

South Dakota | Education

Many Career Slots Still Open

BY BOB MERCER
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — Gov. Dennis Daugaard and the Legislature believed so much that career readiness certificates should become part of South Dakota's culture that they offered 4,000 free slots to school districts for a trial run in their high schools this academic year.

So far 25 districts, representing 1,494 juniors and seniors, have applied to participate in the assessment program, according to Barb Unruh, who oversees career readiness and GED programs for the state Department of Labor.

That's a savings of \$150 per student taking the assessment, which has gold, silver and bronze levels of performance and is known as the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate.

Next school year, career readiness will become part of the state Education De-



Schopp

partment's performance-rating system that generates scores for all public schools.

Unruh presented information about the career-readiness certificate program Monday to members of the state's Workforce Development Council. The council gave its endorsement to the certificate approach more than five years ago.

Eight female inmates at the state's women prison at Pierre recently took the career-readiness assessments. While the tests normally are done on computers with Internet access, the prisoners don't have those privileges, so Unruh delivered the tests using paper and pencil.

Earlier this month two members of the governor's cabinet, Education Secretary Melody Schopp and Labor Secretary Pam Roberts, sent a joint letter to school dis-

tricts telling them about the availability of the 4,000 free slots.

Schools must provide space and one computer per student. The assessments have three pieces — applied mathematics, reading for information and locating information — and students get 55 minutes to complete each of the three.

"We're building it into our accountability system," Schopp, who serves on the workforce council, said Monday.

Two of the workforce council's members, Tom Bohnet of Yankton and Dave Giovannini of Aberdeen, use the career-readiness assessments for their businesses, according to Bill Molseed, the Labor Department's workforce training administrator.

While Bohnet and Giovannini weren't able to take part in the meeting Monday, Molseed said certification is taking root.

"Employers are using this," Molseed told council members. "It's bearing fruit."

Heat Wave Prompts Early dismissals In MW Schools

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — An unusual, late-summer heat wave enveloped much of the Midwest on Monday, putting schools and sports events on hold.

Schools in Iowa, Nebraska, Wisconsin, the Dakotas and Illinois let out early as temperatures crept toward the mid-90s — beyond in some places. After-school sports practices and evening games were canceled in St. Paul, Minn., and misting stations were keeping people cool at the Minnesota State Fair, where about 90 fairgoers had been treated for heat-related illnesses over the weekend.

The heat wave is supposed to last through much of the week, the National Weather Service said. Heat of this magnitude is unusual for this time of year, but not unprecedented. In Des Moines, Iowa, for instance, temperatures on Aug. 26 have reached at least 100 degrees at least six times since 1881.

School districts took precautions, not wanting to put students and teachers in sweaty — and possibly dangerous — situations.

In central Iowa, Marshalltown Community School District administrators canceled afternoon preschool classes on Monday and Tuesday and were planning to release other students two hours early. Parts of all 10 of district buildings have air conditioning, but some rooms aren't connected.

"The buildings can heat up pretty fast, especially when you have kids in there," district spokesman Jason Staker said. "It's not a good environment for students or teachers."

Five elementary schools in Fargo, North Dakota, canceled classes through Wednesday because the buildings weren't fully air-conditioned. Temperatures inside them on Sunday ranged from 85 degrees to 90 degrees, Fargo Schools Superintendent Jeff Schatz said.

In South Dakota, the Sioux Falls School District continued with classes as scheduled, but spokeswoman DeeAnn Konrad said teachers kept window blinds closed and turned off lights in classrooms. The district was also prepared to move students into cooler rooms at nearby churches and a Christian school, she said.

School administrators in the western Nebraska town of Alliance decided to send students home early after local forecasters predicted temperatures in excess of 90 degrees. Some classes in the 1,600-student district are held on the third floor, and temperatures rise when students fill the room.

"It can get uncomfortable even when the temperatures are in the upper 80s," superintendent Troy Unzicker said.

Minneapolis students had to go to school all day, but administrators canceled after-school activities and distributed 750 cases of water to schools. Officials also sent industrial fans to the 18 buildings that lack air conditioning, district spokeswoman Rachel Hicks said. Parents were advised to dress their kids in light clothing, while staffers watched for any symptoms of heat-related illnesses.

In Des Moines, organizers of a downtown farmers market set for Wednesday postponed the event out concern over the extreme heat.

