

TEACHERS ARE FRIENDS



Facebook is revolutionizing all parts our world. In Kentucky (and probably lots of other places) teachers are using the social media site to communicate with students, especially during snow days. “I’ve been doing snow day assignments online because we had so many snow days last year,” teacher Tara Gupton told the Kentucky Daily News. How do the students like it? “Sometimes it seems unfair when you talk to other friends on Facebook,” says student Amanda. “But it’s actually pretty helpful.”

WEBSITE ADS

In 2009, Washington investigated the revenue potential of selling ads on state websites. The state decided to start carrying ads from the Hawaii Tourism Authority on the Washington ferries website. Now lawmakers are considering a bill to allow ads on more agency websites, including the Washington Lottery’s. A fiscal note estimates that between \$56,000 and \$84,000 a year could be generated from the lottery’s website alone. Any state website using a .gov domain name, however, would have to redirect traffic to a .com address first, since the U.S. General Services Administration prohibits private advertisements on .gov websites. Lawmakers in Connecticut and Texas are considering similar bills to allow ads on state websites.

SAY WHAT?

“If you don’t understand what you’re voting for, the right to vote doesn’t mean anything,” says Natalie Landreth, a staff attorney for the Native American Rights Fund. Landreth used this argument in a 2007 suit filed by a group of Yup’ik-speaking Alaska Natives, claiming that they were entitled to ballots and other election information in their language based on the minority language protections in the Voting Rights Act. Alaska is home to 24,000 Yup’ik—an Eskimo-Aleut language—speakers. The case was settled just last year, and Alaska will now be providing sample ballots and voter outreach materials in Yup’ik. Native speakers of Cherokee, Dakota and Navajo also are provided with voter guides for federal elections in their languages.

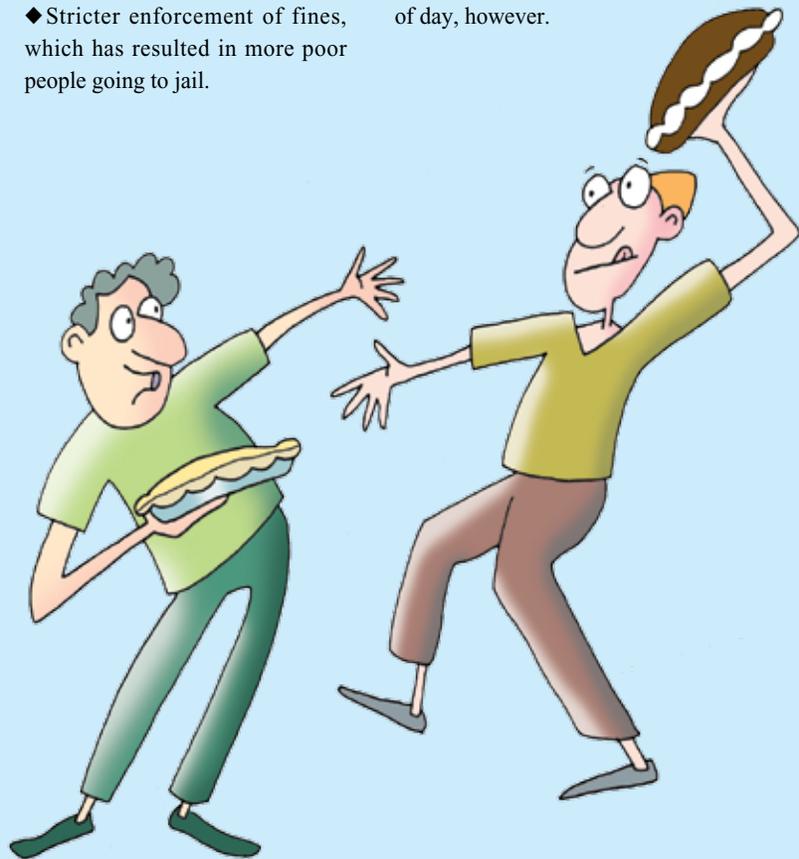
WOUNDED JUSTICE

Public hearings held by the American Bar Association in February revealed how courts are feeling the sting of state budget cuts. An article in the ABA Journal reported some states have experienced:

- ◆ Civil jury trials being suspended for a year.
- ◆ State court judges going without health insurance.
- ◆ Courts asking vendors to provide free pens and pencils.
- ◆ Courts not accepting filings because they can’t afford paper to make copies.
- ◆ Stricter enforcement of fines, which has resulted in more poor people going to jail.

