

Valley students to see some changes at their schools

Excerpted from the Fresno Bee, Monday, Aug. 16, 2010

Fresno Unified

Some Fresno Unified students will arrive on campuses in new buses powered by compressed natural gas. Thirty buses were paid for with a \$5 million grant from the California Air Resources Board and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The buses are less polluting and will reduce fuel costs.

At Duncan Polytechnical High School in central Fresno, a pilot preschool program launches today to better prepare neighborhood children for kindergarten.

Meal time will see a few changes, too. New breakfast and lunch items include yogurt with peaches and granola, and oven-baked curly fries, part of the district's effort to increase meal options and offer more healthy items.

Teachers and administrators will be using a new computer program called ATLAS, which stands for Achievement, Technology, Learning and Assessment System.

The program was developed by the district and Microsoft, and will be phased in to replace the PowerSchool and mainframe systems for tracking enrollment, scheduling, attendance and grades for the district's 73,000 students. Parents will be able to access the new system.

Other changes will be more visible: 13 elementary schools will be undergoing modernization, as will Tioga Middle School and Bullard High School. The upgrades are funded by Measure K bond money.

And there will be some new faces in charge at 19 schools. The principals were either promoted, transferred or hired at the schools.

-- Tracy Correa

Yosemite plans controlled burn

By The Record

Stockton Record, Tuesday, Aug. 17, 2010

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK - Many of Yosemite National Park's scenic vistas are gradually disappearing from view, and park officials are considering a long-term plan to do something about it.

There's nothing wrong with the dramatic granite domes and cascading waterfalls. The problem is with how humans have managed forests and meadows for 160 years. Dense vegetation in areas such as Yosemite Valley is blocking some of the views.

Yosemite National Park staff in 2009 inventoried 181 scenic vistas and found that about one-third were completely blocked by encroaching vegetation and that half were at least partially blocked. The biggest culprit: the lack of fire.

Park officials are proposing to cut back some of the overgrown patches, and in some cases, to allow fire to thin park vegetation. Under one alternative preferred by park staff, crews would clear and maintain 93 of the now-blocked vistas, with initial clearing of 30 sites per year in the first few years of the plan.

The public has until Sept. 17 to comment on a recently-completed environmental assessment of the proposed Scenic Vista Management Plan. The 295-page report details the likely impacts of the plan on everything from air pollution to park wildlife.

To see the plan, visit parkplanning.nps.gov, use the pop-up menu to go to Yosemite National Park and click on "Open for comment."

[Modesto Bee and Sacramento Bee, Commentary, Tuesday, Aug. 17, 2010:](#)

Dan Walters: Storm blows again over diesel-soot rule

By Dan Walters

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger staged a set-piece media event in a Southern California railyard Monday and, among other things, echoed the assertions of his air quality regulator, Mary Nichols, that diesel truck and locomotive soot is a major health hazard.

But is it?

There's actually an intense argument in scientific and regulatory circles about diesel "particulates" – so intense that the leading academic critic of proposed diesel soot regulations has been ousted from his professorship at UCLA for, he says, not going with the academic and political flow.

Last year, the professor, Dr. James Enstrom, blew the whistle on an Air Resources Board staffer, Hien Tran, whose report on diesel emissions was the basis for tough ARB regulations, telling board officials that Tran had falsified his academic credentials.

ARB chair Nichols and other officials kept the revelation a secret, even from other board members, until one member, John Telles of Fresno, did his own investigation and complained about the cover-up.

Nichols disowned Tran but left his research, concluding that diesel soot was a major cause of premature deaths, intact and began writing regulations. A few weeks later, UCLA's department of environmental health sciences began termination proceedings against Enstrom, despite his three-decade-long career at the university.

Enstrom says he's being canned for refusing to go along with the prevailing departmental view that diesel soot is a killer. "My research didn't show any relationship between premature deaths and the level of fine particulate air pollution in California," he said Monday. "These people (in the department hierarchy) have just decided to ... hold a secret vote and voted me out."

Unless overturned on appeal, Enstrom's dismissal will take effect in two weeks. He said he was given ever-changing reasons, ranging from financial to a clash of philosophy, but suspects that his revelations about Tran and the department's research grants from the ARB sparked a drive to "get me terminated and silenced."

The California Dump Truck Owners Association and other groups opposed to the pending diesel rules, in a lengthy letter to the UCLA administration last week, complained about his firing.

"Neither the university nor the School of Public Health would make any personnel decision because an individual took an unpopular position," the school's assistant dean, Sarah Anderson, said in an e-mail. "The university considers personnel matters to be confidential."

It's another unsavory chapter in the diesel soot saga. By all appearances, not only did the ARB cover up Tran's falsification but its sycophants on the UCLA faculty are punishing the man who blew the whistle.

If the Legislature's oversight committees and investigative staffs were doing their jobs, they'd delve into this mess. Don't hold your breath.