Missing Gardnerville woman located, safe

Update Feb. 25 8:15pm:

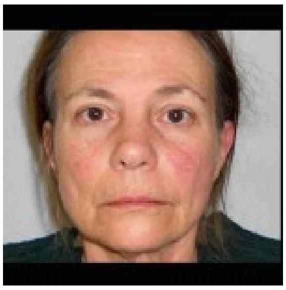
Kathy Arlana Hammond of Gardnerville has returned home after being reported as a missing person on Feb. 15.

Hammond had traveled to Los Angeles on personal business, and was unaware she was reported as a missing person.

Hammond does not possess a cell phone, and had not contacted friends or family during her trip.

—-

A Douglas County woman has not been seen for several days. Kathy Arlana Hammand, 63, was reported missing by a friend on Feb. 17. She was last seen at approximately 1pm Feb. 15.



Kathy Arlana Hammand

Hammond is reported to be driving a teal green four-door 1993 Subaru Legacy sedan, with California license plate No. 3CKF797.

Hammond is 5-feet-2-inches tall, 135 pounds, medium build, fair colored skin, long straight brown hair and brown eyes. She was last seen wearing blue jeans, a brown colored ski jacket with blue trim, and carrying a black fanny pack.

Hammond is known to frequent hiking areas in the foothills along the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

Anyone with information regarding the whereabouts of Hammond or the vehicle is asked to call the sheriff’s department at (775) 782.9908 or (775) 782.5126.

California prosecutors launch criminal inquiry into parks ‘hidden funds’

By Kevin Yamamura, Sacramento Bee

The state attorney general’s office has launched a criminal investigation of California parks officials after the “hidden funds” case seemingly reached a dead end when state and local prosecutors did not pursue charges last month.

Peter Southworth, a supervising deputy at the attorney general’s office, disclosed to a joint legislative committee Wednesday the matter is “still under criminal review in my office.” He did not specify how long the inquiry would take.

Vikingsholm at Emerald Bay

State Park at Lake Tahoe.
Photo/LTN file

Three state agencies have found that California Department of Parks and Recreation officials hid funds for at least 13 years from state lawmakers and the Department of Finance. The Bee reported last year the parks department had cloaked a surplus beyond $20 million while Gov. Jerry Brown and lawmakers threatened to close 70 parks.

The revelations resulted in the resignation of state parks director Ruth Coleman and other disciplinary actions in the department last year.

Attorney General Kamala Harris' office conducted a review that found "conscious and deliberate" acts to hide state parks fee revenue. It then transferred the file to Sacramento County District Attorney Jan Scully for review.

But the state office did not send the most damaging interview transcripts because it questioned employees using administrative, rather than criminal, procedures. The state office also did not identify who was to blame nor which laws were potentially broken.

Scully last month questioned why Harris had sent the case to her, saying that the attorney general's office has "historic authority in the prosecution … of such cases." The criminal pursuit was believed to be over at that point.

But Lynda Gledhill, spokeswoman for Harris, said her office decided to open a criminal investigation shortly after Scully declined to pursue charges, unbeknown to most until Southworth's legislative testimony.

One curiosity in the state parks controversy is why department officials hid millions of dollars when they needed the Legislature's approval to spend the funds.

State Auditor Elaine Howle in hearings this week referred to the hidden surplus as a "useless reserve" because parks officials in theory couldn't spend the money without telling lawmakers of its existence. But that left some lawmakers unsatisfied.

"I can't get my head around the nature of this," said Assemblyman Bob Blumenfield, D-Woodland Hills, chairman of the Assembly Budget Committee, asking later Wednesday whether "sheer stupidity" was to blame. If officials couldn't spend the money, Blumenfield wondered, what was their motive for willfully hiding the funds?

Howle acknowledged that after writing her 60-page audit last week, she and her colleagues were also scratching their heads.

But Howle later offered a credible, albeit complicated, hypothesis: The Legislature authorizes the parks department to spend a certain amount of self-generated fee revenue each year.

If the parks department had a down year for fee collection – say, receiving $15 million instead of $20 million that the Legislature projected – it's possible the department could have tapped $5 million out of the hidden funds. The Legislature would have already given its approval for $20 million, so the department could spend the hidden $5 million rather than face cuts.

Howle said her office plans to further explore this possibility in the coming months.

Poll: Global warming a concern to Californians

By Jon Ortiz, Sacramento Bee

A new survey shows most California voters don't like government's response to global warming and still support the state's greenhouse gas emissions law.