LIGHTS OUT IN COLORADO

Coloradans will continue to spring forth and fall behind since a House bill to eliminate daylight saving time was postponed indefinitely. Representative Ed Vigil introduced it on behalf of “all those people who can’t deal with going backward and coming forward.” He cited a study by the American Psychological Association that discovered more injuries to miners on the Mondays following the time switch. A Senate bill to put the state on daylight savings time year-round still may see the light of day, however.



WAR OVER WHOOPIE PIE

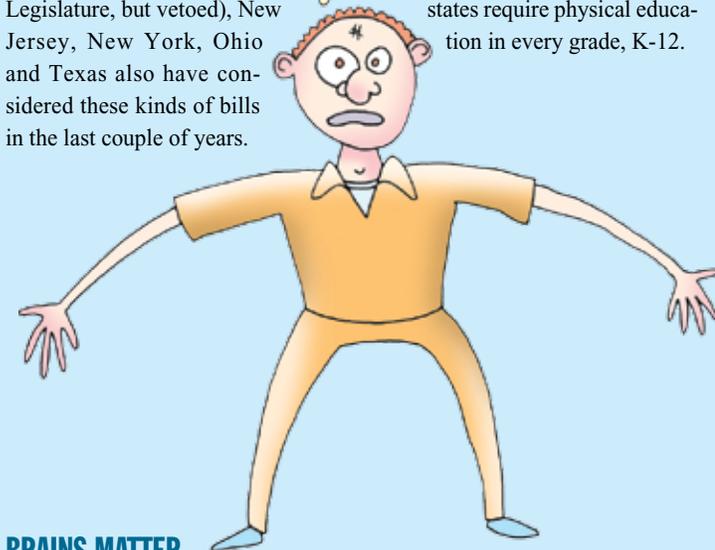
Whether a dessert or a treat, the Whoopie Pie was the center of quite the food fight in Maine. Lawmakers nominated the pie (two cakes with frosting in the middle) to be the official state dessert, but changed that to the official treat because of health concerns around childhood obesity. Supporters hope the official designation will promote tourism and benefit the state’s Whoopie Pie businesses. Others wanted the blueberry pie to receive the title and marketing attention. Lawmakers may need to act fast before Pennsylvanians, who allege it was invented in their state in the 1960s, claim it as theirs first. Mainers counter that a place in Lewiston has been making Whoopie Pies since 1925.

REQUIRED TO REGISTER

Hawaii lawmakers are considering requiring citizens to register to vote. According to the Honolulu Civil Beat, several bills in Hawaii address universal registration. A couple would require all applicants for driver's licenses or state identification cards, if eligible, to be automatically registered to vote. Another requires all eligible residents to register or specifically decline to do so. Roughly 69 percent of eligible Hawaiians are registered; the national average is 72 percent. Most states are required by the National Voter Registration Act (Motor Voter Act) to offer registration when citizens apply for a driver's license or for government benefits. Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Oregon and Texas are also considering universal registration bills this year, and a bill in Maine would require eligible high school students to register to vote in order to graduate. Hawaii, California, Minnesota (passed by the Legislature, but vetoed), New Jersey, New York, Ohio and Texas also have considered these kinds of bills in the last couple of years.

THINK EXERCISE

According to a recent study from the Georgia Health Sciences University, exercise helps overweight, previously inactive children think, plan and do math better. Intelligence scores increased, on average, 3.8 points in the overweight 7- to 11-year-olds who were exercising at least 40 minutes a day for three months. And the more they exercised, the more they improved. While math skills improved, reading skills did not, however. MRIs showed increased activity in the area of the brain associated with complex thinking, decision making and correct social behavior. Colorado may soon be joining the 42 states that require some physical education in elementary school, according to the National Association of Sport and Physical Education. A bill aimed at making sure elementary school kids receive at least 30 minutes of exercise a day is working its way through the legislature. Only five states require physical education in every grade, K-12.

