

U.S. students perform worse in higher grades

By Joy Resmovits, Huffington Post

High school test scores released by the federal government Wednesday provide fresh evidence of a troubling theme in American education: Students seem to perform worse on tests as they advance through the public school system to higher grades.

America's high school seniors have mostly stagnated on the National Assessment of Education Progress in reading and math at least since 2005, when a comparable version of the math exam was first given, according to the report. In 2013, the latest NAEP math test, seniors scored an average of 153 out of 500 – three points higher than in 2005. In reading, students lost ground, dropping from 292 in 1992 to 288 in 2013. In both subjects, achievement gaps between ethnic groups didn't diminish.

“Despite the highest high school graduation rate in our history, and despite growth in student achievement over time in elementary school and middle school, student achievement at the high school level has been flat in recent years,” said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. “Just as troubling, achievement gaps among ethnic groups have not narrowed.”

Read the whole story

Whittell parents furious with class reductions

By Anne Knowles

GARDNERVILLE – Twenty-six parents, grandparents, students and teachers spoke out against the possible elimination of the music program at Whittell High School on May 9 during a special meeting of the Douglas County School District board.

Almost twice that many attendees filled the audience in the Carson Valley Middle School library where the seven-member board met Friday afternoon to discuss revisions to its strategic plan.

The possibility of curriculum cuts was not on the agenda, but some Zephyr Cove parents organized via email and Facebook to encourage people to attend the meeting and give a show of support to the music program during the period for public comment.



Whittell High parents crowd the May 9 board meeting.
Photo/Anne Knowles

The speakers each talked about the importance of the music classes, choir and band to the students overall education and for college admissions, and many told personal stories of the

value of the program.

"I've been in the music program since sixth grade," said Gabe Rusk, a sophomore at Whittell who is a band member. "It's something I need for my future. It's probably the way I'm going to get into college."

Elaine Welch talked about her two children, graduates of Whittell, who sang in the school's Black and White Choir.

"They sang at the Sacramento Kings basketball game. They sang at the Reno Aces games," said Welch. "It would be a shame if the choir program went away."

Maxwell Glasson, a 2002 Whittell graduate, said his participation in the music program helped him get into college and, indirectly, into law school.

"I moved back to raise my family and to put my kids through school there," said Glasson. "You're putting these kids' futures in jeopardy."

Glasson and several other speakers struggled to speak after choking up with tears during their three-minute allotted time, and every speaker was met with a round of applause when they finished.

Many implored the board to form a committee of parents, educators and administrators to come up with ways to save the program.

"We're asking to collaborate and for a seat at the table," said parent Carol Chaplin. "We can think outside of the box together."

Greg Felton, a parent of two children who graduated from Whittell and a third child attending it, suggested such a group could come up with a long-term plan.

"Put together a task force or committee with the people here

and put in place a 10-year plan so this is not hitting us every year," Felton said. "And in the meantime, freeze the cuts."

Several parents said this is just the latest in a list of sacrifices the school has already made, especially after Kingsbury Middle School closed and its students were moved into Whittell, putting two schools into one building. It is now a 7-12 school.

"There were 92 periods offered when Whittell and Kingsbury merged," said Kelly Krolicki, a parent, whose daughter Kate, a Whittell student, spoke after her. "Now there are 74 periods and we're talking about cutting that to 72 periods. We've lost 20 periods in six years."

Some parents talked about reductions in information technology classes and the unfulfilled promise to hire a vice principal for the school, but most were focused on the threat to the music program.

Nancy Gardner, a member of the DCSD board 40 years ago and a mother and grandmother to Whittell graduates, said she understood the fiscal constraints the current board was working under.

"I understand the issues. There are so many of the same issues we faced," said Gardner. "One lesson we learned as a board was to carefully pick our fights. This is a battle you should not be fighting."

Cindy Trigg, Lake Tahoe's representative on the board also made public comment as a parent. She opened the meeting explaining that the board could not bring or comment on future agenda items during the meeting.

"We are not going to have a conversation back and forth," she said.

Tom Moore, the board president, closed the public comment, thanking everyone for their respectful and thoughtful suggestions, and making a promise of sorts. The issue was not on an agenda item at the special board meeting. The meeting was called to tie up loose issues regarding the strategic plan.

“This is a conversation that is going to be taking place at the board level very soon,” Moore said.