The Field Poll results released today show that 62 percent of voters are unhappy with the federal government's actions and nearly half, 49 percent, give low marks to what the state is doing.

Overall, about two-thirds of California voters think global warming is so serious that government needs to combat it and 70 percent support Assembly Bill 32, which aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by regulating industrial polluters.

Both support levels are down somewhat from 2007, one year after AB 32's passage, when 79 percent of voters supported the law and 76 percent wanted something done about climate change.

Republicans, voters 65 and older, Central Valley residents and voters with no more than a high school education tend to believe that more research is needed or that concerns are unwarranted, the poll found.

They also tended to be "by far the people most opposed to AB 32," said Field Poll Director Mark DiCamillo. "Any government action is misguided, from their standpoint."

Luis Hernandez, a 26-year-old registered Democrat, said he's a global-warming skeptic. He thinks government is overreacting.

"It's what I hear on the news," said the Merced resident, "but I'm not a scientist."

On the other side, Democrats, independents, voters up to age 40, San Francisco Bay Area residents, Asian Americans and college graduates tended to think global warming is serious and merits more government action.

"The skeptics don't think government has a role," DiCamillo said. "People who do, view the federal government as dragging its feet."

Sacramento catering business owner Rose Wallace, 63, said the weather has become "topsy-turvy" in her lifetime, and that government work to counter it.

"I think we're going to wait on doing something until it's too late," Wallace said. "This is serious."

Lack of approved software prevents Nevada from offering online poker

By Cy Ryan, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY — Even though the Legislature rushed through a bill on Internet poker Thursday, the state has yet to approve the software to allow the game to be offered to the public.

The Assembly and the Senate gave unanimous approval to the emergency measure, and Gov. Brian Sandoval held a quick signing ceremony.

Gov. Brian Sandoval signed Internet poker legislation last week. Photo/LTN file

But A.G. Burnett, chairman of the Nevada Gaming Control Board, said Friday the computer systems to put the game online are still being tested.

“We have to certify that the software meets state standards,” Burnett said. “The technicians are moving full steam ahead.”

He had no estimate when the first system would be approved.

The state Gaming Commission has issued licenses to nine operators to enter the online poker market. The 2011 Legislature opened the door for companies to offer Internet poker within Nevada.

The bill approved Thursday allows Nevada to sign agreements with other states to offer Internet poker.

Sandoval asked the Legislature to approve the bill within 30 days of the start of the session so Nevada could be the first to enter the field. New Jersey is considering a similar bill.

Sandoval said the bill would “usher in the next frontier of gaming in Nevada. This bill is critical to our state’s economy and ensures that we will continue to be the gold standard of gaming regulation.”

A bill in Congress to permit Internet gambling on a national level has been bottled up.

Land trust assists Tahoe residents with affordable housing

By Kathryn Reed

A desire to do something for his community.

That is how the now 10-year-old St. Joseph Community Land Trust came into being. Lyn Barnett learned about land trusts at a planning convention in 2001. He was convinced during a lecture that a land trust is what Tahoe needed.

“A lot of long-term renters were asking for help because people were turning rentals into vacation rentals,” Barnett said.

At the time Barnett was working for the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. Patrick Conway was the housing coordinator for South Lake Tahoe. Together they researched land trusts to figure out how best to form the local one. At the time there were about 100 in the United States, mostly on the East Coast. Now there are close to three times that number.

Creating a land trust to serve both sides of the state line made it the first bistate trust. It is also faith based, which is not unusual for trusts. Barnett has long been affiliated with the Catholic Church. One benefit for the group is the free office space at St. Theresa Church.

But when it comes to who is on the board, who is helped or who may donate, religion is not part of the equation.

“Our mission is primarily housing, but also housing education, and education that helps people with basic skills in financing to help their overall knowledge to better themselves,” Barnett told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Our primary goal is to help low and moderate income people, but also the general public through education training.”

(See note below about financial workshop.)

The land trust is the majority owner of Sierra Garden Apartments in South Lake Tahoe. The 76-unit complex is all affordable housing. No one has to pay more than 30 percent of his or her income.

Barnett said there is a four-year waiting list for the one-bedroom apartments, and a two- to three-year wait for the two-bedroom units.

Residents are able to serve on the six-member board of the trust.

Barnett’s measure of success for the land trust will be when a majority of the board members are residents. Now one of the six is a resident. He wants the people to have more of say in what goes on with their living quarters.

