Why school ‘reform’ fails

By Robert J. Samuelson, Newsweek

As 56 million children return to the nation’s 133,000 elementary and secondary schools, the promise of “reform” is again in the air. Education Secretary Arne Duncan has announced $4 billion in Race to the Top grants to states whose proposals demonstrated, according to Duncan, “a bold commitment to education reform” and “creativity and innovation [that is] breathtaking.” What they really show is that few subjects inspire more intellectual dishonesty and political puffery than “school reform.”

Since the 1960s, waves of “reform” have failed to produce meaningful achievement gains. The most reliable tests are those given by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The reading and math tests, graded on a 0–500 scale, measure 9-year-olds, 13-year-olds, and 17-year-olds. In 1971, the initial year for the reading test, the average score for high-school seniors was 285; in 2008 that score was 286. The math test started in 1973, when high-school seniors averaged 304; in 2008 the average was 306.

Read the whole story

70-year prison sentence in homeless camp murder

By Andy Furillo, Sacramento Bee

A 42-year-old transient who shot and killed a man in a

Placerville homeless camp has been sentenced to 70 years to life in prison, the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office said in a press release.

Kenneth Sharonoff had been convicted of second-degree murder in the Jan. 23 killing of Clark "Otto" McCabe, 69, on Missouri Flat Road. An El Dorado County Superior Court jury convicted Sharonoff of the murder, as well as being an ex-con with firearms, and also of elder abuse.

The press release on Thursday's sentencing by Judge Suzanne Kingsbury said that a friend of the victim described McCabe as "a kind and generous person" who "was respected and well-liked, and now very much missed."

Read the whole story

Rural towns struggle as health clinics lock doors

By Jocelyn Wiener, Center for Health Reporting

DOYLE – Just before the turnoff into this tiny community, near the shuttered Burger Barn, a sign announcing Doyle's existence also hints at its fade toward oblivion. Underneath the name of the local clinic, Doyle Family Practice, someone has added the words: "Temporarily closed."

Last summer, state budget cuts forced the Doyle clinic – along with five other rural health or dental clinics in far Northern California – to close. Since then, the isolated stretch of highway connecting this high desert community in Lassen County to Susanville, 42 miles northwest, and Reno, 46 miles

southeast, has become a major obstacle for people in need of health care.

Many of Doyle's residents are elderly or poor, often unable to find a ride to either city and too broke to afford gas to drive themselves.

"We all depend on that clinic and it's a very big hardship not to have it," said Alice Sarmento, 61, a retired tow truck driver who suffers from a heart condition, asthma and chronic pain.

Sarmento said she cancels appointments on days she doesn't have gas money to get to Reno. If there's an emergency, she'll either need to find a ride or wait 45 minutes for an ambulance.

Read the whole story

Tahoe-ites rid lake beaches, riverways of tons of trash

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – "I'm going out of state and getting trashed" is not what my Mom wanted to hear I was doing on my birthday. It was met with silence on the other end of the phone.

The truth is I've spent the last two nights in Nevada – out of state – even if the Lakeside Inn is only six miles from my California home. And I got trashed yesterday, on my birthday, in the sense that I participated in the annual coastal cleanup day.



Cigarette butts littered Rabe Meadow and Nevada Beach. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Mom still wasn't amused with my initial description. But she did applaud my community service.

With staying at Stateline, I arranged through Ellen Nunes of Clean Tahoe to have Nevada Beach be a satellite affiliate this year. It was great to be able to walk there from Lakeside.

With 12 of the 15 official sites reporting, Blackwood Meadow reported the most amount of trash – 1,465 pounds – collected during the three-hour campaign to rid California locations near water of trash. Lou Graves parked a truck in front of Clean Tahoe's office in South Lake Tahoe the afternoon of Sept. 25. It was full, and included a couch.

He said this was just one of five couches retrieved from the meadow in the center of South Lake Tahoe. Graves said the truck had 19 bags of trash.

My Jeep was filled with one bag of trash and what looked like the spring of a rear Jeep seat we found near Burke Creek.

In the roughly 2.5 hours Sue and I spent walking through Rabe Meadow and along Nevada Beach we collected 228 cigarette butts, 175 food wrappers, 22 caps/lids, five pieces of glass, 12 straws, rubber from a bike tire, 91 pieces of food and

other trash.