Study: Health insurance saves lives

By Noam N. Levey, Los Angeles Times

Giving more people health insurance could save tens of thousands of lives nationwide, according to a new analysis of data from Massachusetts, whose reforms became the model for President Obama’s health law.

Throughout the national debate over the Affordable Care Act, critics have questioned whether expanding coverage results in better health. The new analysis adds to the growing evidence that it does.

Mortality rates in Massachusetts measurably improved compared with similar places around the country after the state began guaranteeing its residents health coverage in 2006, according to researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health, Brigham and Women’s Hospital and the Urban Institute.

The study, published Monday in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, also implicitly warns that gaps among states in the health of their populations may widen in coming years. That

divide will result from some states taking advantage of federal money to provide health coverage and others opting out of the system.

Read the whole story

Apple, Facebook, others defy authorities, notify users of secret data demands

By Craig Timberg, Washington Post

Major U.S. technology companies have largely ended the practice of quietly complying with investigators' demands for e-mail records and other online data, saying that users have a right to know in advance when their information is targeted for government seizure.

This increasingly defiant industry stand is giving some of the tens of thousands of Americans whose Internet data gets swept into criminal investigations each year the opportunity to fight in court to prevent disclosures. Prosecutors, however, warn that tech companies may undermine cases by tipping off criminals, giving them time to destroy vital electronic evidence before it can be gathered.

Fueling the shift is the industry's eagerness to distance itself from the government after last year's disclosures about National Security Agency surveillance of online services. Apple, Microsoft, Facebook and Google all are updating their policies to expand routine notification of users about government data seizures, unless specifically gagged by a

judge or other legal authority, officials at all four companies said. Yahoo announced similar changes in July.

Read the whole story

Editorial: Swanson for EDC supervisor

Publisher's note: Lake Tahoe News convened an editorial panel of six South Shore residents to decide on this endorsement for the June primary.

Politically savvy, connected locally and beyond, astute in policy and knowledgeable in how to make things happen – that's the type of person Tahoe needs on the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors.

There is only one person running for District 5 who has what it takes to do the job. That person is Angela Swanson.

One of Swanson's strong suits is the ability to build consensus. She proved this on the Lake Tahoe Unified School District board and continues to do so on the South Lake Tahoe City Council.



Angela Swanson

She is undoubtedly the most progressive of the six candidates. She took it upon herself to get involved with the League of California Cities in ways that no other council member has. This brings a voice to South Lake Tahoe that is unique. While she is reimbursed for some of her travel, she does this on her own time. There is no question Swanson is committed to South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado County as a whole.

Swanson is incredibly smart. She knows the issues. She listens. She can change her mind when presented with new information. She is passionate. She cares.

She can step onto the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board, California Tahoe Conservancy board (she was the city's rep), and Tahoe Transportation board (she is the current city rep) without needing to come up to speed. These are all boards that the Tahoe supervisor traditionally sits on, and they are more critical to Tahoe than the Board of Supervisors. This is why who represents District 5 is so critical – TRPA, CTC and TTD have more impact on the lives of those living in the basin than the Board of Supervisors.

Beyond those responsibilities, the primary roles of a county supervisor are to make sure county services are equitably supported throughout the territory and that there is economic stability to provide those services.

Swanson has proved herself to be fiscally responsible on the boards she has served. And she has an awareness of issues that go beyond personal experience.

We hope she can stay focused because at times she seems scattered, which causes her to do things that makes us question her judgment. If Swanson can keep it together, she could be the most effective supervisor Tahoe has had – and perhaps the board has had.

However, Swanson has baggage, which gives us pause as we endorse her. She needs to take responsibility for her role in

taking money from a man now serving time in prison on drug charges and giving it to a nonprofit education foundation. While there was nothing illegal about the transaction, it raises questions about her ethics and judgment.

By now she should know perception can be much greater than reality. Everyone has made mistakes, had moments they wish they could do over. But Swanson has never publicly taken responsibility for her role in the questionable donation that came in a brown bag. It shouldn't matter if the DA cleared her – the public hasn't and she needs to acknowledge this.

Swanson will only succeed at the next level of political office if she grows up a bit, becomes more mature and takes responsibility for her shortcomings as well as her accomplishments.

While we believe Sue Novasel is electable, we don't believe she has the breadth of knowledge to tackle the job efficiently. And while she says she will give 100 percent to this job, it has been years since she has had a regular full-time job. The supervisor works more than 40 hours a week – it doesn't end.