St. Joseph Land Trust also built a house on Tallac Street about four blocks from Lake Tahoe. The group was the first to do so under TRPA’s moderate housing guidelines.

It was then sold to someone who fit the economic guidelines.

The trust owns the land it's built on. The house must always be sold to someone who meets the moderate-income qualifications.

"The general perception is that the housing market is affordable. But it's not to locals. And we also have depressed wages," Barnett said. "Incline is high on our target list. They really see need up there."

But he said it's hard to convince businesses that it is good for them to have workers live locally. So they don't give to the land trust, which could help provide affordable housing.

"In the future I would like to see more partnerships. If the economy is truly indeed improving, people need to know we exist and we can potentially help with their housing needs," Barnett said.

Working with the local chapter of Habitat for Humanity is a possibility. They could do the rehab work on a fixer up that the trust would buy and then sell to a qualified moderate-income buyer.

A summer workshop geared toward seniors to teach them how not to be a victim of fraud has been talked about.

More information about St. Joseph Land Trust may be found online.

–

Note:

The free financial education workshop at Lake Tahoe Community College is Feb. 25 from 6-8pm. The focus will be on financial goal setting, budgeting, money savings tips, and basic bank accounts. The speaker is from Wells Fargo Bank.

RSVP to (530) 541.4660, ext. 741 or email Alee@ltcc.edu. Space is limited. The event is in Room G4. St. Joseph Community Land

Trust and LTCC’s Student Support Services are sponsoring the event.

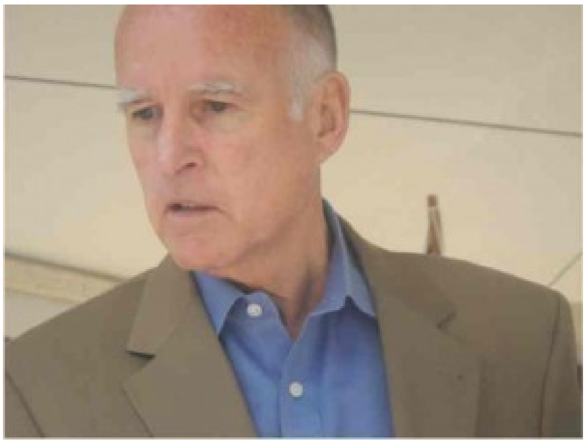
Brown wants local control for school districts

By Sharon Noguchi, San Jose Mercury News

Jerry Brown is pushing an appealing idea: Local control for local schools.

Bucking a national trend, the governor wants to back the state away from making schools account for their spending and for punishing them if their students lag in achievement.

But, perhaps surprisingly, school officials aren’t jumping up and down about the proposal.



Gov. Jerry Brown wants to revamp education in

California. Photo/LTN file

Elsewhere, education is becoming more results-driven, with everyone from Uncle Sam down to the smallest startup charter school demanding more and more evidence, usually through test scores, that they're getting enough bang for their buck.

The governor wants none of that – but it's unlikely he will get his way and free schools entirely from state oversight. Brown is proposing that school districts tie their plans for student achievement to their budgets. The 58 county offices of education would have the responsibility of approving those plans.

"A central authority should only perform those tasks which cannot be performed at a more immediate or local level," Brown said in his State of the State address.

"We are moving more authority, accountability and responsibility down to the local level," said H.D. Palmer, spokesman for the state Department of Finance.

The governor would free schools from line-item reviews in Sacramento over how they spent specific pots of money, and wants the state not to punish schools whose students are failing. Instead, Brown puts his faith in the power of the people – to turn local school board members out of office if their schools don't perform.

Many school officials like the possibility of reducing accounting and paperwork.

"I really appreciate that," said Scott Laurence, superintendent of the San Mateo Union High School District. He'd like more leeway in using funds in ways the district determines best serves students.

But he worries that without specific state demands, schools won't always pay as much attention as they should to various student needs.

In fact, Brown’s proposal sounds like it would take schools back 70 years, when local districts answered only to themselves and their voters. What prompted the state legislators to create 60-odd educational programs — focusing on migrant children, gifted and talented students, English-language learners, arts, counseling and more — was that schools weren’t meeting perceived needs.

“They have forced school districts to pay attention to groups of students that haven’t been a major emphasis for school districts,” Laurence said.

What’s more, the state Supreme Court has ruled that the state has a constitutional obligation to ensure that all students have basic equality of opportunity in education. “That’s a non-delegable role,” said John Affeldt, managing attorney of Public Advocates, a public-interest law firm that has sued the state on various school-equity issues.