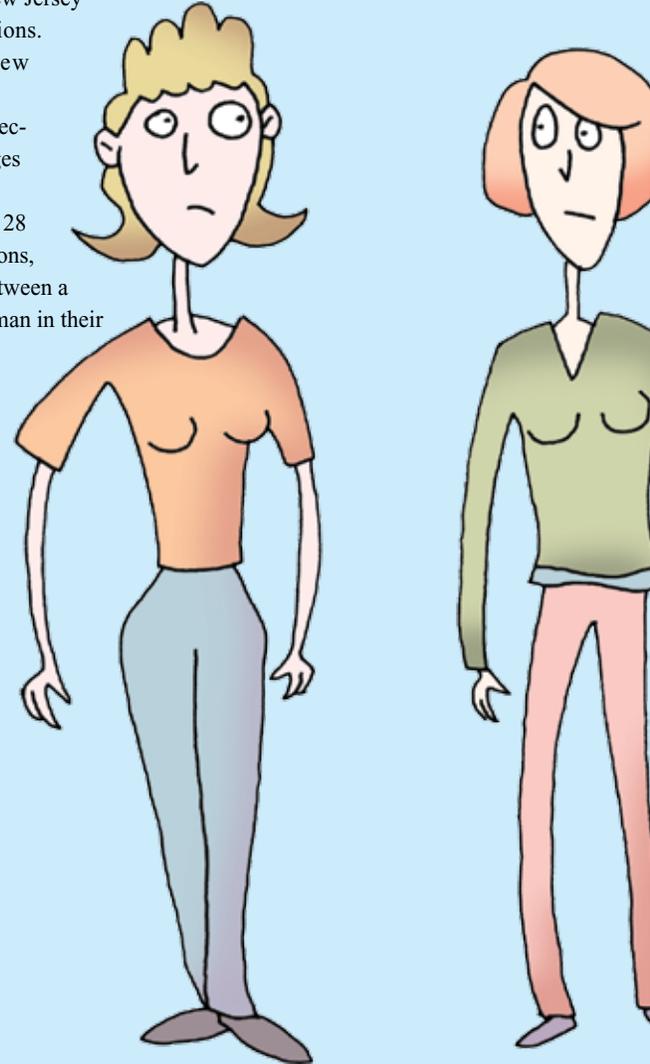


BRAINS MATTER

Traumatic brain injuries among prison inmates may be 10 times higher than that of the general population. A recent study in Minnesota found that 82.8 percent of male inmates had at least one head injury in their lifetimes, mostly caused by assaults (in and out of prison). Nationally, it's estimated that between 25 percent and 87 percent of all inmates have had some kind of traumatic brain injury, while only 8.5 percent of the general population has. In 2009, Vermont passed a bill requiring screening, treatment and special accommodation of inmates with a traumatic brain injury, and Washington created a working group to study the issue.

DIVORCE DENIED

A state judge in Nebraska recently denied a lesbian couple a divorce, saying the state constitution prevents gay couples married in other states from getting divorced in Nebraska. According to the Lincoln Journal Star, the judge cited similar cases in Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Texas—states that don't allow same-sex marriages—where courts also denied divorces. Connecticut, Massachusetts, Iowa, New Hampshire and Vermont allow gay marriages; Hawaii and New Jersey allow civil unions. Maryland, New York and Rhode Island recognize marriages performed in other states. In 28 state constitutions, marriage as between a man and a woman in their constitutions.



CRIME AND CRASHES

There's a new law enforcement tool that developers say will reduce crimes, crashes and traffic violations all at the same time—while saving money. Called "Data-Driven Approaches to Crime and Traffic Safety," the model uses geo-mapping to locate "hot spots"—where there are both high crime rates and traffic crashes—to determine which areas to saturate with police officers. Using this model, the Baltimore Police Department reduced burglaries by 18.1 percent, robberies by 32 percent and vehicle thefts by 43.5 percent. In one year, Lafourche Parish, La., doubled drunken-driving arrests and cut deaths from drunken-driving crashes by nearly 60 percent. Approximately 150 law enforcement agencies in 39 states are in some phase of adopting the model. More information can be found from the U.S. Department of Transportation, co-developers of the model.