse of power is unforgivable

By Kathryn Reed

Maybe it should be called the *in*justice system.

Due process is clearly not a phrase that is applied equally to all who come in contact with law enforcement.

While there are plenty of stories about individuals who have been wrongly accused being set free with new evidence, what about those who are left in limbo? It's an entirely different form of purgatory.

Our criminal justice system is supposed to be about being innocent until proven guilty. But the way the system works – and information is distributed – it is more like guilty until proven innocent.

A person is arrested and the public perception is the suspect is guilty. All the media has to go on is the police report or what the cops say. Reaching the suspect behind bars isn't as easy as picking up the phone. And often if an attorney has been retained, the line of communication is immediately cutoff.

That keeps the story one-sided. It's all about what law enforcement has to say.

Yes, the suspect or person of interest can choose not to listen to legal advice. But based on that seldom happening, the conclusion one can draw is that it's safer to be tried in

a courtroom than the media.

There are two residents of South Lake Tahoe who have not been arrested, but their lives have been turned upside down by law enforcement and subsequently the media. One usually tells his side, the other is mum.

I'm talking about Johnny Poland and Angela Swanson.

Neither one has been charged with a crime. Neither one has been arrested. Both have been the targets of law enforcement. Both are in limbo.

The cases are completely different, but the consequences to date are similar. An investigation is going on, law enforcement is not talking, evidence has not been presented to them or the public, and they are spending money to defend themselves against the unknown.

What is outrageous is that this is almost 2013 and it's allowed to happen in the United States.

Law enforcement should not have the power to ruin lives. Investigate and charge. Go to court. See what the judge or jury says. But limbo – that should never be tolerated.

Law enforcement seldom seems to be held accountable for the wrongs they have committed.

No one is perfect and we all make mistakes. But cops, district attorneys, parole officers – their mistakes can destroy lives.

Look at the Jaycee Lee Dugard case. An 11-year-old is whisked away from a bus stop in Meyers, found 18 years later in 2009 at a ramshackle abode only three hours away in the Bay Area. Parole officers came to the house. Jaycee kept being raped. Unforgivable.

It's also unforgivable what is happening to Poland and Swanson.

Police officers out on leave means minimal coverage on streets of South Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Going to 12-hour shifts was supposed to put more officers on the streets of South Lake Tahoe on weekend nights during times when crime more often occurs.

That hasn’t happened despite the change from 10-hour to 12-hour shifts about 100 days ago.

Police Chief Brian Uhler blames it on staffing issues. Three officers are out on medical leave, though he would not say if it’s work related or when they may return. Two officers were just hired last month to replace two who had left the department. They are in training. And then there’s Officer Johnny Poland’s spot that cannot be filled until the FBI figures out what it is going to do.



Johnny Poland gets paid to be a South Lake Tahoe police officer even though he hasn't worked in more than a year. Photo/LTN file

It's been more than a year since Poland was put on paid administrative because of the federal investigation. But no one to this day is saying what Poland may have done.

FBI spokeswoman Gina Swankie, as in the past, would not speak about the investigation.

Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News*, "It is still a joint investigation involving our agency and the FBI. There have been some developments in the recent past. We are trying to bring this situation to some form of closure in the not so distant future."

What the developments are, what closure means and what the time line is are not being made public.

Poland is training with the National Guard and therefore was unavailable for comment. While he is working for the Guard he is not being paid by the city. When he's not training, he's collecting a check, health benefits and retirement benefits

from the city. That total cost for taxpayers is not known. The city is not legally able to fill the void created by his forced departure.

12-hour shifts

Lt. Brian Williams will give the City Council an update Dec. 11 about how the 12-hour shift is working. The council had asked to be briefed at about the 90-day mark.

The council was concerned fatigue could be an issue. Uhler says that has not been an issue to date. Data was collected to see if accidents might go up during the last two hours of the shift. There has not been a single accident.

“We looked at overtime savings in terms of payback time with the shift schedule and there has been a $15,000 savings in the first 90-plus days,” Uhler said. “There have been no negatives that are tangible.”

When Uhler went before the council in the summer to tell them about how the shifts would be lengthened one of the benefits was supposed to be more manpower at critical times. That has not materialized with officers out. And while they are off duty their positions are vacant.

With the loss of two sergeants and a captain because of budget constraints, there is no room to move someone down into a patrol car even on a temporary basis.

“We have absorbed some loses through attrition, but we’ve reached the point where we no longer can lose officers and maintain the minimum service levels,” Uhler said.

USFS schedules burn operation on West Shore

U.S. Forest Service fuels management crews will conduct prescribed fire operations near Grand Avenue on West shore near Tahoe Pines on Dec. 5.

Crews expect to burn 1 acre, weather permitting. Operations will continue as weather and conditions allow.

Residents and visitors can expect to see smoke from this prescribed fire project area. The Forest Service strives to minimize the impacts of smoke on local communities. Smoke-sensitive residents should consider staying indoors and keeping doors, windows and outside vents closed.

To directly receive prescribed fire updates, send an email to pa_ltbmu@fs.fed.us.

Forest Service staff will post road signs around areas affected by prescribed fire, and update the local fire information line at (530) 543-2600, No. 6.

Fiscal cliff would be costly to California

By Pamela Nonga Ngue and Michelle Murphy, California News Service

WASHINGTON – California stands to lose as much as $4.5 billion in federal funding and more than 200,000 jobs next year if Congress fails to reach a deficit reduction agreement by Dec. 31.