That said, Affeldt too thinks the state is overly focused on specific kinds of achievement. “I think the pendulum probably has swung too far to narrow the whole focus of our educational venture around performance.”

And while he advocates pushing the pendulum back, he said, “we can’t swing it all the way back to the 1950s.”

Brown may not want to tell districts how to spend money, but state legislators could have other ideas. “The Legislature has never shown any evidence they believe in local control,” said Ron Bennett, president of School Services Inc., which advises most of the 1,000 school districts in the state on state education finance and law.

But whatever Sacramento decides, it will retain the role of enforcer of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which demands that schools receiving federal aid attain minimal levels of proficiency. The state jumps in with advisers and money – up to $100,000 per school – when districts have large numbers of failing students. Nearly half of California's 1,000 school districts fall into that category, called "program improvement" by the federal government.

Even as school officials concede that it is cumbersome to answer to higher authorities, they point out that student achievement has steadily grown in the decade since the state beefed up its academic oversight. In addition, a laissez-faire accountability system could make comparisons among school districts tricky.

If each district chooses how it wants to look at accountability, said Mike Nebesnick, director of educational accountability for San Jose Unified, "I don't think they're going to be lined up."

Brown stands behind the principle of "subsidiarity," which he said is violated "when distant authorities prescribe in minute detail what is taught, how it is taught and how it is to be measured."

But as much as educators may like flexibility, they worry mostly about funding. Californians have to demand an increase in per-pupil funding, said Wesley Smith, superintendent of the Morgan Hill Unified School District. "We are still 48 out of 50 in per-pupil funding. California students deserve more."

Law would shield public real

estate transactions

By Jim Sanders, Sacramento Bee

When CalPERS balked at releasing records that could shed light on its decision to invest $100 million in an East Palo Alto housing project that failed, a judge ordered disclosure nearly three years ago.

San Francisco Superior Court Judge Charlotte Woolard's ruling said it is difficult to imagine a more critical time for public scrutiny of the decision-making process than when public funds are at stake.

But newly proposed legislation would make such real estate records confidential in the future, requiring public agencies to disclose gains or losses on a project but not documents that could show why a deal was made, risks involved, marketing strategy or partnership terms.

Assemblyman Kevin Mullin said his Assembly Bill 382 is designed to strike a balance between open government and the need to protect public investments from competitive disadvantage.

Withholding "sensitive information" about real estate deals is in the public interest to "ensure that pension funds are as profitable as possible so that taxpayers aren't left holding the bag," said Mullin, D-South San Francisco.

The California Public Employees' Retirement System has taken no position on AB382, which is sponsored by the State Association of County Retirement Systems.

California’s pension systems invest massive sums in real estate – CalPERS, for example, had real estate investments exceeding $24 billion on Jan. 1, roughly 10 percent of its total investments.

Peter Scheer, director of the First Amendment Coalition, which sued CalPERS in the East Palo Alto case, said the pension agency has been involved in large real estate deals that went sour.

AB382 would “increase the chances that mistakes will be made in real estate investments” because critics would be deprived of documents that could prompt them to raise red flags, Scheer said.

“I think public pensioners and the taxpayers generally benefit from as much transparency as possible,” he said.

The East Palo Alto project raised public-policy as well as investment issues after tenants complained they were harassed and driven out in an effort to circumvent the city’s rent-control laws.

AB382 would add real estate to a list of “alternative investment vehicles” for public agencies – including hedge funds, venture capital funds and private equity funds – that generate internal documents that have been exempt from disclosure since 2005.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed the limited exemption in 2005, responding to concerns that state agencies would lose lucrative opportunities to partner with private investment groups because proprietary information might be released through public records requests.

A legislative analysis of the 2005 legislation, Senate Bill 439, said that investments by the University of California in its top two performing funds over a 14-year period, generating $1.84 billion for UC, were in jeopardy unless changes were made to public records law.

The 2005 bill was a compromise stemming partly from litigation by the First Amendment Coalition and others that resulted in CalPERS disclosing its fees to venture capital firms. The McClatchy Co., owner of the *Bee*, is a member of the First Amendment Coalition.

Specifically, the changes from 2005 require public agencies to release records identifying each investment, dollars committed, profits, cash distributions, internal rates of return, and management fees and costs.

However, public agencies can withhold investment agreements, capital call notices, portfolio positions, due diligence materials, information distributed at partner meetings, and quarterly or annual financial statements about a project.

