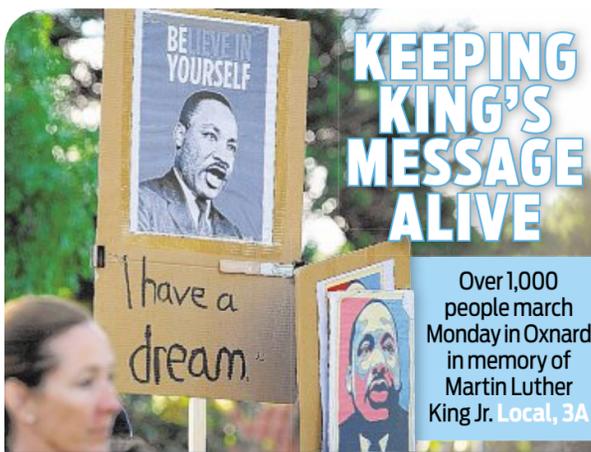


# VENTURA COUNTY STAR



## KEEPING KING'S MESSAGE ALIVE

Over 1,000 people march Monday in Oxnard in memory of Martin Luther King Jr. Local, 3A

OVERPASS COLLAPSES IN CINCINNATI; AT LEAST ONE PERSON DEAD: **NATION 9A**

\$1.00

COAST 67° / 49°  
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Clouds and sun

### Quick Read

#### SCHOOLS SEEK NEW LEADER

The Ventura Unified School District will pay a search firm to find a new superintendent. LOCAL, 3A



#### COMING BACK TO VENTURA

After Chivas USA's academy team folded, Jacob Plascencia decided to transfer to Ventura High to play his senior soccer season. SPORTS, 1B

#### WEALTH GETS CONCENTRATED

The richest 1 percent will own more than half the world's wealth by 2016, according to a new report. BUSINESS, 12A



#### RIVALRY JOINS FORCES IN CLUB

They may be bitter rivals in high school, but they've become teammates on the Bones Volleyball Club in Thousand Oaks. SPORTS, 1B

#### FATHER SEEKS SUIT DISMISSAL

The father of a former Westlake High School athlete sued by his son's coach wants a judge to dismiss the suit. LOCAL, 3A

### Opinion

"Several young adults in Ventura County tested positive for measles in the last few weeks."

EDITORIAL, 11A

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# Counselor dearth hinders schools

## Lack of help hurts students often on move

By Brenda Iasevoli  
The Hechinger Report

LOS ANGELES — California ranks worst in the nation when it comes to providing students with guidance counselors, according to the U.S. Department of

Education, and authorities say the scarcity disproportionately affects the state's most vulnerable students because there simply are not enough counselors to track transient students and make sure they are taking the right credits to graduate.

The problem is most pronounced in impoverished districts, where, for a variety of reasons, students are most often on the move.

Foster kids bounce around. Other kids move with parents who are looking for jobs, and some are sent to live with relatives until their parents can get on their feet.

Transient students need guidance counselors to help them figure out their next steps. California law requires that transcripts follow students to their next school within two days of transfer. But with

so few counselors, mistakes happen. The American School Counselor Association recommends a student-to-counselor ratio of 250-to-1. In California, the ratio was 1,016-to-1 for the 2010-11 school year, the latest for which data is available.

Transcripts, which are solely schools' responsibility, may never be sent, or they get lost and no one follows up. At the new

school, counselors have to assign kids to classes without ever seeing a transcript. Students end up taking courses that don't count toward graduation.

"If you ask a teacher or a counselor why this happens, they'll often say, 'We didn't have a transcript,'" said Debra Sacks of Come Back Kids, a charter school that helps dropouts in

See COUNSELORS, 2A



Jovana Hernandez (from left), Nathaly Guerrero and Arianna Vielma, all third-graders, practice solving math problems through Sokikom, a computer game, at Rio Plaza School.

# Gamers conquer math

## Rio School District pilots skills program

By Cheri Carlson  
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805-437-0260

Hands shot up in the air. Students talked and laughed; some cheered. "What should we pick?" a boy called out. "Fractions," another yelled back. It was noisy in Erin Trujillo's third-grade classroom, but a good noisy, she said.

"The good noisy is when students are leaning over saying, 'This is how you have to do this. You have to add this,'" Trujillo said. "The bad noisy is when they're talking about what they're going to do at recess."

Her 32 third-graders at Rio Plaza School in El Rio were playing Sokikom, a game-based math program being piloted in the Rio School District.

It's just one piece of math instruction in the classroom, and it's aligned to new Common Core standards. Those standards put more focus on critical thinking and technology skills, and Rio educators said a game such as Sokikom helps them do that.

The word "game," or "gamification," might raise some eyebrows. But

Trujillo and others are proponents. "It's so valuable for students to have the motivation," she said. "It's just a whole different level of engagement, of collaboration."