The Iowa Department of Public Health issued a statewide advisory for vulnerable populations, including young children and the elderly. In some cases, the heat can become so extreme that sweating isn't enough for people to lower their body temperatures, Dr. Patricia Quinlisk said.

Man Convicted Of Killing Neb. Family Avoids Execution

BY JOSH FUNK
Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — A Brazilian man convicted of killing two missionaries and their 7-year-old son in Omaha has avoided the death penalty.

A panel of three judges on Monday sentenced Jose Oliveira-Coutinho, 38, to life in prison for his role in the slayings.

Oliveira-Coutinho was one of three Brazilian men charged with killing Vanderlei Szczepanik, his wife, Jacqueline, and their son, Christopher, who were also from Brazil. Oliveira-Coutinho was convicted last year of three counts of first-degree murder and one count of theft.

The family was last seen in December 2009. Prosecutors said Oliveira-Coutinho and two other Brazilians — Valdeir Goncalves-Santos and Elias Lourenco-Batista — beat Vanderlei Szczepanik to death and hanged his wife and son before throwing their bodies in the Missouri River.

Christopher's body was recovered in 2011. Investigators had to perform DNA tests to confirm that the body pulled from the Iowa side of the Missouri River was the Brazilian boy who

had been missing for nearly two years.

Douglas County Attorney Don Klein said his office pursued a death sentence because of the aggravating factors in this case, but that he will accept the life term.

"We respect the panel's decision," Klein said.

Oliveira-Coutinho's attorneys did not immediately return messages left Monday morning.

The Szczepaniks had been living in Omaha for five years before they disappeared. Vanderlei Szczepanik was renovating an old school into an Assembly of God church center and had hired the three men accused of killing the family to help.

The family's belongings were found at the Christian Community Center, where the family was staying in south Omaha. Their two vehicles were later abandoned in the city. Szczepanik and his wife were both 43-year-old missionaries.

Investigators theorize the killings were over money. Prosecutors say the three men accused in the killings racked up thousands of dollars in charges on the family's credit cards after their deaths.



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Heat Stressing South Dakota Row Crops

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — Ag officials say South Dakota's heat wave is putting a lot of stress on crops.

The U.S. Agriculture Department says in its weekly crop report that the dry conditions helped the small grain harvest, but row crops are in need of more rain.

At the end of last week, winter wheat, spring wheat, oats and barley were all behind average and also behind where the crops were at this time last year.

Corn at the dough stage was behind last year but ahead of average, while soybeans setting pods and sunflowers blooming were slightly behind average.

The third cutting of alfalfa was 49 percent complete, behind 68 percent last year but ahead of the 46 percent average.

Neb. Crops Hurt By Dry, Hot Weather

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — The condition of the corn crop in Nebraska and nationally has declined slightly as a late summer dry hot spell settles in over Midwest states renewing fears of a crop damaging drought.

The Department of Agriculture says in Monday's weekly report that 44 percent of dry land corn is in good or excellent condition, down a percentage point from a week ago and lower than the 59 percent average.

Nebraska irrigated corn is 81 percent good or excellent compared to 79 percent a week ago.

Nationally a slightly larger percentage of the corn crop slipped into poor or very poor category.

Nebraska soybeans are now 6 percent poor or very poor, up from 5 percent the week before. A slight decline also is reported nationally.

Omaha Fire Chief Resigns, Ends Dispute

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Omaha's fire chief has agreed to resign under a deal with the mayor that ends a long dispute between the two officials.

Mayor Jean Stothert's office announced Monday that Chief Mike McDonnell agreed to leave his job immediately.

He'll be placed on paid administrative leave Tuesday and allowed to retire with credit for 25 years employment. That's a little more than a year more than his actual service.

Battalion Chief Bernard Kanger will serve as interim chief.

The chief's departure comes amid a dispute between Stothert and McDonnell since her May election. Stothert has demanded that the city reduce the fire department budget.

The mayor agreed to retain three assistant fire chiefs through the end of 2014 and not to lay off firefighters until at least July 1, 2014.

SD's Oldest Resident Dies In Watertown

WATERTOWN (AP) — South Dakota's oldest living resident has died.

KXLG Radio reports Dorothy Anritter was 108 and died Saturday at Jenkins Living Center in Watertown.

She was the 2012 and 2013 South Dakota Centenarian of the year and would have celebrated her 109th birthday on Nov. 25th.

Anritter was born in 1904. Her sister, Ruby Anritter, also lived to 108. She died in June 2012.

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