Robert Van Der Volgen, chief counsel for the Los Angeles County Employees Retirement Association, said AB382 would protect strategic real estate records that could be exploited by other investors.

“We get lots of requests from people who just want to compete: What’s your rental rate? What’s your lease rate? If I tell you that, especially if you own the building across the street, I basically just put myself at a competitive disadvantage,” Van Der Volgen said.

Attorney Karl Olson, who filed the East Palo Alto lawsuit, said that AB 382 could result in withholding documents that could show, for example, that a staff recommendation not to invest in a massive project had been ignored or that a private partner was nearly bankrupt when a big deal occurred.

Scheer said that state law already provides confidentiality if an agency can show that withholding a document “clearly outweighs the public interest served by disclosure.” It also exempts appraisals and other real estate-related evaluations prior to a sale involving public funds.

"Beyond that limited exception, I think the rule should be – and it should apply to real estate transactions as much as any other – that the public is entitled to know all the basic information about these kinds of deals," Scheer said.

California making provisions if Nevada leaves TRPA Compact

By Kathryn Reed

Two California state senators introduced a bill on Friday that would bring changes to the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

SB630 amends a series of sections of government code relating to the California Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. The bill is authored by state Sens. Fran Pavley, D-Agoura Hills, and Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento.

California is working on protecting its assets at Lake Tahoe. Photo/LTN file

It asks that the TRPA Regional Plan adopted in December be recognized.

The bill talks about California needing a contingency plan if Nevada goes forward with the provisions in its Senate Bill 271 which calls for the Silver State to withdraw from the bistate Compact in 2015. SB271 was passed two years ago when it looked like the Regional Plan might not get adopted and was at a time when the states were not playing nice.

Since then, officials from both state governments helped create a bridge to compromise that led to the near unanimous adoption of the Regional Plan more than two months ago.

There has been talk among Nevada legislators to repeal that bill in the current session. But the Sierra Club and Friends of the West Shore lawsuit to prevent the Regional Plan from taking effect could play a role in what Nevada does.

The California law introduced Feb. 22 says, “For California to have due time to protect its many interests in the Tahoe basin, the state will need to have a contingency plan in place prior to the dissolution of the bistate Compact, as contemplated by Senate Bill 271.”

It goes on to say, “The bill would revise the membership of the governing body of the agency to eliminate the existing five members of the governing body, and prescribe requirements for the appointment of a new nine-member governing board. The bill would also revise the composition of a technical advisory committee required to be appointed by the agency, and would request the participation of a representative of the governing board of the Nevada Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. The bill would eliminate a provision authorizing the governing body of the agency to contract with the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency for services.”

If Nevada rescinds SB271 and remains part of the Compact that the federal government established more than 40 years ago, then SB630 would likely not go forward.

Thousands of California teachers missing needed credentials

By Joanna Lin, California Watch

The last time Charlie Parker took a social studies class, he was a teenager with an Afro and Jimmy Carter was president of the United States. Yet here he was, standing at the front of a classroom, trying to teach dozens of high schoolers subjects that never appealed to him when he learned them more than 30 years ago.

On his first day teaching U.S. history, world history and economics at McAlister High School in Los Angeles nearly four years ago, Parker struggled to keep his course materials straight and handed a student the wrong textbook. Some days, his students' questions went unanswered or were directed to the Internet. Later, Parker said, when his students took state tests, their scores were low.

After school, Parker said, "I was doing homework, just like the kids."

These were not the troubles of a rookie teacher. In fact, Parker had taught for more than 20 years, including 11 at McAlister.

The problem for Parker, who taught social studies at McAlister for two years and now teaches at another Los Angeles high school, was that he should not have taught history to begin with.

Every year in California, public school administrators assign thousands of teachers to classes for which they lack the credentials or legal authorization to teach. Untrained teachers have been assigned to a variety of difficult classes, including those filled with English-language learners and others with special intellectual and physical needs. Or, in Parker's case, to teach social studies when they're credentialed for biology.

Nearly 1 in 10 teachers or certificated personnel – more than 32,000 school employees – did not have the credentials or authorization for their positions from 2007 through 2011, according to data compiled by the state Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

The problem is greater at low-performing schools, where students are overwhelmingly low-income and Latino. The average rate of improperly assigned teachers at these schools was 16 percent over the same period.

"That isn't something that should be acceptable to anybody," said Brooks Allen, director of education advocacy at the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California.