Kathryn Reed hauls out what looks like a spring for a car seat that she found in Burke Creek. Photo/Susan Wood

While Sue was using profanity toward smokers, I had choice words for the people who left behind peanut-pistachio-sun flower shells.

Yes, putting out a cigarette in the sand is great. But what the heck are you thinking when leaving it there?

I love pistachios – but why leave the shells on the beach? How long do you think it's going to take to biodegrade? And no bird wants the empty shell. Stop being lazy. Your litter is worse than the paper left behind because it blends in more with the sand.

According to Clean Tahoe's Nunes, with 80 percent of the sites reporting, 193 people participated through her organization, 2,557 pounds of trash were collected, 266.5 pounds of recyclables were bagged, and 26 miles were covered.

These are just results on the South Shore. Coastal Cleanup is a statewide effort.



Sue Wood finds Nevada Beach isn't as pristine as it looks. Photo/Kathryn Reed

"The youngest volunteer was 18 months old, although many little ones were in backpacks. The youngest in dad's backpack was 2 months. Our oldest volunteer was 84. Four of our volunteers drove all the way from San Francisco to participate," Nunes told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I'm simply amazed at how our group pulled it together without the usual grant funding to advertise the event. Getting the word out was a grass-roots effort with each member of our organizing committee reaching out to their co-worker and friend networks. Facebook played a big role in getting the word out as well."

Veteran journalists discuss future of news

By Amanda Finnegan, Las Vegas Sun

Watchdog journalism needs to be preserved but finding a way to financially sustain it will remain a challenge in the coming years, industry experts said.

During a panel discussion Wednesday entitled “The Death of Old News” hosted by the Black Mountain Institute at UNLV, three longtime journalists discussed how the Internet is impacting the news industry and the industry’s financial struggles.

The panel included Las Vegas Sun President and Editor Brian Greenspun, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author Alex Jones, and longtime journalist, author and executive editor and anchor of “PBS NewsHour” Jim Lerher.

“Quality journalism costs money,” Lerher said. “What’s happening now is that the resources to do quality journalism are diminishing. However, the professionals have realized that in order for us to survive, prosper and grow, we need to form cooperative ventures.”

Read the whole story

Who is leading Tahoe-Reno’s economic revival?

By Bill O’Driscoll, Reno Gazette-Journal

Their mission is the same: To grow business in Northern Nevada.

But with record-high unemployment and the harshest recession since the Great Depression comes the question of cohesion among economic development agencies, as the region continues to compete with other states for commerce.

Pessimism in the recently released Sierra Region Economic Outlook Mid-Year Business Survey prompted calls for greater unity to, as Northern Nevada Development Authority Executive

Director Rob Hooper put it, “turn this economic beast around.”

“It’s a matter of getting everyone on the same page,” Greg Mosier, dean of the University of Nevada, Reno College of Business, a survey sponsor, said in assessing what needs to be done.

“In some ways, they’ve tried to do that, but it’s never been everyone in the room at the same time,” Mosier said. “I don’t think there’s been a team effort so far. It’s going to be a train wreck going forward. We’ve got to say, ‘What are we going to do?'”

Read the whole story

Mediation fails between MV, STATA in Tahoe transit mess

By Kathryn Reed

Mediation this week failed to resolve the lawsuit MV Transportation filed against the South Shore’s transit agency and the members in the organization.

MV Transportation filed a lawsuit against South Tahoe Area Transit Authority after the agency severed the contract with the Fairfield-based company. MV had signed a three-year contract in summer 2009 to run the day-to-day operation of the bus service on the South Shore that includes BlueGo, Heavenly ski shuttles, Nifty 50 Trolley, routes to Carson City, and service into Carson Valley.



Transit on the South Shore is in a precarious predicament. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Financial issues began surfacing early in the relationship. Sources close to the situation told *Lake Tahoe News* MV was racking bills immediately because drivers employed by former bus contractor Area Transit Management did not pass the basic state and federal tests. This meant MV had to bring in workers from outside the area at an added premium.

Issues at the bus garage in South Lake Tahoe and maintenance of the vehicles were also problems MV had to contend with.

During this time John Andoh was the transit administrator. The board, made up of representatives from South Lake Tahoe, Douglas County, Heavenly Mountain Resort, Ridge Tahoe, Harveys, Harrah's, MontBleu, Lakeside Inn, Horizon, and Tahoe Transportation District gave him free reign without much oversight. (El Dorado County at the time was a member, but has since pulled out; TRPA has a non-voting member on the board. They are named in the lawsuit.)

