

Report: Kids being medicated at alarming rate

By Alan Schwarzmay, New York Times

ATLANTA – More than 10,000 American toddlers 2 or 3 years old are being medicated for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder outside established pediatric guidelines, according to data presented last week by an official at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The report, which found that toddlers covered by Medicaid are particularly prone to be put on medication such as Ritalin and Adderall, is among the first efforts to gauge the diagnosis of A.D.H.D. in children below age 4. Doctors at the Georgia Mental Health Forum at the Carter Center in Atlanta, where the data was presented, as well as several outside experts strongly criticized the use of medication in so many children that young.

The American Academy of Pediatrics standard practice guidelines for A.D.H.D. do not even address the diagnosis in children 3 and younger – let alone the use of such stimulant medications, because their safety and effectiveness have barely been explored in that age group. “It’s absolutely shocking, and it shouldn’t be happening,” said Anita Zervigon-Hakes, a children’s mental health consultant to the Carter Center. “People are just feeling around in the dark. We obviously don’t have our act together for little children.”

Read the whole story

CalFire crews training with little water

By Patrick Walker, KXTV

AUBURN -- Firefighters are ready for what could be a long and busy summer ahead.

Extreme conditions and low water levels may make it even harder for crews to battle wildfires this season.

"The drought has absolutely left the conditions tinder-dry, and obviously very explosive," CalFire spokesperson Daniel Berlant said.

New recruits are training this week at CalFire's Auburn facility, and they are learning not to depend too heavily on water.

"We're still going to need to use water, but we may use hand tools, we may use other fire-suppression techniques that don't require as much water," Berlant explained.

These techniques are nothing new.

Read the whole story

Study: Community college students do poorly in online

classes

By Danya Perez-Hernandez, Chronicle of Higher Education

While the use of online courses is increasingly widespread in California's community colleges, the success rate of students in the courses lags behind that of their peers taking in-person courses, according to a report released last week by the Public Policy Institute of California, a nonprofit and nonpartisan think tank that focuses on the state's public programs.

The report, "Online Learning and Student Outcomes in California's Community Colleges," says online-course enrollment reached close to one million in the 2010-11 academic year, up from 114,000 in 2002-3. Almost 530,000 California community-college students enrolled in online courses during 2011-12, nearly 20 percent of all students taking credit courses, the report says.

The institute's researchers found that students were less likely to complete online courses than traditional courses, and were less likely to complete online courses with passing grades. But when it comes to long-term impact, measured by the likelihood of students' earning degrees or transferring to four-year-colleges, those who combined traditional and online courses were more successful than those who took face-to-face courses alone.

According to the report, in 2011-12, 79.4 percent of students completed online courses they started, compared with 85.9 percent of students completing traditional courses. The findings are based on student and course data collected from the 112 community colleges in California.

Read the whole story

Brown wants Calif. to be in front of climate change

By Jennifer Medinamay, New York Times

LOS ANGELES — Portraying California as the front line of climate change, Gov. Jerry Brown said Monday that the effects of man-made global warming were devastating the state, drawing a direct link between climate change and both the record-setting drought that has left the state parched and the early-season wildfires that broke out across California last week. He declared that people must find a way “to live with nature, not collide with it.”

Saying that California was at the “epicenter” of the impact of climate change, Brown said that states and nations in general were “not on a sustainable path” when it came to global warming and the harsh weather patterns and other problems it brings.

“We have to adapt because the climate is changing,” Brown said in a speech to scientists gathered in Sacramento for a conference on the drought’s impact on state agriculture. “Now there’s no doubt that the evidence has been strong for quite a while, and it is getting even stronger.”

Brown has made battling climate change one of the centerpieces of his tenure, traveling as far as China to marshal support for efforts to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions. He has pressed for continued enforcement of the state’s cap-and-trade program — which places limits on emissions from major polluters — despite some critics’ calls to scale back amid the weak economy. And he has repeatedly criticized Congress for not doing enough to take action.

Whittell parents want their concerns addressed

By Anne Knowles

MINDEN – A committee consisting of parents and Douglas County School District staff may be formed this fall to investigate and suggest solutions to some of the long-term issues facing Whittell High School.

Superintendent Lisa Noonan, in an update at the May 21 board meeting regarding the school's staffing, said she needed the summer to plan for what she called a study group, which then could be launched at the start of the new school year.

