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U.S. homebuilding near two-year low; permits extend decline



**Inside C2**

# Southern DAILY Make Today Different

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| Southern News Group

## Four Democratic 2020 candidates court South Carolina's black voters

CHARLESTON, S.C. (Reuters) - Four of the two dozen Democrats vying for their party's 2020 U.S. presidential nomination appeared at a Black Economic Alliance forum in Charleston, South Carolina, on Saturday, with an eye on the key role black voters will play in the early-voting state.

South Carolina will host the fourth nominating contest next year, after Iowa, New Hampshire and Nevada, and it is the first state where a significant proportion of the Democratic electorate - about 60 percent - is black.

Pete Buttigieg, the mayor of South Bend, Indiana, former U.S. Representative Beto O'Rourke and U.S. Senators Cory Booker and Elizabeth Warren attended Saturday's forum, which was organized by the Black Economic Alliance.

The candidates want to show their messages resonate with black voters in South Carolina, potentially portending success in subsequent nominating contests across the U.S. South.

They also want to prove they can generate enthusiasm among black voters for their candidacies in the November general election against President Donald Trump, the presumed Republican nominee. Democrat Hillary Clinton's stunning loss to Trump in 2016 was in part attributed to a decline in black voter turnout for the first time in 20 years.

At the forum, O'Rourke called for increased access to capital for minority business owners and expunging the arrest records for those with marijuana convictions, which disproportionately affects communities of color. Warren discussed her recent proposal for a \$7 billion fund to launch 100,000 minority-owned businesses.



FILE PHOTO: U.S. Democratic presidential candidate Mayor Pete Buttigieg delivers remarks on foreign policy and national security, in Bloomington, Indiana, U.S., June 11, 2019. REUTERS/John Sommers II

## Special Report: They fled Venezuela's crisis by boat - then vanished

GUIRIA, Venezuela (Reuters) - A taxi dropped Maroly Bastardo and her two small children by a cemetery not far from the shore in northeast Venezuela. She still had time to change her mind.

Eight months pregnant, Bastardo faced forbidding choices in a nation whose economy has collapsed. Give birth in Venezuela, where newborns are dying at alarming rates in shortage-plagued maternity wards. Or board a crowded smuggler's boat bound for Trinidad, the largest of two islands that make up the Caribbean nation of Trinidad and Tobago. Her husband, Kennier Berra, had landed there in February, found work and beckoned her to join him.

Bastardo's mother, Carolina, begged her to stay. Neither Bastardo or her children could swim. Barely three weeks earlier, 27 people had gone missing after a migrant boat went down in the narrow stretch of water separating Venezuela from Trinidad. The 20-kilometer strait, known for its treacherous currents, is nicknamed the Dragon's Mouths. But the 19-year old hairdresser was determined. On May 16, she and the kids packed into an aging fishing vessel along with 31 other people, including three relatives of her husband. They snapped cellphone photos from the shore near the port town of Guiria, where thousands of Venezuelans have departed in recent years, and messaged loved ones goodbye.

The craft, the Ana Maria, never arrived. No migrants or wreckage have been found.

A man believed to be the boat's pilot, a 25-year-old Venezuelan named Alberto Abreu, was plucked from the sea on May 17 by a fisherman and taken to nearby Grenada. Abreu told his rescuer the Ana Maria had sunk the night before. He fled before police could complete their investigation, Grenadian authorities said, and hasn't been spotted since.

Bastardo's anguished mother, Carolina, clings to hope that perhaps a lesser tragedy has befallen her daughter and grandchildren. She prays smugglers are holding them hostage to extract more money, and that any day now she will get the ransom call.

"My heart tells me they are alive," Carolina said. "But it's a torture." The disappearance of Bastardo, five relatives and her unborn child underscores the ever-more perilous lengths Venezuelans are taking to escape a nation in freefall.

Years of economic mismanagement by the socialist government have crippled the oil-rich nation with hyperinflation, shortages and misery. An estimated 4 million people - about 12% of the populace - have fled the South American country in just the last five years.

The vast majority have traveled overland to neighboring Colombia and Brazil. But in images reminiscent of desperate Cubans fleeing their homeland in decades past, Venezuelans increasingly are taking to the sea in rickety boats.