No financial wrongdoing has been alleged in regards to Andoh. He was hired to operate the buses by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. He wasn't hired to keep track of expenses. He was told to make sure the buses ran. And he did.

The board didn’t know about MV’s expenses until the bills started piling up because they weren’t getting paid. MV board members have said off the record they didn’t know bills weren’t being paid. They didn’t believe it was their job to know what was going on a day-to-day basis.

MV wants its money and that’s what the lawsuit is all about. The firm claims it is owed about $2 million and wants another $1 million in lost profits.

Other than confirming there was a mediation session for the better part of a day in Reno this week, MV officials did not want to comment further.

With STATA having filed for bankruptcy on Sept. 13, MV doesn’t have much to gain from the agency. The agency owns two buses, while the members own the remainder.

Mike McLaughlin, attorney for STATA, said the attorney representing his client in bankruptcy court is going to seek to remove this particular lawsuit to bankruptcy court. This means the bankruptcy judge would rule on the lawsuit as part of the bankruptcy resolution.

It is possible MV will ask the bankruptcy judge to remand the case back to state court.

Each of the members pays a different amount into the STATA kitty, so to speak. Each, though, has an equal vote on the board. If the bankruptcy judge decides the members are liable for paying the millions of dollars, it is not known if it would be in equal payments or some method based on their annual contribution.

The 2008-09 audit as of Sept. 24 was still not posted on the BlueGo website so it’s hard to know if the document had been prepared by the federal deadline of months ago, if any information contained in it could have prevented some of the chaos that is going on now.

For now, the buses keep rolling. But the routes keep changing.

Board members have their fingers crossed that one day BlueGo's vision statement will be more than just words and will be a reality, "The vision statement of BlueGo is to provide a transit service that allows anyone to go anywhere easily on a service that is clean, accessible, reliable, efficient and safe which hereby improves the environment and the quality of life in our resort community. "

Navy choppers dip into Emerald Bay

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

The Navy is investigating an incident during which two Seahawk helicopters attempting to hover over Lake Tahoe were damaged when they briefly hit the water, a Navy spokesman said Friday.

The Navy's two MH-60 Romeo helicopters, were en route from Mather Air Force Base near Sacramento to Lemoore Naval Air Station Sept. 13 when the accident – displayed on a video posted on YouTube – occurred, said Lt. Aaron Kakiel, spokesman for the Naval Air Forces command at North Island in San Diego.

The YouTube posting states the incident occurred at Emerald Bay but Kakiel couldn't confirm the precise location. The area in the video does resemble the Tahoe's famous bay.

Read the whole story

Judge suspends prosecution of Phillip Garrido; sanity at issue

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

A judge in Placerville suspended the criminal prosecution of accused kidnapper Phillip Garrido after his public defender declared she doubted his mental competency to face trial.

The judge ordered a hearing for Oct. 8 on whether to appoint a mental expert to examine the 59-year-old alleged kidnapper of Jaycee Lee Dugard, who was abducted in 1991 at the age of 11.



Phillip and Nancy Garrido

The judge said he would allow the prosecution of Garrido's wife, Nancy Garrido to proceed. But he said he had his own doubts about Phillip Garrido's competency after public defender Susan Gellman said she, too, doubted his competency. The judge suspended the case.

The development could delay the prosecution of Phillip Garrido indefinitely.

His wife still faces a hearing Oct. 1.

Read the whole story

California budget agreement possible next week

By Kevin Yamamura, Sacramento Bee

State leaders broke a dubious record today as California entered the 86th day of the fiscal year without enacting a budget.

Perhaps that served as sufficient motivation. Legislative leaders and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger announced Thursday they had agreed on a "framework" for a budget agreement that could be voted on as early as next week.

But they provided no official details on the plan they discussed at Schwarzenegger's private office in Santa Monica. And they were hesitant to call it an official compromise until after they brief lawmakers and meet again Monday in Sacramento. The state faces a projected $19 billion deficit, more than one-fifth of the general fund budget.

"The governor and legislative leaders have reached the framework of an agreement, will work through the details over the weekend, and hope to come to a final agreement when they reconvene Monday," Schwarzenegger spokesman Aaron McLear said in a statement that was reviewed by legislative leaders.

Read the whole story