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SUNDAY Orlando Sentinel

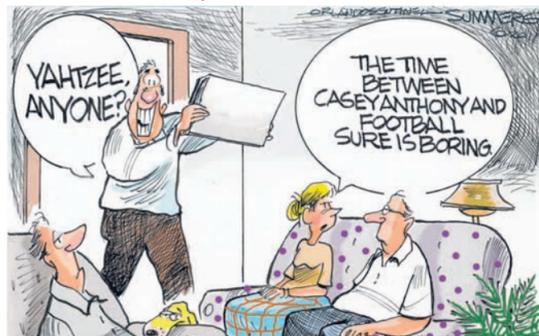
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WEATHER
94°/77°
(today/tonight)

Scattered storms later.
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Bianchi: 'Noles in the SEC? Recall what Bowden said

FSU looks better as a big gun in the ACC than it would in the middle of the SEC pack, Mike Bianchi says. **C1**



BY LESLIE POSTAL | Staff Writer

Another new school year has arrived in Central Florida, and in many ways, the ritual and rhythm of the season — school shopping and meet-the-teacher events — are the same as ever.

But the 2011-12 school year will be anything but routine, with seismic shifts for those who work and study in Florida's public schools.

New laws will alter teacher pay and evaluation plans, expand students' school choices and likely put more kids in many classes. And the deepest education cuts in decades from the Florida Legislature will be felt across the region.

"It is not business as usual when we start this new school year," said Orange Superintendent Ron Blocker. "We don't have the resources."

School starts Monday in Seminole County and a week later in Lake, Orange, Osceola and Volusia counties.

Here are some key changes this year:

CHALLENGES DEFINE NEW SCHOOL YEAR



Kids line up Saturday for free backpacks at the 2011 Back to School Bash by Hope Now International at Amway Center in Orlando. Read more on Page A8 and see video and a photo gallery at OrlandoSentinel.com.

Money

Public schools will have about \$542 less to spend per child this year after the Florida Legislature slashed funding by an average of nearly 8 percent. That makes the state's contribution to public education its smallest since 2003.

The impact of the cuts varies by district — some such as Orange have local taxes that offset state reductions — but many have reduced expenses by eliminating bus services, electives and administrative staff. Many worry there is little money to fix leaky roofs or balky air-conditioning systems and fewer dollars to upgrade school technology.

In Seminole, among the hardest hit locally, Longwood Elementary has been closed, with its students on Monday scattered to four other campuses.

AVERAGE PER-PUPIL FUNDING IN FLORIDA
2011: **\$6,262**

2010: \$6,898 2007: \$7,143

SOURCE: Florida Department of Education; total varies slightly by county based on cost-of-living formula.

Teacher pay

The state this year will begin to ramp up a far-reaching, and fiercely controversial, merit-pay plan that overhauls how teachers and principals are evaluated and paid.

The law wipes out tenure for new teachers and relies on student growth on standardized tests to judge teacher quality and, ultimately, determine who gets paid the most. It will be phased in during the next three years, but its impact will be felt this year.

The state will use a new system at the end of the year to evaluate teachers based on how much their students improve on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. The system will crunch FCAT data while taking into account factors outside a teacher's control, such as a student's absentee rate.

By July, the state will report what percentage of teachers in each district were highly effective, effective, needed improvement/developing or ineffective based on the new system.

New salary plans that use the test-score data are to be in place by 2014. Plans for how to judge teachers who do not teach so-called FCAT subjects are to be finalized that year, too.

Class size

Lawmakers relaxed the law limiting class sizes that voters approved in 2002. The change will be most noticeable in high schools, where all foreign-language classes and most advanced courses — from Advanced Placement offerings to pre-calculus and American literature — can now exceed the law's original enrollment caps.

The new law shrinks by more than 500 the number of classes that must meet those original caps — no more than 18 students in pre-K-to-third-grade classes, 22 in the middle grades and 25 in high school. The caps remain in place for about 300 "core" classes. But even those classes can be exceeded by three to five children after October, if creating a new class is not possible.