Prime destinations are the nearby islands of Aruba, Curacao, Grenada and Trinidad and Tobago off Venezuela's Caribbean coast. Formerly welcoming of Venezuelans, who once brought tourist dollars, all have clamped down hard on these mostly impoverished migrants. Their governments have tightened visa requirements, increased deportations and beefed up coast-guard patrols to intercept smugglers' vessels.

Trinidad and Tobago, with a population of more than 1.3 million people and among the highest incomes in the region, has been a particular magnet.

Since 2016, almost 25,000 Venezuelans have arrived in Trinidad, according to government figures, many without documentation. The United Nations last year estimated 40,000 Venezuelans were living in Trinidad, straining the government's ability to assist them.

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# U.S. homebuilding near two-year low; permits extend decline

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. homebuilding dropped to a near two-year low pulled down by persistent weakness in the single-family unit segment, suggesting the housing market continued to struggle despite falling mortgage rates. The second straight monthly decline in homebuilding reported by the Commerce Department on Friday probably reflected in part massive flooding in the Midwest, with housing starts in the region plunging to levels last seen in early 2015.

The weak report bucked a recent tide of upbeat data, including retail sales, trade and construction spending, that indicated the economy regained speed late in the first quarter after appearing to stumble at the turn of the year. "Waiting for construction activity to pick up after a sharp drop in mortgage rates is like waiting for Godot," said Chris Rupkey, chief economist at MUFG in New York. "It is hard to know what is ailing the home construction industry."

Housing starts fell 0.3 percent to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1.139 million units last month, the lowest level since May 2017. Data for February was revised down to show homebuilding tumbling to a pace of 1.142 million units instead of the previously reported 1.162 million-unit rate.

Housing starts in the Midwest, which was devastated by floods during the month, dropped 17.6 percent. Homebuilding also fell in the Northeast and South, but surged in the West.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast housing starts increasing to a pace of 1.230 million units in March. The dollar was trading lower against a basket of currencies. U.S. stock and bond markets were closed for the Good Friday holiday.

A sharp pickup in home construction appears unlikely. Building permits fell 1.7 percent to

a rate of 1.269 million units in March, the lowest in five months. It was the third straight monthly decrease in permits.

The prolonged weakness in homebuilding is likely the result of land and labor shortages, as well as expensive building materials. A survey on Tuesday showed that though builders reported strong demand for new homes, they continued to highlight "affordability concerns stemming from a chronic shortage of construction workers and buildable lots."

These factors are constraining builders' ability to construct homes in the lower price segment of the market, which continues to experience a shortage of homes for sale. The housing market hit a soft patch last year, with investment in homebuilding contracting 0.3 percent, the weakest performance since 2010.

#### FUNDAMENTALS IMPROVING

Despite the weakness in homebuilding, the fundamentals for the housing market are improving. The 30-year fixed mortgage rate has dropped from a peak of about 4.94 percent in November to around 4.12 percent, according to data from mortgage finance agency Freddie Mac. Wage growth is also strengthening. Declining mortgage rates follow a recent decision by the Federal Reserve to suspend its three-year monetary policy tightening campaign.

While housing continues to be soft, the other segments of the economy have rebounded from earlier weakness. Retail sales surged in March and trade, inventory and construction spending data have also been bullish, leading economists to upgrade their gross domestic product growth estimates for the first quarter.



FILE PHOTO: A construction worker builds a single family home in San Diego, California, U.S. February 15, 2017. Picture taken REUTERS/Mike Blake



FILE PHOTO: Single family homes being built by KB Homes are shown under construction in San Diego

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## Editor's Choice



Soccer Football - Women's World Cup - Group E - Canada v New Zealand - Stade des Alpes, Grenoble, France - June 15, 2019 General view of fan holding France 2019 Women's World Cup flag inside the stadium before the match REUTERS/Denis Balibouse



A girl reacts after riot police threw tear gas during a general strike against the government's pension plan and cuts to federal spending on higher education planned by Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro's right-wing government in Rio de Janeiro



A guard lies on the ground after falling off his horse during the Trooping the Colour parade in central London, Britain June 8, 2019. REUTERS/Peter Nicholls TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY



U.S. Democratic presidential candidate and U.S. Senator Kamala Harris joins with striking McDonalds workers in Las Vegas



Venezuelan children sleep at the Binational Border Service Center of Peru in Tumbes



A person smiles during the Gay Pride Parade in Rome, Italy, June 8, 2019. REUTERS/Yara Nardi TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY



Members of the Coldstream Guards take part in the Trooping the Colour parade in central London, Britain June 8, 2019. REUTERS/Peter Nicholls TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY



A reveller takes part in the LGBT Rainbow Parade during the EuroPride in Vienna, Austria June 15, 2019. REUTERS/Lisi Niesner TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY

SUNDAY, JUNE 16, 2019

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# COMMUNITY

## Students Will Learn How To Write Cursive Letters Beginning In The Second Grade

### Texas Students Will Have To Learn Cursive Again Starting This Fall



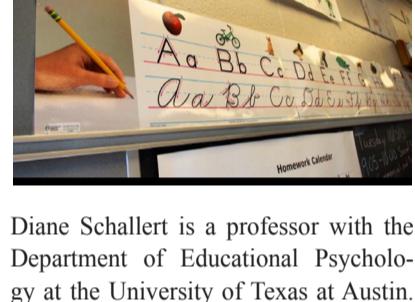
Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

AUSTIN, Texas — Most school districts in Texas don't currently teach cursive. But that's about to change.

In 2017, the State Board of Education changed the requirements for the "English Language Arts and Reading" portion of the state education standards known as Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills or TEKS. The changes that were adopted are set to be implemented during the 2019-2020 school year.

One of those changes is reintroducing cursive writing to elementary school students.

According to the list of updates issued under the Texas Education Code, starting this year, students will be taught to write cursive letters in second grade. By third grade, students will be expected to be able to "write complete words, thoughts, and answers legibly in cursive writing leaving appropriate spaces between words."



Diane Schallert is a professor with the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Texas at Austin.



By fourth grade, students will be expected to write legibly in cursive to complete assignments.

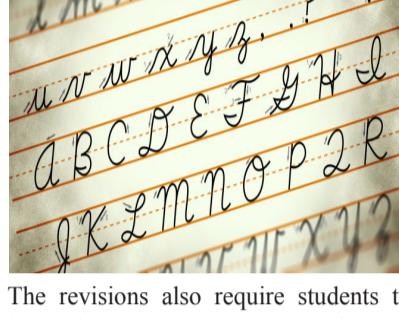
Cursive will be added back into elementary school curriculum during the 2019-2020 school year for all Texas districts. (Courtesy <https://www.wfaa.com>)