When the kids are playing Sokikom, she doesn't hear them talking about recess. "They're too engaged in what they're doing, and they love to help each other," she said. "That's Common Core — critical thinking, communication, collaboration."

In Sokikom, students can compete against each other or other classrooms, but each one works at his or her level on skills such as fractions and geometry.

See PILOT, 2A



Nathaly (left) and Jovana congratulate each other after solving a math problem through Sokikom. El Rio students such as Nathaly and Jovana are focusing on math through Sokikom.

"It's so valuable for students to have the motivation. It's just a whole different level of engagement, of collaboration."

Erin Trujillo, Rio Plaza School third-grade teacher, on developing students' math skills with the computer game Sokikom

# Students give free tuition plan an A

## Community college leader: It benefits all

By Jean Cowden Moore  
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805-437-0236

President Barack Obama is expected to highlight community colleges in his State of the Union speech this week when he proposes making the two-year schools free for all students, regardless of income.

Under Obama's proposal, which still must pass Congress, students

would receive three years of community college tuition free as long as they attend at least half the time and maintain a 2.5 grade-point average.

The federal government would pay three-quarters of the cost — an estimated \$60 billion over 10 years. States would pick up the remaining quarter.

Greg Gillespie, president of Ventura College, said the proposal showcases the role community colleges play in preparing students for careers or four-year university.

Even if it doesn't pass, it may prompt more students to continue their

education, he said.

"Anything we can do to make access to higher education easier for people will benefit all of us," Gillespie said. "Community college is really key to moving people into jobs, as well as baccalaureate programs."

The proposal would benefit families differently, depending on where they live. California has one of the lowest tuition rates nationwide at \$46 per unit, which translates to roughly \$1,200 per year for a full-time student. In Vermont, by contrast, annual tuition is about \$7,000.

Many low-income California students already qualify for free tuition.

If they meet federal poverty guidelines, they can receive a tuition waiver from the state, commonly called the BOG waiver.

Low-income students also can receive federal Pell grants, which cover all college costs up to \$5,730 per year.

Still, the proposal could be just the nudge some people need to continue their education, especially if they're worried about cost, said Wyatt Bolton,

See COLLEGE, 2A

# Speech to seek to take credit

## Obama may be premature

By Christi Parsons and Kathleen Hennessey  
Tribune Washington Bureau (TNS)

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama will lay out an ambitious vision Tuesday for government's role in American life, from such everyday concerns as how to pay for mortgages, tuition and doctors' bills to broader issues including the climate and national security.

The hopeful portrait will come in a sweeping State of the Union address that is focused on ways to strengthen the middle class. It is meant to give Obama a chance to claim credit for the rebounding economy.

"We've seen manufacturing come back. We have cut our deficits. Gas prices have dropped," Obama said in a video sent to supporters Monday. "Now that we have fought our way through the crisis, how do we make sure that everybody in this country is sharing in this growing economy?"

That implicitly victorious message sets up another question, though, and a debate that will probably flourish for the remainder of Obama's time in office: Are his policies working, or is it too soon to brag?

White House advisers think the shift is right on time. They're looking at research that reflects the public's steadily improving view of the economy following improvements on the metrics Obama cites.

A Gallup Poll survey last week found that 41 percent of Americans were "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with the nation's economy, up from 28 percent a year ago. Public opinion of the president is usually closely tied to how the economy is viewed. If the economy continues to grow, as most forecasters expect, Obama is likely to see at least some more improvement in his own approval ratings.

During his address to Congress, Obama is expected to declare that the outlook is bright for a big American "comeback." The word has shown up repeatedly in recent weeks as the White House embarked on an unusual strategy of openly discussing the policy initiatives the president will introduce, on such issues as housing, education and tax reform, rather than unveiling them during the speech.

It's a new tone in

See OBAMA, 2A

FROM THE COVER

COLLEGE from 1A

21, a student at Oxnard College.

“My brother could benefit from something like that,” Bolton said. “He could really use the idea that somebody else will help. Something like that could push him to where he would go to school.”

And for students like him, who are already in school, free tuition could relieve a lot of stress, said Bolton, who works 30 to 35 hours per week.

“It would take some worries away,” he said. “It would help me focus on other things, like school.”

In addition to state and federal aid, Ventura also offers the Ventura College Promise, which covers the first year of tuition for students graduating from any Ventura County high school. Students must be under 20 and enroll in the first semester starting after they graduate. Students who have earned a GED also qualify.

The promise program “really encourages students to finish their education,” said Norbert Tan, executive director of the Ventura College Foundation, which administers the program. Students who receive the funding from the promise program are 50 percent more likely to finish a second year of college than their peers, according to a recent foundation study, Tan said.

