

Whittell test scores going down; 4-day week intact

By Kathryn Reed

ZEPHYR COVE – School board members in Douglas County on Tuesday received enough information to convince them the four-day school week is not the reason test scores at Whittell High School are going down.

After WHS Principal Crespin Esquivel gave a sobering account of how students are doing at his facility, the next part of the April 10 discussion centered on whether the 7-12 school should continue with the Monday-Thursday schedule that began in fall 2009.

The board on a 7-0 vote agreed for the next three years to keep Whittell on the four-day schedule.



Whittell
Principal
Crespin
Esquivel
listens to the
board talk
about his
school.

Photo/Kathryn
Reed

Board member Randy Green said five years of data is needed before true conclusions can be made.

“I don’t think we can tell if the results are the four-day week or site specific,” board member Tom Moore said of the test data. “I do firmly believe it is one of the two.”

Superintendent Lisa Noonan said she is convinced “we can’t blame it on the four-day week.”

Statistics presented by consultant Steve Mulvenon, who was tasked with compiling a report to the board about four-day school weeks and how other districts are coping as well as to assess specifics about Whittell, showed that reducing the days in the classroom does not negatively impact test scores, nor does it save districts money.

When proponents of the Whittell four-day school week first presented their idea, one of the overriding reasons was to decrease absences because so many extracurricular events are on Fridays, which was pulling students from the classroom. The number of class periods missed dropped from 27,972 in 2008-09 to 16,984 in 2009-10 and 17,589 in 2010-11.

While the perception of parents, teachers and students – who all had the opportunity to take similar surveys – was that academic performance is better with the four-day week, the principal’s report showed a different reality.

Part of the discrepancy could be that the survey questions were broad in nature and parents may have just thought about their child’s individual test scores or semester grade. Esquivel on Tuesday was talking standardized tests that affect several grade levels, as well as the ACT that college-bound students take.

“We do have a trend that is heading down. We are trying to implement good things, but we won’t see results for two to three years,” Esquivel told the board.

The data shows almost across the board in every grade level and subject tested (reading, math, science, language arts) students are doing worse than their predecessors.

Esquivel has no definitive reasons why. By incorporating the data Mulvenon presented the blame cannot be put on enrollment – it has been steady for at least three years, the ethnicity of the student body has not changed dramatically (28 Hispanics in 2006-07 compared to 42 in 2011-12), and reduced or free lunches have not spiked (37 students in 2006-07 and 48 in 2011-12).

“In 2008 Whittell had 25 percent of students take the ACT. In 2011 68 percent took it,” Mulvenon said. “The more students who take standardized tests the more likely the average (score) gravitates to the mean.”

It was stressed by several people that with Whittell having such a small student body it only takes a few students to change the percentage in test scores. For example Douglas High has a graduating class of about 400, which is nearly double Whittell’s entire population. So, to have a 10 percent drop in scores, it could mean five students doing poorly at Whittell, while it would take 40 from Whittell’s senior class.

A bright spot is 90 percent of Whittell’s class of 2011 graduated. And students in the class of 2012 have been accepted to a variety of universities including a full ride to Georgia Tech, an athletic scholarship to Oregon State, one to Baylor, another to Tulane, more than 15 to UNR to name a few.

The concern is if the test scores continue to decline that graduation rates will drop and post-secondary options won’t be there for tomorrow’s Warriors.

The board and staff are also worried that as new state mandates come into being the stakes will be higher and thresholds harder to meet.

Esquivel admitted the collaboration between Whittell seventh-grade teachers and Zephyr Cove's sixth-grade teachers needs a 180-degree improvement. Mentoring programs are also going to be implemented.

The board was also assured the superintendent and principal would be meeting to come up with a more definitive plan of action.

FBI asking questions about Nevada bear hunt

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Controversy over Nevada's black bear hunt took a new twist Tuesday, with American Indians opposed to the hunt saying they've been questioned over the matter by the FBI.

Representatives of the American Indian Movement who spoke out against killing Nevada's bears on religious grounds last month are claiming their rights were violated by questioning by an agent of the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force.