#### Related

##### Arizona becomes first state to require cursive writing in schools

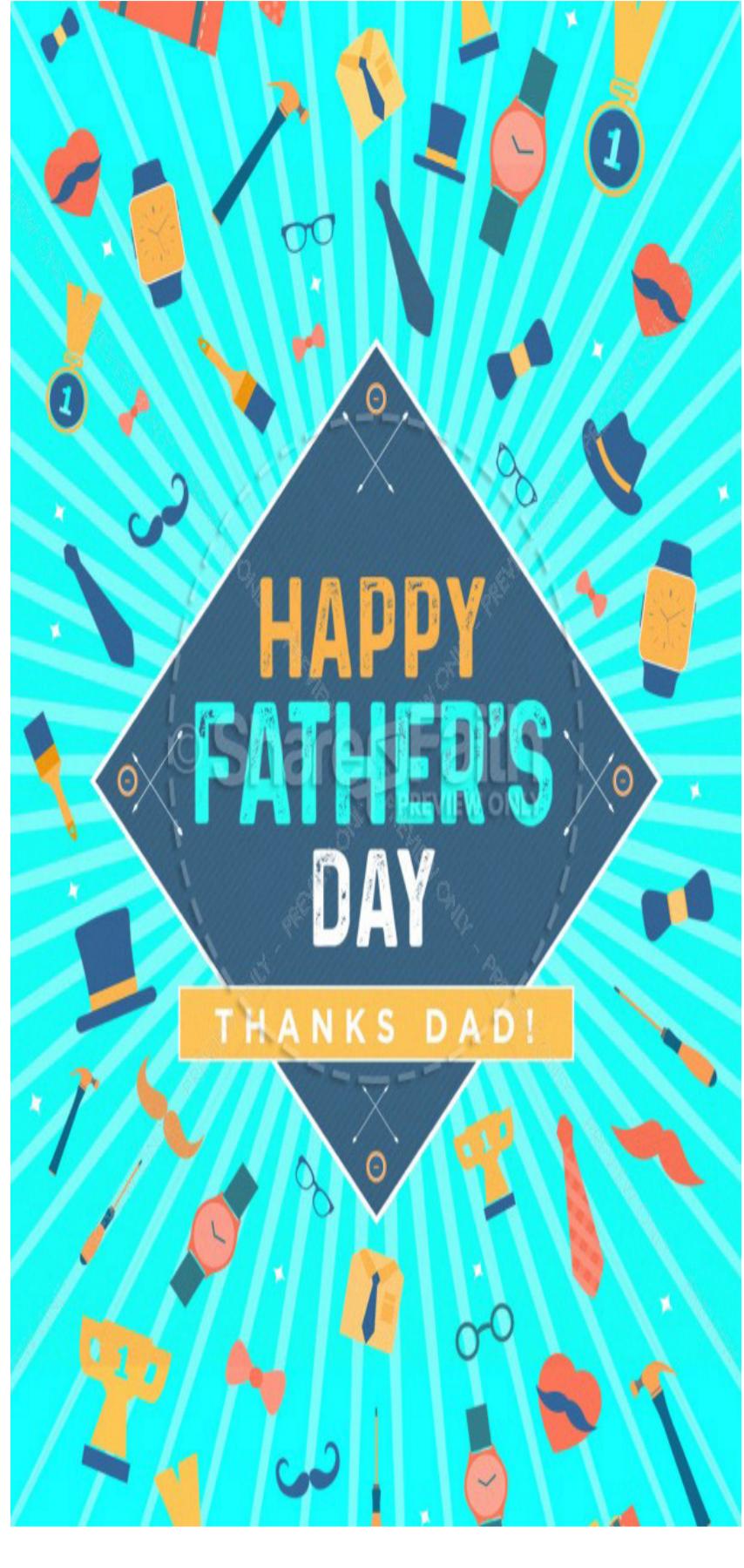
PHOENIX (AP) - Arizona will require public schools to teach cursive handwriting as one of a number of new education standards approved by the state Board of Education.

The move amends state's current standards, which are based on federal guidelines known as the Common Core. Common Core has become a politicized topic.



The revisions also require students to learn about time and money and memorize spelling lists in early grades and set standards for high-school-level math courses that are not required for graduation.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Diane Douglas says the changes were designed to clarify rules and give teachers and school boards more flexibility. The Board of Education says 48 percent of the Common Core standards on language arts and 40 percent of the Common Core standards on math were revised. (Courtesy <https://www.kvue.com/>)



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Cheerios, Nature Valley Cereals Contain Roundup Ingredient, Study Finds

## Roundup For Breakfast: Tests Show Weed Killer In All Kids' Cereals Sampled



### OVERVIEW

21 oat-based cereal and snack products such as Cheerios tested positive for traces of glyphosate. The chemical is the active ingredient in Roundup, which has been at the center of several trials alleging the weedkiller causes cancer. All but four of the products tested had glyphosate levels higher than what an environmental group considers safe for children.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Twenty-one oat-based cereal and snack products popular with children contain traces of glyphosate, the active ingredient in the weed killer Roundup, according to tests from the Environmental Working Group. EWG said the tests found glyphosate levels above what it considers safe for children in all but four of the products.

The 21 products that were tested are made by General Mills, including six varieties of Cheerios and 14 of General Mills' Nature Valley products, such as Nature Valley granola bars.

General Mills said food safety is a "top priority" for the company, which said it's working to minimize the use of pesticides on the ingredients it uses. "Most crops grown in fields use some form of pesticides and trace amounts are found in the majority of food we eat," the company said in

an emailed statement. "Experts at the FDA and EPA determine the safe levels for food products," which it adheres to, as well as farmers that grow the crops, it added.