“It’s really getting them in the habit of going to college,” he said. “If there could be support for a second year, that would be even better.”

Lucia Marquez, 20, who is preparing to transfer to a four-year university, received the funding in her first year at Ventura. The prospect of free tuition can be the tipping point that gets people into college and allows them to focus on their classes once they’re there, she said.

That’s why she hopes Congress will pass Obama’s proposal. It helps individual students, and it helps the economy because those students will



Lucia Marquez, Ventura College student body president, works at her desk in the student activities office. She took advantage of the Ventura College Promise, which covered her first year of tuition.

go on to get good jobs, she said.

“We want to have educated people,” Marquez said. “When people are educated, they’re creating things, making things and building up our economy. Community college is a way to continue your education.”

Still, the open access offered under Obama’s proposal has drawn some objections, with critics arguing that it covers students who could easily afford college without any financial help. Others have argued the federal government would be taking on too big a role in higher education, a role that belongs more properly to states.

But Gillespie believes it could transform the country’s education system, making two years of college as accessible as kindergarten through 12th grade.

“We’re creating a K-14 public education system,” he said. “We’re providing access to everyone, expanding the role of public education.”

Locally, the proposal also could help Moorpark, Oxnard and Ventura colleges grow, Gillespie said. And that could help the colleges qualify for more state funds, which will partially depend on growth starting next year.



Vondel Faniel, a basketball player for Ventura College, walks past the college’s Library and Learning Resource Center.

As the proposal makes its way through Congress, it inevitably will change, with some of the criticisms being addressed, said Jamillah Moore, chancellor of the Ventura County Community College District, which oversees Moorpark, Oxnard and Ventura colleges. “I see it as a good idea,

but I think it will take some fine-tuning,” Moore said. “We’ll need to look at details regarding implementation.”

Whatever becomes of the proposal, Gillespie said he’s glad Obama made it.

“It’s a valuable discussion to have,” Gillespie said, “even if it’s not that plan.”

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

President Obama has proposed making community college tuition-free for everyone. Below are key points of his proposal, as well as information on California’s tuition rates and waivers.

Obama’s proposal:

- Covers community college tuition for everyone, regardless of income. Students would have to attend at least half-time and maintain at least a 2.5 grade-point average to qualify for the tuition break.

- The federal government would pick up three-quarters of the cost. States would pick up the remaining quarter. The cost to the federal government is estimated at \$60 billion over 10 years. The cost to states would vary, depending on tuition rates.

- Congress, where both houses are controlled by Republicans, must still pass the proposal.

Tuition at California’s community colleges:

- \$46 a unit, or about \$1,200 for full-time students. California has one of the lowest community college tuition rates nationwide.

Tuition breaks already available:

- A Board of Governors fee waiver provides free tuition for low-income California residents.

- Pell federal grants cover up to \$5,370 a year in tuition, and low-income students can use any remaining money for books, supplies and living costs.

- The Ventura College Promise program covers the first year of tuition at Ventura College for students graduating from a Ventura County high school. Students must be under 20 and start college the first semester after graduating from high school. The program also is available for students who earn a GED.

PILOT from 1A

When they get the right answer or win the game, they earn coins they can use to buy hairstyles, clothes or accessories for their computer avatar.

The more difficult the game, the more coins earned.

It’s too soon to say whether Sokikom ends up being the golden ticket at Rio. Whether to take the program districtwide will depend on the pilot’s success, including an analysis of the data, said Mike Vollmert, technology director for the district.

Late last year a few teachers participated in a small-scale pilot, trying the program in their classrooms.

“The feedback was that this seems to have promise and we should take a deeper look at it,” Vollmert said. So this year they are piloting the program at Rio Plaza and Rio del Norte schools.

“We know the kids like it,” said Jake Waltrip, Rio del Norte principal.

The more kids like what they’re doing in school, the more they feel connected



Third-graders collaborate to solve math problems using Sokikom. JUAN CARLOS THE STAR

to it, he said. “It keeps them motivated.”

Whether it is this program or another, Vollmert thinks things are headed in the right direction.

“I think the move toward providing more flexible, sort of gamified learning environments for kids is the way to go,” he said.

With help from federal education grants, Sokikom started moving into classrooms in 2009 but formally launched in school two years ago, said Snehal Patel, Sokikom’s founder and CEO.

Some like that the game can make students almost forget they’re learning math. That’s part of it, but it can’t stop there, Patel said.

“You get that chocolate-covered broccoli syndrome,” he said. In the long run, the program has to get students interested

in math, and one way to do that is to help them get better at it, he said.

As students played last week, Trujillo didn’t stop walking around, crouching down to help a student, sometimes having them bring out a whiteboard to write the equation down.

There’s still more she would like, including an easy report to show parents how their students are doing and one translated in Spanish. But she sees her students’ math skills improving.