Please turn to **CHALLENGES, A8**

HOW MANY STUDENTS?
Florida: **2,655,237**

Lake: 41,137 Seminole: 63,388
Orange: 176,825 Volusia: 60,640
Osceola: 54,691

SOURCE: Florida Department of Education estimates

MORE CHANGES Virtual schools, more tests, saggy pants, school vouchers, transfers, enrollment. **A8**

What slump? Villages never quit booming

BY CHRISTINE SHOW
Staff Writer

THE VILLAGES — While home construction remains anemic in most of Central Florida, hundreds of houses are rising each month in this mammoth retirement community as seniors continue to flock to the area.

Sumter County, where The Villages is growing rapidly, led the region with the highest number of building permits for single-family homes last year, according to census data.

When the housing market tanked statewide in 2007 and '08, construction in The Villages kept humming along. Last year, nearly all of Sumter's new homes were in The Villages, which had 2,143 permits — more than the far more populous Seminole, Osceola and Lake counties combined.

And the trend is continuing. Through the first six months of this year, 1,206 residential permits were issued in The Villages — 120 more than in the same period last year.

The growth in the 55-and-older commu-

Please turn to **VILLAGES, A8**

Ammo dealer's life spun out of control, family members say

BY AMY PAVUK
Staff Writer

Though Efraim Diveroli was just 21 and had less-than-stellar reviews on the few military contracts he had received, the U.S. Army awarded his small Florida business a \$298 million contract to provide ammunition to security forces in Afghanistan.

It was a deal that would change Diveroli's young life. The money went to his head. He engaged in shoddy business deals, shipping faulty or inadequate supplies and munitions to U.S. troops and others overseas.

He became the target of multiple federal probes. A congressional committee that investigated the contract called it a "case study" of what's wrong with the government's procurement process. And ultimately, the deal

Please turn to **DIVEROLI, A12**



Diveroli

Gun laws

Cities, counties purge gun laws before Florida law kicks in. **B1**

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Kids await free backpacks at Saturday's Back to School Bash at the Amway Center in downtown Orlando. JACOB LANGSTON/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

30,000 TRY FOR KIDS' SUPPLIES

By ELOÍSA RUANO GONZÁLEZ | Staff Writer

Desperate for free school supplies, some families lined up overnight outside the Amway Center for the largest backpack giveaway in Central Florida.

More than 30,000 people swarmed the building Saturday for the annual Back to School Bash, organized by Hope Now International. In its seventh year, the giveaway is the biggest one yet.

Volunteers handed out 12,000 backpacks stuffed with school supplies. One thousand children received free haircuts, and 750 received immunizations. Hundreds of kids also got health and dental screenings. This year, more than 100 teachers received massages and boxes of school supplies.

The event, the largest of three scheduled in Central Florida on Saturday, was supposed to start at 10 a.m. However, doors opened 90 minutes early to get people out of the hot sun.

About 2,500 people had lined up by 8:30 a.m., said Brenda Ortiz, Hope Now media coordinator.

"The crowd just got too big," she said. Martha Gibbs, a single mom of four, arrived shortly before 9 a.m. Unemployed, she said she needs all the help she can get to prepare her children for school. Because of budget cuts, many teachers are requiring students to bring in a long list of supplies, including note-

"School supplies are too expensive at the store."

— Martha Gibbs, a single mom of four

Amanda Sparling, a student at Paul Mitchell the School Orlando, gives a haircut to Rayniel Vazquez at Saturday's Back to School Bash.



Volunteers aid family whose car was towed

Volunteers stepped in when the car of a family that lined up overnight for Saturday's backpack giveaway was towed. The St. Cloud family got in line at Amway Center on Friday night, hoping to be one of the first to get free supplies. But the family parked in a "tow-away area," said Brenda Ortiz, the organization's media coordinator. After learning the family couldn't pay the tow fee, volunteers at the bash pitched in money to get the car back and fed the family breakfast, Ortiz said.

book paper, pencils and toilet paper.

"School supplies are too expensive at the store," said Gibbs, a former assistant loan officer in New York. Unable to find work for a year, she moved in November to Orlando, where she had lived for years. She still has no job.

"I've been searching ... but I haven't found anything," she said.