In the 2010-11 school year, more than 12,000 teachers and certificated personnel at more than 1,000 low-performing schools served in positions they should not have held. On average at these schools, 82 percent of students qualified for free or reduced-price meals, and more than three-quarters were Latino, a California Watch analysis found.

Research and interviews with state and local education officials suggest that staffing turnover and shortages, insufficient resources, poor planning and mismanagement contribute to assigning teachers to classes for which they lack specialized training.

This problem of “misassignments,” as they’re known, has improved dramatically since the 2005-06 school year, when the state began giving greater attention to teacher assignments at low-performing schools. At the time, 29 percent of teachers at these schools lacked licenses for their positions.

Teachers gaining authorization to instruct English-language learners have driven much of that progress. The extra scrutiny – a product of Williams v. California, a landmark class-action lawsuit that in 2004 charged the state with ensuring all students had qualified, credentialed teachers – also has helped.

Still, the rate of improperly assigned teachers at low-performing schools has hovered above a persistent 12 percent. (It’s unclear how California ranks nationally; states have different standards and policies for employing teachers, making comparisons difficult.)

“The persistence of misassignments, year over year, even with annual monitoring, certainly suggests that it’s something that needs to be looked at,” said Allen, the attorney assigned to implement the Williams settlement.

Public Advocates, which represented students in the Williams lawsuit, has called for the Legislature to hold a hearing on the problem and for the credentialing commission to push the issue.

Alamo Democrat Joan Buchanan, chairwoman of the Assembly Education Committee, said that while she is open to holding a hearing, she is “not sure passing a law is going to be like waving a magic wand and solve the problem there.” She said she hoped the State Board of Education and Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson would also look into the issue.

Ensuring teachers are appropriately licensed “is very important back-office work that nobody ever sees and can pay huge dividends and, in some instances, be very harmful to kids,” said Michael Hanson, superintendent of the Fresno Unified School District.

In one case, at the public Berkeley Technology Academy, a student failed the California High School Proficiency Examination after enrolling in a class intended to prepare her and other credit-deficient students for the test. The student later told her mother that the class included nothing she encountered on the exam, which allows students to receive the equivalent of a high school diploma.

“I paid good money for my daughter to participate (in) this CHSPE experiment only to find out that the teacher may have been unqualified to teach it, and that she did not adequately prepare the students to take the final exam,” the student’s mother wrote in a June 2011 complaint.

The Berkeley Unified School District acknowledged in a letter to the mother that a noncredentialed staff member had taught the course. It offered her daughter 20 hours of private instruction and the option to enroll at the high school for a fifth year.

While credentials and legal authorization do not guarantee effective teachers, they represent the baseline qualifications that educators must have. If a teacher has been assigned to the wrong class, his or her performance evaluation is nullified under state law, making it more difficult to identify bad – and good – teachers.

The Commission on Teacher Credentialing typically needs to work with only a handful of school districts that struggle to resolve improper assignments on their own, said Roxann Purdue, a consultant in the agency’s professional services division.

Yet the lengthy, laborious and often paper-heavy process of monitoring assignments means that teachers and other staff can remain in the wrong positions for months.

County offices of education typically begin compiling paperwork from school districts in late fall or winter. Once they identify teachers who lack necessary credentials or authorization and notify the district, the district has 30 days to address the problems. By the time it’s all resolved – teachers must be reassigned, get the appropriate credentials, receive emergency or short-term permits or local authorizations, obtain waivers or resign – the school year could be nearly over.

In the 2011-12 school year, for example, Alameda County notified the Oakland Unified School District on May 15 to correct any remaining teacher assignment problems by June 30 – 15 days after the school year ended, records show. A letter listed 50 teachers whose qualifications were unclear or who held inappropriate assignments.

“If we had a whole bunch of people working on it, we could identify the misassignment sooner. You’re talking about one manager, one analyst – that’s all we are,” said Stephanie Tomasi, Alameda’s credentials manager.

County officials said there’s little they can do to expedite the monitoring process. School schedules and staffing tend to shift during the first month or two of school, so counties don’t begin monitoring until classes are settled. Schools, too, need time to gather their records.

“It seems like we want to catch it (improperly assigned teachers) really early in the school year so you don’t have a student going all year without services or whatever they need,” said Teresa Ussery, a credential analyst for Stanislaus

County, which requests district documents in October and reports assignment problems in March and April. “But just because of timelines and processes, it’s very hard to do that — especially if it’s a large district.”