The goal of the group would be to look at how other small schools have dealt with such issues as declining enrollment, budget cuts and reduced curriculum, and find answers for Whittell's ongoing problems.



More than 50 people fill the room May 21 at the Douglas County School District

meeting. Photo/Anne Knowles

Enrollment at Lake Tahoe schools has dropped from a high of 942 students during the 1997-98 school year to 385 students this year.

The task force was one of the requests made by the public during a May 9 meeting of the board, where about two dozen teachers, parents and others spoke mostly about a threat to Whittell's music program.

"The launching pad is the conversation next week," Noonan said at this week's board meeting. "We need more listening and conversation. We don't have the answers tonight."

Noonan has scheduled a meeting with parents at 4:30pm May 27 at the high school, prior to a 6pm awards ceremony there, to talk further about their concerns.

About 10 parents and teachers spoke at the May 21 meeting, most reiterating the same worries voiced at the previous meeting.

Kelly Gardner, for example, said parents were very excited about meeting with Noonan next week. But she said parents had been blindsided before by unexpected changes and needed to first build trust with the school district.

"I am hopeful you have empathy for our lack of trust and that we need commitment to run our schools from decisions of what is best for our kids and not from an accounts' perspective," said Gardner during public comment. "I look forward to building a truly trusting environment to work toward a plan that works for all the students at the lake."

In a May 6 email to the board and district office staff, Noonan said, "The number of students requesting music for next year was enough to fill one class – which is a 0.20 allocation. Rather than post a job for a 20 percent contract,

we added a drama class and will use the music stipends for hiring someone to offer a music club.

"We also increased the fine arts teacher from a 60 percent contract to an 80 percent contract.

"The overall reduction at WHS for next year is a 0.40 allocation."

During her presentation, Noonan also emphasized that the district budget, which the board approved at the meeting, does not end the discussion.

"The first concern I want to alleviate is when the board sets the budget they report to the state, that is different than my role helping with allocations," said Noonan. "The board is never asked to approve at a granular level."

Noonan said deciding how to spend the money allotted is an ongoing process and a school's master schedule of classes is a "living, breathing document."

The passed budget freezes most spending categories, except for an additional \$25,000 for testing of 11th-graders, \$4,450 for software, \$50,000 for special education and \$577,125 for salaries and benefits.

There are eight employee groups and the district has negotiated contracts with all of them except for the largest group, teachers.

Several teachers spoke during public comment and two held up homemade protest signs saying, among other things, "Negotiate Don't Arbitrate," and "Transparency, Honesty, Question the Budget."

Noonan, during her update, asked that a task force of parents and staff not overlap with or negate the work of school performance plans, which are required by law and address some of the same issues in the short-term.

Board President Tom Moore said that the board could not yet approve the proposed committee because it was not an item on the board's May 21 agenda.

Nev. fires Xerox, joins federal health exchange

By Kyle Roerink, Las Vegas Sun

Nevada will abandon its state-run health exchange, sever ties with software contractor Xerox and switch to the federal system for one year to enroll its residents in health care, a state board voted Tuesday.

The Silver State Exchange's board of directors proclaimed it had "no confidence" in staying with Xerox, citing the company's inability to fix 1,500 technical glitches in the current exchange. Xerox had a \$75 million contract with the state and has spent \$12 million of that money, according to the state.

Xerox executives testified at the May 20 meeting and lobbied the board to keep the company on the project. But they did not sway the decision.

"The current system is intolerable and is not the best we can do," said Lynn Etkins, the board's vice chair.

Read the whole story

Drugs, mental health issues common with SLT criminals

By Brian Uhler

In the last two months, we shared information about crime in general and about DUI, domestic violence and public intoxication. This month, we will give you information about drug use and mental health.

From January through April:

Reported drug events 37.

Mental health detentions 34.



Brian Uhler

Barton Hospital conducts an annual “needs assessment” where they examine the community as a whole from a health perspective. It is of no surprise to us at the SLTPD that the top item on Barton’s list is substance abuse and the second item is mental health.