The report is the latest from the EWG to detect traces of glyphosate in cereals. The environmental advocacy group found traces of the chemical in dozens of Cheerios and Quaker brand products in October.

Glyphosate has been at the center of several high-profile lawsuits alleging the chemical causes cancer. A California jury awarded a couple \$2 billion in punitive damages after concluding that sustained exposure to Monsanto's popular Roundup weed killer led to their cancer diagnoses. Monsanto is now owned by Bayer.

Several varieties of Cheerios — including Honey Nut, Chocolate Peanut Butter, Oat Crunch and Multi Grain — are included on the list of foods that contain "troubling" levels of glyphosate, the cancer-causing ingredient in the Bayer-Monsanto herbicide Roundup, the Environmental Working Group announced Wednesday.

Twenty-one oat-based cereal and snack products — also including several from the Nature Valley line — were sampled in a round of testing commissioned by the group, a new statement said.



All but four of them contained levels higher than what scientists consider safe for children, according to the report.

The nonprofit organization has previously said that the level of the ingredient safe for kids is no more than 160 parts per billion (ppb).

The highest level of glyphosate is found in Honey Nut Cheerios Medley Crunch — at 833 ppb. The lowest is found in Nature Valley's Dark Chocolate & Nut version of Fruit & Nut Chewy Trail Mix Granola Bar, with only 76 ppb.

A second round of tests commissioned by the Environmental Working Group found the active ingredient in Monsanto's Roundup weed killer in every sample of popular oat-based cereal and other oat-based food marketed to children. These test results fly

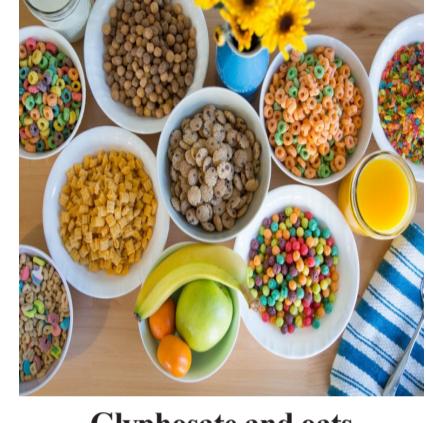
in the face of claims by two companies, Quaker and General Mills, which have said there is no reason for concern. This is because, they say, their products meet the legal standards.

Yet almost all of the samples tested by EWG had residues of glyphosate at levels higher than what EWG scientists consider protective of children's health with an adequate margin of safety. The EWG findings of a chemical identified as probably carcinogenic by the World Health Organization come on the heels of a major study published in JAMA Internal Medicine that found a significant reduction in cancer risk for individuals who ate a lot of organic food.

Twenty-one oat-based cereal and snack products — also including several from the Nature Valley line — were sampled in a round of testing commissioned by the group, a new statement said.

However, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has a far higher threshold for glyphosate content, ranging from 0.1 to 310 parts per million, rather than per billion.

Even though several juries have found in favor of cancer patients who claim their illness is linked to glyphosate exposure, there are conflicting scientific studies. The World Health Organization's cancer agency has said the weedkiller is "possibly carcinogenic to humans," but other organizations have said they believe the link is unlikely.



Detects Above  
EWG's Health  
Benchmark  
(160 ppb)

**28**

SAMPLES  
TESTED

**28**

GLYPHOSATE  
DETECTS

**26**

DETECTS ABOVE  
EWG'S HEALTH  
BENCHMARK  
(160 ppb)

### Glyphosate and oats

Glyphosate is sprayed on oats to dry out the crop, making it easier to harvest, the EWG said. The group said the practice increases the chances the chemical will end up in children's cereal.

"The only way to quickly remove this cancer-causing weedkiller from foods marketed to children is for companies like General Mills and Quaker to use oats from farmers who do not use glyphosate as a desiccant," it said in the report.

The four products that tested below the EWG's threshold of 160 parts per billion are:

- Honey Nut Cheerios
- Nature Valley Fruit & Nut Chewy Trail Mix Granola Bars, Dark Chocolate & Nut
- Nature Valley Sweet & Salty Nut granola bars, Cashew
- Nature Valley Soft-Baked Oatmeal Squares, Cinnamon Brown Sugar

(Courtesy tps://www.cbsnews.com/news/)

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