Still, Ussery said, problems identified late in one school year pay off the following school year. Schools learn to not repeat the same mistakes, she said.

In the Berkeley case, for example, the district said that the class led by an uncredentialed staff member would no longer be offered and that credentialed teachers would teach all courses at the school.

Improper assignments often are the result of school administrators who do not know that even elective or short-term courses require appropriate certification, said Purdue of the credentialing commission.

Middle and high schools in particular, she said, are offering more experimental courses that are less straightforward to staff than, say, a physics class.

Still, nearly 2,400 teachers in low-performing schools were assigned to teach core academic subjects — English, math, science and social science — without the appropriate credentials or authorization during the 2010-11 school year.

By comparison, teachers lacking authorization to teach English-language learners — which numbered more than 22,200 in the 2005-06 school year — plummeted to 1,575.

“That is a success story,” said Allen of the ACLU. “So the question is, what is it that needs to be done to have that similar trend across the board?”

California teachers of all subjects must have authorization to teach English learners, even if they have just one student in their class who is learning the language. But Purdue said what worked to increase authorizations for teaching English-language learners does not apply to other subjects.

“It’s an isolated problem with a permanent solution, whereas the other subjects areas, it’s a new opportunity to misassign them every semester and every year,” she said.

The commission tackled the problem with English-learner authorization by first offering training opportunities to existing credentialed teachers. It then phased in English-learner training at educator preparation programs so that all new teachers would automatically have the authorization.

“You’d keep closing the circle until it becomes smaller and smaller,” Purdue said. “But you can’t do that for math, because if someone’s misassigned in math, we have to have all teachers authorized in every subject to close every loophole.”

Hanson, of Fresno Unified, said assigning teachers outside of what their credentials allow is sometimes the best solution to a Rubik’s cube of teachers, students, courses and schedules.

In the last school year, for example, scheduling conflicts led to a high school algebra teacher instructing one period of geometry, a course the teacher’s credential did not permit. “I’m not going to find a geometry teacher who can work one period during the day,” Hanson said. “Here’s the only way I can get it done.”

In certain locations and subjects, such as math, science and special education, incorrect assignments could reflect teacher shortages. These shortages are most critical in schools concentrated with low-income and minority students and in districts with fewer resources, a state task force reported in September.

“You can’t leave it up to local principals to find good teachers and well-prepared teachers if they don’t exist,” said Linda Darling-Hammond, chairwoman of the Commission on Teacher

Credentialing, who also co-led the task force. “Ultimately, you have to invest in getting enough teachers in shortage fields and invest in getting enough teachers who will teach in shortage locations.”

Teacher layoffs – California schools cut about 32,000 teachers between 2007-08 and 2010-11 – ought to have produced a larger supply of qualified teachers, said John Affeldt, who served as lead counsel on the Williams lawsuit and is a managing attorney at Public Advocates.

But most districts have policies that allow them to hold on to teachers in high-need areas, even when layoffs are required, said Sharon Robison, the Association of California School Administrators’ liaison to the credentialing commission. Teachers who are laid off are not always qualified in the subjects or available in the locations that schools need, she said.

It took Oakland Unified five months to find a permanent teacher for a class of 12 severely disabled children at Fred T. Korematsu Discovery Academy. Seven substitutes led the class before a teacher from Washington state could take over Nov. 1, more than two months after the start of the school year.

Of the 30 to 40 applications Principal Charles Wilson saw prior to the teacher’s hiring, seven applicants had appropriate credentials and three were interviewed. None was a good fit for the position, he said.

Low-performing schools like his are sometimes accused of “intentionally trying to hire young, kind of throwaway teachers because they’re cheap,” Wilson said. “But the reality of it is those kinds of (qualified, experienced) teachers don’t apply to these kinds of schools. They don’t take an interview.”

Even though his elementary school has a positive reputation as being supportive of teachers, Wilson said, “people are scared. … It’s too much of a stress they don’t want to take on.”

Education officials and critics agree that much progress has been made in reducing the number of incorrect assignments. Among nearly 300 low-performing schools that had improper assignments for six consecutive years, 79 percent had fewer instances of the problem in 2010-11 than they did in 2005-06.

Seven years ago, Huntington Park Senior High School, south of downtown Los Angeles, had more improper assignments than any other school in the state. In fact, it had more misassignments than it had teachers – 477 in all, indicating that staff members lacked more than one necessary credential or authorization for their positions.