Regarding drugs, we recently learned that there was a statewide assessment which characterized the drug problem in El Dorado County as being twice as bad as all other counties in California. Of course, drug abuse leads to all kinds of crime problems – particularly property crimes. Some people have the strange belief that drugs should not be a police concern, but only be a matter of public health. If you happen

to be in this group, consider the following:

- One statistical report found that jail inmates convicted of robbery (56 percent), weapons violations (56 percent), burglary (55 percent), or motor vehicle theft (55 percent) were most likely to have reported to be using drugs at the time of the offense.
- Another report found that 76 percent of jail inmates who had a mental health problem were dependent on or abused alcohol or drugs, compared to 53 percent of inmates without a mental health problem.
- In another study, over 30 percent of state prisoners reported that they committed their property crime specifically to get money for drugs.

In short, drug abuse and crime are closely correlated. It seems reasonable to assume that lowering the use of drugs in our community would have a positive effect on crime.

On mental health issues, SLTPD staff members receive special training to ensure such events are handled with sensitivity and care for the affected person. This training includes working with officers and dispatchers so they can effectively recognize those with mental disabilities and sensibly intervene to restore peace when such a person is in crisis.

The El Dorado County Health Department has made significant improvements in the last year, working more closely than ever with law enforcement. A grant was recently approved which helps bolster the connection between the Health Department and law enforcement responders.

Brian Uhler is chief of the South Lake Tahoe Police Department.

California parks director calling it quits

By Chris Megerian, Los Angeles Times

Anthony Jackson, the former Marine major general who took over California's parks department with a mandate to reform the troubled agency, is leaving after 18 months on the job.

Jackson became the department's director in the wake of an accounting scandal, and he is departing in the middle of an ongoing review of park operations. His last day is June 30.

Despite some improvements, a draft report from the Parks Forward commission said more changes are still needed.

"Despite years of well-intentioned external reports and internal strategic plans, the Department has not yet been able to achieve the magnitude or scope of change needed," the report said.

Read the whole story

Judge: Vail Resorts has rights to Park City ski resort

By Jason Blevins, Denver Post

A Utah District Court ruled Wednesday that Park City Mountain Resort officials failed to renew their historic lease for a

majority of their ski terrain and the landowner is allowed to lease the ski area's upper terrain to a new operator.

That means Vail Resorts just won the rights to more than two-thirds of the land beneath Utah's most popular ski area. And it means that Park City Mountain Resort owner Powdr Corp. will go down in history as captaining the ski industry's most costly clerical error: a days-late filing to renew their decades-old, sweetheart lease could forever change their flagship ski area, which has seen Powdr invest more than \$100 million.

Powdr Corp. argued it was an "honest mistake" when the resort operator was a couple days late filing paperwork to renew its lease for land beneath Park City Mountain Resort. It was paying landowner Talisker Corp. about \$150,000 a year for the land, per the series of 20-year leases first forged in the 1970s. For comparison, Vail Resorts is paying Talisker \$25 million a year plus a percentage of revenue every year to lease the adjacent 4,000-acre Canyons ski area.

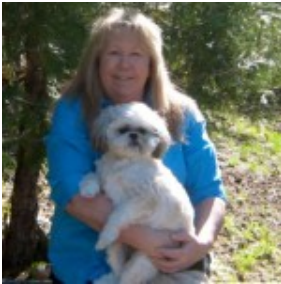
Talisker refused to sign a new lease with Powdr and went looking for a new tenant. Powdr sued Talisker to force a new deal. Talisker leased Canyons to Vail Resorts on the condition that the continent's largest resort operator takes over the Park City Mountain Resort legal battle, calling Vail Resorts a "dramatically better operator" than Powdr.

Read the whole story

Piper's house ownership in

Tahoe questioned

El Dorado County supervisor candidate Teresa Piper is quick to point out she is a dual-resident because she owns homes in Pollock Pines and South Lake Tahoe.



Teresa Piper

And with this assertion, she said it makes her more qualified than the other five candidates because she understands issues in both parts of what is now District 5.

However, Mimi Rich Hennick of Portland wrote a letter to the *Mountain Democrat* that challenges Piper's assertions.

Hennick writes, "The house she is referring to, and claiming ownership of, is currently and jointly owned by me and my ex-husband, Larry Hennick, since we purchased it in 2002. It was recently on the market and will be re-listed in the near future to be sold as part of our court-ordered divorce settlement."

Piper did not respond to *Lake Tahoe News'* inquiry about the house ownership question.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*