The automatic cuts, part of a larger package of steep spending reductions originally intended to pressure Congress to address the national debt, are now coming into sharper focus as the "fiscal cliff" deadline approaches, and some fear they could damage the state's economy.

Low-income Californians are especially vulnerable because they rely on federal programs for services ranging from child care and health screenings to education and family violence prevention.

"The cuts are going to be hitting just about every aspect of federal spending that might show up here in the state of California," said Robert Kleinhenz, chief economist at the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corp.

The Defense Department would lose $57 billion, costing California 135,000 jobs in 2013, according to a report by Stephen Fuller at George Mason University.

Southern California would be hit particularly hard by cuts in military spending. San Diego and Los Angeles counties could lose up to $2.1 billion, according to an analysis by the Center for Security Policy.

The same study found the Bay Area counties of San Francisco,

San Mateo, Contra Costa and Alameda stand to lose up to $522 million in defense spending.

The looming cuts are the result of a compromise reached in the summer of 2011, which raised the U.S. debt limit but forced Congress to identify $1.5 trillion in spending reductions. If they failed to make those cuts, an automatic $1.2 trillion in cuts equally divided between domestic programs and defense would take place.

Congress can still avoid the cuts if it reaches a deficit deal by the end of the month. Obama met with top members of Congress 10 days after his re-election on Nov. 6, but a pact has not been reached.

Many economists fear the cuts will drag the United States back into a recession. The George Mason University study projected a loss of more than 2 million jobs and a $215 billion drop in the nation’s gross domestic product.

Without department-by-department budgets, it is impossible to know exactly which programs will be cut and which will be spared. However, recent state analyses provide a glimpse into the potential consequences of the cuts.

Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, who serves on the Senate Appropriations Committee, projected that cuts in health, education and labor will total over $546 million in California alone.

Among the consequences for California, according to Harkin:

– 12,000 children from low-income families would lose access to Head Start programs.

– 2,000 fewer women would be screened for breast and cervical cancer.

– 7,000 victims of domestic violence would not have services.

– 8,000 fewer people would be tested for HIV.

– 296,000 students would lose the benefits of Title I grants.

– 143,000 fewer job seekers would be given assistance to find employment.

The University of California warns it could lose $335 million in research funding and $21.5 million in Medicare revenue for its health system.

“It would have a devastating impact on the nation, including California, and including the University of California.” said Gary Falle, the university’s associate vice president for federal governmental relations.

California’s economy is on the rebound. The Legislative Analyst’s Office projects a 1.8 percent increase in California’s gross state product in 2013. However, it projects the ripple effects of federal cuts would result in a 0.6 percent contraction.

Studies point to California’s vulnerability to defense cuts. The Pew Research Center estimates that $8 billion in California defense contracts would be lost over the next 10 years. The analysis by the Center for Security Policy projects nearly 1 in 5 California defense contracts would be lost next year alone.

All 58 California counties are at risk. Even Mariposa County, with only one defense contract – worth $6,072 – is projected to lose $571.

Not everyone in Washington is overly concerned about $109 billion in cuts in light of the government’s $3.6 trillion budget. California Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Elk Grove, said it pales in comparison to the huge increases in federal spending over the past decade.

In an interview, he noted that the cuts would amount to barely

one quarter of 1 percent of total federal spending, “which frankly underwhelms me.”

Economists warn the failure to reach a compromise could send the United States back into a recession with grave implications for California.

“That would mean job losses at the national level and the reversal of the job gains that we saw here in California over these last few months,” Kleinhenz said.

The loss of income due to job cuts would reduce consumer spending by over $11 billion in California alone, according to the George Mason University report.

The expiration of Bush-era tax cuts is another element of the fiscal cliff negotiations between President Obama and Republicans.

Obama is pushing for a deal to maintain current tax rates for a majority of Americans, but raise rates on households with taxable income above $250,000. That would affect as many as 750,000 California households – 6 percent – according to the 2010 census.

McClintock expressed concern over how tax increases would hurt California.

“If the taxes are allowed to go up … it will be very negative for the state’s economy,” McClintock said.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• The El Dorado County Veteran Affairs Commission is looking for veterans who reside in the Lake Tahoe Basin to serve as a commissioner or alternate commissioner. If interested, contact Judi McCallum at (530) 573.7918, (530) 621.6577 or bosfive@edcgov.us.

• Tips from FEMA: “During cold months, keep your car’s gas tank at least half full for emergencies. This should keep the fuel line from freezing.”

• Lake Tahoe Community College Connect Ed is offering Kids Winter Break Adventure Camps. More info is online.

• Vail Resorts has opened a Breeze Rentals facility store in Tahoe City.

• The Martis Valley Reservoir Community Workshop is Dec. 5 from 6-8pm at Truckee Town Hall Council Chambers, 10183 Truckee Airport Road, Truckee.

North Shore biomass facility passes health study

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

A health study on the effects of a planned biomass energy facility near Lake Tahoe has given the project positive marks.

The report, released Monday, found the proposed 2-megawatt facility turning forest slash into energy would have positive health impacts, with few negative effects.

After getting community pushback on a proposed Kings Beach location, officials turned their attention to county-owned land off Highway 89 between Truckee and Squaw Valley.

The report found that the project “will likely benefit community health” by reducing wildfire fuels, diverting open pile burns to a less polluting environment and diversifying energy sources.

Placer County’s planning commission will consider the proposed facility Dec. 20 at the commission’s Auburn chamber, 3091 County Center Drive.