Kevin Brown has clearly done his research and comes across as informed. But his ties to developers and other special interests make us question if he is the appropriate voice for Lake Tahoe.

Gerri Grego needs to get more experience beyond the South Lake Tahoe Planning Commission. She also needs some moxie.

Teresa Piper needs experience to be taken seriously.

Kenny Curtzwiler can't say he is anti-government and then want to be on an elected body. This doesn't make sense. We don't need an outsider on the board.

District 5 will be best served for the next four years if

Angela Swanson is on the Board of Supervisors. Vote Swanson on June 3.

Diversity lacking among U.S. teachers

By Jesse J. Holland, AP

U.S. teachers are nowhere near as diverse as their students.

Almost half the students attending public schools are minorities, yet fewer than 1 in 5 of their teachers is nonwhite.

New studies from the Center for American Progress and the National Education Association are calling attention to this “diversity gap” at elementary and secondary schools in the United States. The groups want more to be done to help teachers more accurately mirror the students in their classrooms.

Teachers are always pushing their students to excel, said Kevin Gilbert, coordinator of teacher leadership and special projects for the Clinton Public School District in Clinton, Miss.

It becomes easier for students to believe “when they can look and see someone who looks just like them, that they can relate to,” said Gilbert, a member of the NEA’s executive committee. “Nothing can help motivate our students more than to see success standing right in front of them.”

More than minority students would benefit from a more diverse teacher corps, said Ulrich Boser, the author of the center’s

report.

“Even in a place like North Dakota, where the students aren’t particularly diverse relative to the rest of the country, it’s important for our social fabric, for our sense as a nation, that students are engaging with people who think, talk and act differently than them but can also be just as effective at raising student achievement in the classroom,” he said.

There were about 3.3 million teachers in American public elementary and secondary schools in 2012, according to a study by the National Center for Education Statistics. It said 82 percent were white, 8 percent were Hispanic, 7 percent were black and about 2 percent were Asian.

Students are a different story. In 1993, minority students made up 31 percent of the public school population; it was 41 percent in 2003.

The Center for American Progress’ most recent statistics show 48 percent of the students in public schools are nonwhite – 23 percent Hispanic, 16 percent black and 5 percent Asian – and that percentage is expected to continue to increase.

“We project that this fall, for the first time in American history, the majority of public school students in America will be nonwhite,” Education Secretary Arne Duncan said last week.

Hispanics have passed blacks as the largest minority group of teachers, just as there are more Hispanic students than African-Americans in the public school system. This tracks with the increases in the number of Hispanics in the United States, with Latinos the largest minority group in the country and the fastest-growing.

Jan Alderson, a science teacher at Shawnee Mission South High School in Overland Park, Kansas, saw the changes at her school.

“We have very few teachers of minority background yet we’ve gone to about 40 percent minority population,” said Alderson, who was inducted into the National Teacher Hall of Fame this past week. “It’s a beautiful blending, it’s just teachers who don’t have that cultural background, I think just that there are more issues.”

Teaching used be one of the only professions African-American college graduates could aspire to and make decent money, said LaRuth Gray, scholar-in-residence at the Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools at New York University.

But as the county integrated and other professions opened their ranks, education lost its “cachet” and fewer African-American students thought about becoming teachers, she said.

“It’s not seen as the ideal careers to have, and so therefore our youngsters, our black children tend to move in other directions,” said Gray, who also serves as a government liaison for the National Alliance of Black School Educators.

It will take political will to change those numbers, advocates say. Most states already have programs and policies intended to increase the number of minority teachers, “but the yield of new teachers of color is disappointing,” the NEA report said.

Asking more of workers during off hours may backfire

By Clive Thompson, Mother Jones

My airplane home from Boston is delayed for takeoff, so the

woman next to me pulls out her phones to get some work done. Like many of us, she has two—an iPhone for her personal life and a BlackBerry paid for by her employer. “It’s a dog leash,” she jokes. “They yank on it and I respond. If somebody from work emails me on Friday at 10 p.m., they’re pissed if I don’t write back in five minutes.” When I ask whether she ever just turns it off, she shakes her head in annoyance, as though I’d uttered something profane. “My team leader would kill me,” she says.