After years of poor student performance, Huntington Park underwent a dramatic district-ordered transformation in 2011 that switched it from a year-round calendar to traditional school year and required teachers to reinterview for their jobs. The school replaced about 70 percent of its staff in less than two months.

School administrators, themselves newcomers, saw the process as an opportunity to ensure all teachers had the credentials for a predictable stable of classes that mirror those required for admittance to California universities, said Freddy Lara, the school’s assistant principal. Lara said the Los Angeles Unified School District referred the school only qualified, credentialed candidates for each position.

Today, the school’s principal, Lupe Hernandez, reports that the campus has no incorrect assignments. But Huntington Park may be an outlier. Most schools cannot require all their teachers to reapply for jobs, and doing so would not necessarily prevent future assignment problems.

“This is really about the tension between what students need every year and the adults that we’ve already hired in the system and probably have permanent (tenured) status," said Hanson of Fresno Unified.

Schools should always strive to have no improperly assigned teachers, Hanson and other education officials said. But they doubted that was a realistic possibility.

"I don't think it's a menacing problem that people haven't really tried to work on," said Robison of the Association of California School Administrators. "It's just that you have over 1,000 school districts, hundreds of thousands of students, and on any given day, you're going to have a vacancy you need to fill because you have students who are there and ready to learn – and expecting to learn – and you have to teach them."

Ritz-Carlton selling multimillion dollar homes in Truckee

By Kathryn Reed

TRUCKEE – Clearly there is a demand for high-end properties in the greater Lake Tahoe area because within days of full ownership residences at the Ritz-Carlton at Northstar coming on the market some are already in escrow.

The public was able to stroll through the multimillion dollar penthouse floor parcels last weekend. Seventeen homes are available on the sixth floor and another six on the third floor.

For Nora Lacey of Newcastle it was the level of service, quality of food and the people at the Ritz that convinced her buying was the correct decision. She and her family will have a second home on the third floor.

Twenty-three full ownership residences at the Ritz-Carlton, Lake Tahoe were released this month. Photos/Kathryn Reed

“We had been considering a cabin on the lake,” Lacey said as she and her two adult daughters perused the sixth floor during the open house Feb. 17. “With a vacation home, you don’t want to worry about it.”

Frozen pipes, shoveling, driving — those are things they won’t have to worry about once they arrive. And for the family members who ski, a concierge will lay their skis in snow so they can schuss to various lifts at midmountain.

The Bay Area is the primary market for the residences, with those in their mid-30s and mid-40s making the most inquiries, according to Jenn Wade, who is handling publicity for the residences.

The two-, three- and four-bedroom penthouses range from 1,554- to 3,407-square-feet at a price between $1.25 million and $4.5 million.

Wade told *Lake Tahoe News* the change in ownership at the Ritz and the uptick in the housing market are why the residences finally went on sale – more than three years after the property opened midmountain at the Northstar ski resort.

Kennedy Wilson and its partners acquired the Ritz-Carlton, Lake Tahoe and Ritz-Carlton Residences, Lake Tahoe in December 2012.

The $300 million hotel opened in December 2009 as the recession was taking hold. Developer East West Partners was not able to pay its debts, defaulting on a $165 million loan in 2011. Placer County records reveal the Kennedy Wilson group paid $73.6 million for the whole site.

Four models are open – two by San Francisco designer Jay Jeffers and two by Truckee's Debbie Costa. Jeffers will do a third that will be done in mid-March.

The designers started with almost a blank canvas. The wood floor and mostly Wolf appliances were already installed. Large windows throughout capture either views of the ski slopes or the Martis Valley.

Some places have a double-sided fireplace – the second side being on the balcony. All have high ceilings. Recessed lighting is throughout, but so is plenty of natural lighting. And unusual angles are throughout most of the rooms, which adds character and uniqueness to each home.

"Modern mountain" is how Jeffers described his approach.

"The wood beams and fireplaces and stone create a nice palette," Jeffers told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He used a cloud fixture above the dining room table in one residence "because we are in the clouds here. When you are under it, it is like a cumulus cloud."

Costa had two weeks and a tight budget to come up with her offerings. She tried to use as many local vendors as possible. While her décor is more understated than what Jeffers came up with, they seem more livable.

For those who choose to go with an approved Ritz-Carlton interior, they can put their residence in the hotel rental pool. Otherwise, if renting is what they want to do with a non-approved design, they can do so on their own or through a separate firm.

For more info about the Ritz Residences, go online.

ngg_shortcode_0_placeholder Click on photos to enlarge.