The Back to School Bash is a lifeline, she said. With the free school supplies and haircuts, she figures to save \$80 for each child.

Her story isn't uncommon.

Many parents are unemployed and can't pay for school supplies and dental and health exams, said Gregg Stewart, dental director for the Community Health Centers. Last year, his volunteers examined 500 children's teeth. "We expect to top that this year," he said.

Last year, about 25,000 people flooded Amway Arena for free book bags, paper and pencils. The line stretched for two miles, event founder Michael Radka said. The organization discussed getting a bigger venue. The new Amway Center was a perfect location for this year's bash, Radka said.

LaWanda Lewis had her three children get dental checks. It was her first time at the bash. Although she said there are people worse off financially, she still needs the assistance, with her third child entering school. He'll be in kindergarten.

"I could handle two. Now there are three," she said.

It's important for kids to have paper and pencils to excel in school, said Jeana McMath, a teacher at Millennia Elementary School in Orlando. Often, students won't tell teachers they don't have the material needed to do their homework.

Last year, she said a student wasn't doing her spelling assignments because she didn't have paper to write on.

"Having stuff like this [helps]," McMath said about the giveaway.

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CHALLENGES

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Virtual schools

Students starting ninth grade this year must take one online course to earn high-school diplomas, thanks to a law that seeks to expand digital or virtual learning. The law also allows the state-funded Florida Virtual School to expand its offerings to elementary-school kids. It had been serving middle and high schools.

School districts and charter schools, and other private virtual operations, can also increase their virtual-course offerings, giving Florida students more ways to learn outside the traditional teacher-in-a-classroom setting.



More tests

Florida will continue its push for computer-based testing this school year, with more students taking FCAT and new standardized final exams online.

This spring, sixth- and 10th-graders will take their FCAT reading tests online, though students in other grades and those taking FCAT math, science and writing exams will continue to take paper-and-pencil versions.

The state also will expand its arsenal of end-of-course exams for middle- and high-school students by adding biology and geometry tests. Last year, end-of-course exams debuted in Florida with an Algebra 1 test. Like the algebra exam, the new exams also will be taken on computer. An end-of-course exam in U.S. history will be field-tested this spring as well.

HOW MANY TEACHERS?

Florida
192,464

Lake: 3,036
Orange: 13,005
Osceola: 3,685
Seminole: 4,560
Volusia: 4,469

SOURCE: Florida Department of Education, 2010-11 teacher count



Saggy pants

Six years after Sen. Gary Siplin, D-Orlando, first proposed it, state lawmakers this year outlawed "saggy pants" on school kids. The law says students cannot wear their pants in a way that "exposes underwear or body parts." Students caught with sagging pants could, on the third offense, be given a three-day, in-school suspension. They also could be banned from extracurricular activities.



School vouchers

Florida's private-school-voucher program for students with disabilities is expanding this year to include more youngsters.

The current program, known as the McKay scholarship, is a tuition voucher that families can use to help pay for private schools if they want to opt out of public institutions.

It had been an option only for students in the state's "exceptional-education" program. But now students with 504 plans can apply, too.

Students with these plans have a disability as defined under federal law but do not typically need the kind of interventions or accommodations that students in the state's exceptional-education program need. More than 51,000 Florida students have 504 plans, so the legislation could significantly expand the McKay program, which last year served about 21,000 youngsters.



Student transfers

Students at public schools deemed "failing" under an expanded school-choice law can transfer to better-performing schools this year. Statewide, 159 schools, including 11 in Orange, two in Lake and two in Volusia counties, have to offer transfers for the coming year. That is up from 24 last year. Nearly 1,100 families in Central Florida have applied to have their children switch schools, though some might not take the transfers.



Enrollment

The enrollment in public schools across Florida is expected to grow, but very modestly, with perhaps about 12,000 new students entering the system. The total should remain fewer than 2.7 million.

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VILLAGES

Continued from Page A1

nity — which also sprawls into Lake and Marion counties, northwest of Orlando — is fueled by the unique financial situations of the seniors who move from Northern climates with traditional pensions, equity from their former homes and savings, experts say.