Cultural pundits these days often bemoan how people are “addicted” to their smart phones. We’re narcissistic drones, we’re told, unable to look away from the glowing screen, desperate to remain in touch. And it’s certainly true that many of us should probably cool it with social media; nobody needs to check Twitter that often. But it’s also becoming clear that workplace demands propel a lot of that nervous phone-glancing. In fact, you could view off-hours email as one of the growing labor issues of our time.

In a recent survey of workers, 50 percent said they checked email while in bed, and 38 percent “routinely” checked it at the dinner table.

Consider some recent data: A 2012 survey by the Center for Creative Leadership found that 60 percent of smartphone-using professionals kept in touch with work for a full 13.5 hours per day, and then spent another 5 hours juggling work email each weekend. That’s 72 hours a week of job-related contact. Another survey of 1,000 workers by Good Technology, a mobile-software firm, found that 68 percent checked work email before 8 a.m., 50 percent checked it while in bed, and 38 percent “routinely” did so at the dinner table. Fully 44 percent of working adults surveyed by the American Psychological Association reported that they check work email daily while on vacation—about 1 in 10 checked it hourly. It only gets worse as you move up the ladder. According to the Pew Research Center, people who make more than \$75,000 per year are more

likely to fret that their phone makes it impossible for them to stop thinking about work.

Over time, the creep of off-hours messages from our bosses and colleagues has led us to tolerate these intrusions as an inevitable part of the job, which is why it's so startling when an employer is actually straightforward with his lunatic demands, as with the notorious email a Quinn Emanuel law partner sent to his underlings back in 2009: "Unless you have very good reason not to (for example when you are asleep, in court or in a tunnel), you should be checking your emails every hour."

Constant access may work out great for employers, since it continues to ratchet up the pressure for turning off-the-clock, away-from-the-desk hours into just another part of the workday. But any corresponding economic gains likely aren't being passed on to workers: During the great internet-age boom in productivity, which is up 23 percent since 2000, the inflation-adjusted wages and benefits for college graduates climbed just 4 percent, according to the Economic Policy Institute.

Read the whole story

Farmers' markets open in Lake Tahoe



Farmers' markets have a variety of fresh produce.
Photos/Provided

By Kathryn Reed

Farmers' market season arrived in Lake Tahoe this week, though the bulk of the markets don't open until June.

"The thing we found out about farmers' markets is there are many options, but you still have the opportunity to meet the farmer," Steve Rozier told *Lake Tahoe News*. He runs a market in Stateline, Incline Village and Gardnerville – all of which started this week. "It's the best bang for your buck."

Peaches and apricots came in early this year for his farmers. Also available this time of year are a few oranges, leafy greens, strawberries, broccoli, beets, carrots and artichokes.

Instead of being at Kahle Community Center, the Stateline market is in the front parking lot of Lakeside Inn and Casino, which is where it ended last season. In June it will move over to Lakeside's property next to Shoreline Adventure Center off

Kahle Drive.

Rozier's Gardnerville market is more of a farm to fork event in partnership with Lentine's Italian Restaurant.

An avocado farmer from San Diego and cheese purveyor from Petaluma will be making the rounds on a part-time basis at Rozier's markets.

He describes the Stateline market as more of grab and go, while in Incline people have a beer and listen to live music.

When the South Lake Tahoe market opens on election day it will be starting its 20th year.

Expect cherries, greens and angelcots to be in abundance the first day. Angelcots are similar to an apricot, but more refined.

"The water issue doesn't seem to be affecting things much," Jim Coalwell, who runs the El Dorado County Certified Farmers Market in South Tahoe, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Later on we might see a difference."

He said the wet spring has been good for farmers.



Artists, music and bounce house will be at the Ski Run market.

Not all the vendors are locked in, but Coalwell is not expecting many changes because his market sells out of booth

space quickly.

The Ski Run Boulevard market in South Tahoe starts June 6. The big new vendor is homemade ice cream. A meat and egg vendor is also possible.

Blue Angel Café will return with its beer garden.