"It's a civil rights violation. We did nothing wrong," said Lisa Bonta, a member of the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony and a founding member of AIM's newly formed Northern Nevada chapter.

Bonta said she and her husband Johnny were questioned April 2 at her Reno apartment by George Cholico, a Washoe County detective attached to the FBI's terrorism task force in Reno.

Cholico declined to discuss the matter with the Reno Gazette-Journal, referring questions to the FBI's Las Vegas office. FBI spokesman Patrick Turner said in an e-mail statement that the bureau was investigating a citizens complaint, "conducted an assessment and determined no further investigation was warranted at this time."

Read the whole story

Does Sierra snow study buck fears of warming?

By Mark Robison, Reno Gazette-Journal

John Christy says his new study of Sierra Nevada snowfall shows global warming is not the dire threat many make it out to be.

"In general, it depends on what religion you have," Christy said when asked about the reaction to his paper. "If you believe Man is doing horrible things to the planet, then you can't believe this report. If you believe the other way, then this is a chapter in your bible."

Climate change skeptics have seized on the report published by the peer-reviewed Journal of Hydrometeorology.

James Taylor – who is not a scientist and is affiliated with the Heartland Institute, which challenges global warming – penned a blog for Forbes.com that said, “Alarmists were asserting with near unity that global warming was responsible for winters with below average snowfall. Christy’s study shows that as far as the Sierra Nevada mountains are concerned, the alarmists are wrong on both counts – there is no trend one way or the other.”

Christy’s climatology colleagues say not so fast.

David Pierce said Christy is going beyond the data in his study, which shows steady snowfall since 1878 in the Sierra, and is making conclusions he hasn’t proven.

Global warming models predict snowfall will decrease as temperatures rise toward the end of this century, not now, said Pierce, a researcher at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla, where he studies the effects of climate change on ocean temperatures and water resources – including snow – in the Western United States.

Pierce takes exception to Christy making such claims in the media instead of in his study, adding this “is unfortunate because peer-review is the process that filters out unsupported personal opinion from what is backed by evidence.”

Read the whole story

El Dorado 1 of 18 California counties losing residents

By Phillip Reese, Sacramento Bee

Once-booming El Dorado County lost residents last year, one of 18 California counties that saw its population shrink from 2010 to 2011, according to new U.S. Census Bureau estimates.

The loss was minuscule – 210 people, or one-tenth of one percent – but it represents a reversal for a county that averaged 3.5 percent annual population growth during the past four decades.

Two factors explain the drop: low birth rates and more residents leaving the county than coming. Last year, El Dorado County saw about 9 births for every 1,000 residents – 35 percent below the statewide average. About 500 more residents left the county last year than came to it.

Read the whole story

NTSB makes 7 recommendations for Reno Air Races

By Martha Bellisle, Reno Gazette-Journal

The National Transportation Safety Board has not yet determined what caused last year's deadly crash at the Reno National Championship Air Races, but its chairwoman recommended on Tuesday seven changes she said would make the races safer for pilots and spectators.

The pilots should receive special G-force training and perhaps wear G-suits to help them deal with race conditions, NTSB chairwoman Deborah Hersman said during a press conference. The course should also be changed to keep spectators away from the flight path, she said.

Hersman also said the Federal Aviation Administration needs to fix its rules to clarify whether spectators must be 500 feet from the flight path, or 1,000 feet. Race officials need to change their system to make sure that problems found during prerace technical inspections are fixed and documented. And the aircraft should undergo an engineering evaluation that to show that the plane can handle the race stress, she said.

“Our investigation revealed that this pilot in this airplane had never flown at this speed on this course,” Hersman said. “We are issuing a safety recommendation to ensure that pilots and their modified airplanes are put through their paces prior to race day.”

The pilot and 10 people on the ground were killed in the crash of the Galloping Ghost on Sept. 16, and at least 70 people were injured. Many suffered amputations and severe lacerations from flying shrapnel.

Read the whole story

Bomb squad detonates explosive device in South Lake Tahoe

Police are sifting through the remnants of a crude explosive device to determine who may have left it on Tallac Avenue near the Laundromat at Harrison Avenue in South Lake Tahoe.