Construction workers on tractors moving dirt are part of the character of the 44,000-home community, owned by developer H. Gary Morse, a national powerhouse in the Republican Party. Residents like the convenience of the stores, restaurants and medical facilities that keep sprouting.

Retirees are also drawn by the massive community's golfing opportunities — residents can tee off on 37 courses — and an abundance of other activities. There are more than 1,000 clubs to join, with a range of interests, from beach shag dancing to astronomy, comic books to Mustang cars.

"This was it," Carol Kemp said of her decision to move to the community of 85,000 people about two weeks ago from Somerset, Pa. "Even though it's a large community, you feel as though you're in a smaller, neighborhood kind of environment. And yet, all the amenities you need are in golf-cart reach."

Kemp, 62, and her husband, Dave, 63, decided to give up their longtime home after dealing with rough winters the past two years. They bought a lot for their new Florida residence earlier this year. After they crossed their fingers for a few months, their Pennsylvania home sold.

"It's not an area that property values ever got really out of control. Therefore, it didn't drop that much," said Carol Kemp, a retired



Carol Kemp unpacks Thursday at her new home in The Villages. She and her husband moved to escape Pennsylvania's winters. TOM BENITEZ/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

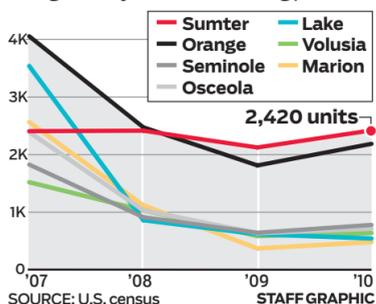
high-school guidance counselor who lives on a pension. "We didn't make any great money on our house, but we really didn't lose on it either."

Kemp's experience selling her home is shared by retirees across the country who didn't experience as big a crash as other areas, said Stephen Maag, director of residential communities for LeadingAge, an association representing not-for-profit organizations dedicated to aging services.

"Some people lost value in their houses, but it wasn't nearly as dramatic as other parts of the country," Maag said. "Houses are still selling — they're just taking longer

Single-family-home permits

Since 2009, Sumter County has led the region in single-family residential-building permits.



to sell them."

The Villages has only a handful of foreclosures because many residents pay cash for their new homes after selling their old ones up North, said Sherri Meadows, owner of Meadows Realty in Ocala. For those who do get mortgages, finances are better managed because residents come with longtime financial-planning experience.

"It's stayed pretty stable," Meadows said of the area's property values.

Advice from friends and family already living in The Villages typically draws new residents, said Jean A. Dorrell, an estate planner in nearby Summerfield whose clients are often Villagers. The Villages sales office offers an attractive trip for prospective residents.

"The Villages make it really enticing to come down," Dorrell said of the attention lavished on guests during their sales visit.

Frequent trips to visit his sister-in-law prompted Bill Von Dohlen, 72, to move

permanently to the senior haven this past September.

"We personally wanted to get out of the snow," said Von Dohlen, a retired attorney who moved with his wife from a suburb outside Rochester, N.Y. "We decided to come down here and continue to have an active life all year round."

The cost of living is noticeably lower in The Villages compared with other popular retirement spots in South Florida and coastal areas of the state, which may be driving more people to the community, said Sean Snaith, director of the University of Central Florida's Institute of Economic Competitiveness. Last year, Sumter trailed only the much-larger Hillsborough, which had 2,903 single-family permits, among the state's 67 counties.

In The Villages, two-bedroom, two-bath-room homes are for sale for as little as \$130,000, according to its website. Homes escalate in price from there, ranging from \$150,000 for a modest 1,600-square-foot villa to \$470,000 for a more luxurious floor plan of 5,100 square feet, a two-car garage and a separate garage with a golf cart, the site shows.

"I think people's plans of where and when and how they would retire changed dramatically," Snaith said. "They're moving to relatively low-cost areas of the state."

As Kemp unpacked boxes in her new three-bedroom home last week, she said she looks forward to playing golf, swimming and taking low-cost continuing-education classes at The Villages' Lifelong Learning College.

"With all those kind of things and the availability so close at hand," she said, "I think it's a pretty reasonable place to be."

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