Here is a list of some of the farmers' markets in the area:

Tuesday

- South Lake Tahoe: El Dorado County Certified Farmers Market Association

American Legion parking lot, Highway 50

June 3-Oct. 7, 8am-1pm

- Truckee: Truckee River Regional Park

10500 Brockway Road off Highway 267

June 10-Oct. 14, 8am-1pm

Wednesday

- Gardnerville: Lampe Park Farmers Market

1328 Waterloo Lane

May 21-Sept. 24, 9am-pm

- Stateline: Farmers Market at Lakeside Inn and Casino

168 Highway 50

Now-Sept. 24, 4-7pm

No market July 2

Thursday

- Incline Village: Farmers Market at Tunnel Creek

1115 Tunnel Creek Road

Now-Sept. 25, 4-7pm,

No market July 3

- Tahoe City: Commons Beach

Commons Beach Road and North Lake Boulevard

May 22-June 19; Aug 28-Sept. 25, 8am-1pm

- Tahoe City: Tahoe Lake Elementary School

375 Grove St.

June 26-Aug. 21, 8am-1pm

- Truckee: Truckee Thursdays

Historic Downtown Truckee at Donner Pass Road near the train station

June 12-Aug. 21, 5-9pm

Friday

- South Lake Tahoe: Ski Run Boulevard

Ski Run at Birch Street

June 6-Sept. 26, 3-8pm

- Crystal Bay: Farmers Market at Tahoe Biltmore

5 Highway 28

June 6-Sept. 26, 9am-1pm

No market July 4

- Gardnerville: Farm to Fork Festival

Lentine's Italian Restaurant, 1488 Highway 395

Now-Sept. 26, 4-7pm

No market July 4

- Incline Village Farmers' Market

770 Mays Blvd., Ste. 2

June 13-Aug. 30, 10am-2pm

Saturday

- Incline Village Farmers' Market

770 Mays Blvd., Ste. 2

June 13-Aug. 30, 10am-2pm.

TRPA Regional Plan court decision appealed

By Kathryn Reed

Earthjustice, which represents the Sierra Club and Friends of the West Shore, waited until May 7 – the last day possible – to file an appeal regarding the U.S. District Court's decision upholding the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's Regional Plan update.

"The agency's strange strategy to protect Lake Tahoe and its surrounding landscape from the damage caused by excessive urbanization over past decades is to promote even more development," Earthjustice attorney Wendy Park said in a

statement. "We will continue our fight to protect the lake from the misguided actions of the agency charged with protecting and restoring its environment."



The TRPA's Regional Plan is headed back to court.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

The Regional Plan was approved by the bi-state regulatory agency in December 2012, five years after the previous one was supposed to be null and void. Countless meetings were conducted, comments given and bickering between the two states over the document that almost resulted in Nevada's pulling out of the bi-state Compact.

Two months after the Governing Board approved the plan the lawsuit was filed. U.S. District Court Judge John Mendez on April 7 said the agency could keep the document in place. Last June he had handed TRPA a partial victory by saying the Regional Plan update does not violate California law by allowing local jurisdictions to have more authority. That was one of the items in the lawsuit.

It will now be up to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals to make a decision.

"TRPA is confident the Regional Plan will accelerate Lake Tahoe's restoration and support sustainable communities," TRPA Executive Director Joanne Marchetta told *Lake Tahoe News*. "While the appeal makes its way through the legal process, we

will continue to put the substantial environmental benefits of the plan into place.”

The environmental groups believe the environmental impact statement for the RPU failed to analyze how the document will have negative impacts on soil conservation, water quality and air quality. Their contention is the plan promotes more growth, including in areas not already developed.

“TRPA has abandoned its core mission to restore and protect Lake Tahoe’s environment,” Laurel Ames of the Sierra Club said in a statement. “It’s a fallacy that the environmental damage caused to Lake Tahoe by the over-urbanization approved by TRPA can be solved by further intensifying urbanization, and this demonstrates just how far the agency has strayed.”

Study: Laughing may be the best medicine

By Melissa Healy, Los Angeles Times

Want the potential mental and physical health benefits of meditation without the work of chasing away all those intrusive thoughts and feelings? Try laughing, a new study suggests.

Laughter – the real kind associated with genuine joy and mirth – sets off brain wave patterns quite similar to those generated when experienced meditators ply their mindfulness skills, a new study finds.

Researchers know that when hooked up to an electroencephalograph, which measures electrical activity

among neurons in the brain, those practiced in the art of meditation are able to achieve a brain state of what is called gamma brain wave activity: In it, virtually all of the brain's higher cortical regions begin to operate on a common frequency, somewhere in the 30- to 40-hertz bandwidth.

Unlike the dreamless sleep in which alpha brain waves sweep across the brain, or the cacophony of alert mental activity associated with beta brain waves, gamma waves tend to be synchronous throughout the brain. It's the brain wave pattern associated with cognitive "flow," with being "in the zone," with the highest state of cognitive processing.

Read the whole story