“At first glance it did not appear to be a highly sophisticated device,” South Tahoe police Lt. Brian Williams told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He did add that had someone been near the contraption when it went off, the result could have been life threatening.

People at the laundry facility called officers Tuesday about 7am alerting them to the suspicious device. Tahoe Douglas bomb squad used its robot to detonate it.

The object was described as having shotgun shells and other material wrapped in duct tape.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

South Tahoe city manager on the road interviewing for jobs

By Kathryn Reed

Halfway into his three-year contract with South Lake Tahoe, Tony O'Rourke is looking for another job.

He has been out of the office quite a bit in a quest to move on. He says the decision has more to do with his family than it does professional reasons.



Tony O'Rourke

"For the long term I need to find a solution to this personal issue," O'Rourke, 57, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Today and Wednesday he is in Medford interviewing to be city manager of that Southern Oregon town. He is one of four finalists for the job.

O'Rourke started with South Tahoe in August 2010 with a salary of \$175,000.

The Medford job pays between \$138,000 and \$152,000 a year, plus benefits.

O'Rourke has informed the entire South Lake Tahoe City Council about his need to move someplace else. He said a number of cities have approached him about leading their community, but geographically they don't all meet his family's needs.

Mayor Claire Fortier said the council would prefer O'Rourke stays, but understands the reasons he wants to move on.

"Tony has been a very, very effective city manager; doing the things we needed done," Fortier said.

While O'Rourke's review has been on the closed session agenda since last fall, this council has yet to formally critique him. Fortier said the council individually reviewed him, she gathered their input and that O'Rourke then did a self-analysis. She said the council has been waiting to all be together to go over the review with O'Rourke, which could be at the April 17 meeting. However, by then it might not matter because he could be submitting his resignation letter.

While he is out of town, Nancy Kerry does his job – despite not having the title of assistant city manager – just the responsibility.

Gaming revenue up in Nevada, including Stateline

Percentage-wise the Stateline casinos had a higher tally in gaming revenues compared to the state from February 2011 to February 2012.

The Nevada Gaming Control Board released the figures this morning. The South Shore win was \$15 million, an increase of 10.3 percent. The state revenue was \$932 million, or an increase of 5.7 percent year-over-year.

The North Shore was one of the few locations in the state to report a drop in revenue.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

South Lake Tahoe pot club abruptly closes its doors

South Lake Tahoe is down to two medical marijuana dispensaries.

City of Angels 2 closed Sunday night.

“I’m afraid of the feds,” owner Gino DiMatteo told *Lake Tahoe News* as he stood in front of the shop on Third Street.



City of Angels
2 pot club in
South Lake
Tahoe is
closed.
Photo/LTN

The professionally made sign plastered on the front door says the same thing. “Closed until further notice; Fear of feds; Nothing of value on premises” is what the sign says.

The word has not got out to all clients because people were approaching the business Monday night.

DiMatteo said he is not sure if this is a permanent decision.

He is upset he isn’t able to get people the medicine they need.

DiMatteo would not elaborate on what led to this decision. He said he has not received any notification from the feds; that this decision was his and that he was not raided; nor did he say his landlord told him to move out.

Landlords at the three South Tahoe dispensaries have received letters from the U.S. Attorney’s Office saying their property could be confiscated in addition to other penalties if they continue to allow medicinal marijuana to be sold.

– Kathryn Reed

AT&T backing out of phone directory business

By Scott Moritz, Bloomberg

AT&T Inc. agreed to sell a majority stake in its Yellow Pages directory division to Cerberus Capital Management LP for about \$950 million as part of an effort to dispose of units that are holding back revenue growth.

AT&T will receive \$750 million in cash and a \$200 million note, according to a statement from the Dallas-based phone carrier today. AT&T will keep a 47 percent stake in the business, which had about \$3.3 billion in revenue in 2011.

The sale lets AT&T, which hung on to its Yellow Pages division as competitors fled the business, to reduce its exposure to a unit facing increasing competition from online rivals Google Inc., Groupon Inc. and Yelp Inc. To boost sales, AT&T, the biggest U.S. phone company, is focusing on its mobile- phone business, where it trails Verizon Wireless.

Read the whole story