When she started teaching fractions in math class last week, students told her they were already doing those on Sokikom.

They said they could break up cubes into fourths and eighths in the game, she said. “They’ve moved on ahead of what I’m teaching in the math book.”

counselors, so schools don’t have to employ them, and there is no one at the state education department whose job it is to advocate for their hiring.

Switching schools nearly cost Jose Salas a diploma. In his freshman year of high school, his mother kicked him out when she learned he was gay. He bounced from one friend’s house to another, and to a new high school each year: Hawthorne High in South Los Angeles, Edison High in Fresno, Morningside High in Inglewood. Somehow he stayed on track to graduate.

Yet the high school where he enrolled next, Hillcrest Continuation High School in Inglewood, placed him in remedial

OBAMA from 1A

Obama’s message on the economy, and one that he avoided on the campaign trail during last fall’s mid-term election. With wages stagnating and many Americans still out of work, he instead spoke of solutions rather than suggesting that the economy had mended completely.

Even as he begins to boast about the economy, Obama must be careful what he takes credit for. Although the budget deficit last year was the lowest since 2007, the drop was due in part to spending cuts that Obama opposed.

Obama also points to job growth as a sign of the American economy’s resurgence under his six years of economic stewardship, but the employment numbers alone don’t quite reveal the true state of the economy. When Obama came into office, the unemployment rate was nearly 8 percent and rising. It was 5.6 percent in December, the lowest of his presidency, but still above where it was before the Great Recession.

Perhaps more important, median household income has fallen and not rebounded under Obama’s tenure.

And when the president points to his rescue of the auto industry and gains in manufacturing, the Alliance for American Manufacturing warns of going too far too soon.

“It is indeed the strongest period of manufacturing job growth since the early 1990s,” said the group’s president, Scott Gold. “But the administration fails to mention that we’ve only recovered one-third of the good-paying manufacturing jobs that were destroyed in the recession. We still have a long way to go.”

In their previews of the policies to come, White House aides have talked about eliminating tax loopholes that benefit wealthy individuals and big corporations and using the savings to invest in such areas as child care and assistance for college costs. Obama also wants an infusion of federal money into road and bridge projects.

Lottery

**SUPER LOTTO: JAN. 17**

14-19-29-32-42 27  
NEXT JACKPOT: \$9 million

No tickets matched the winning numbers

**MEGA MILLIONS: JAN. 16**

26-32-44-45-58 11  
NEXT JACKPOT: \$15 million

No tickets matched the winning numbers

**POWERBALL: JAN. 17**

15-16-23-27-36 9  
NEXT JACKPOT: \$208 million

No tickets matched the winning numbers

**FANTASY 5: JAN. 19**

4-6-8-31-38

**DAILY 3: JAN. 19**

Afternoon 3-7-0  
Evening 1-8-9

**DAILY 4: JAN. 19**

5-3-9-2

**DAILY DERBY: JAN. 19**

1st: 10 – SOLID GOLD  
2nd: 06 – WHIRL WIN  
3rd: 08 – GORGEOUS GEORGE  
Race time: 1:41.57

COUNSELORS from 1A

Riverside County. “You have people just assigning classes without truly evaluating the needs of the students.”

The decline in school counselors can be traced back to Proposition 13, according to Loretta Whitson, executive director of the California Association of School Counselors. The initiative, passed by California voters in 1978, lowered property taxes at a time when home values and thus tax assessments were skyrocketing. Seniors on fixed incomes were in danger of getting priced out of their homes.

As a side effect of Prop.

13, districts could no longer raise property taxes to fund education and were forced instead to rely on state funding and to fight with competing interests for the money.

The problem became worse when large numbers of counselors were laid off in California during the economic downturn that began in 2008. At the start of the recession, the state employed 7,839 counselors. Kathleen Rakestraw of the American School Counselor Association says that number dropped to 6,191 by the 2010-11 school year.

The effect of the layoffs has been compounded by the state’s extraordinary population growth and by overcrowded schools. California does not mandate



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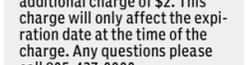
We aim to get it right, but when we get it wrong, please let us know. We want to correct the record. Contact Editor John Moore at jmoore@vcstar.com or 805-437-0200 to report any errors in news stories.

CORRECTION

■ Jammie Barnes was misidentified in a story in Monday’s newspaper about a service to honor the life of Buena High School teacher Missy Phelan, who died last week. Barnes, a former student of Phelan’s who spoke at the service, is a woman.

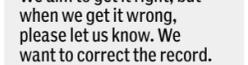
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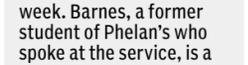
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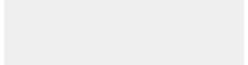
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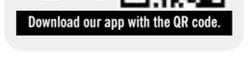
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