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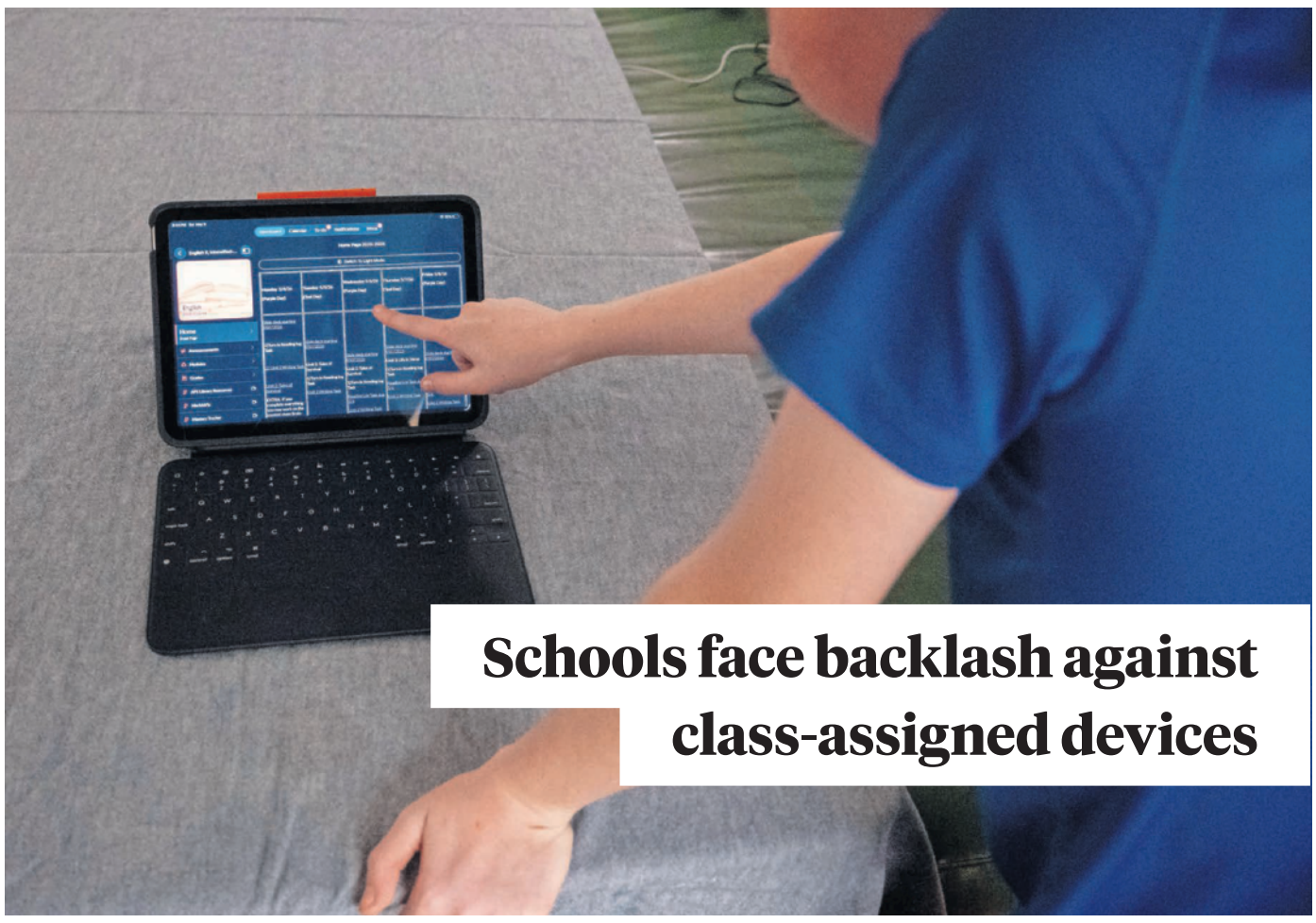
JACKSON CITIZEN PATRIOT

MAJOR TEST

JAPAN'S NAOMI OSAKA RETURNS A SERVE IN OPENING-ROUND ACTION AT THE FRENCH OPEN — THE SECOND OF THE FOUR MAJORS IN TENNIS. PLAY RESUMES INTO NEXT WEEK IN PARIS. **B1**



Schools face backlash against class-assigned devices

A student at a school in Arlington, Va., shows how he uses an iPad for classes. One mom says, "Ten years from now, I can't imagine us looking back with any other reaction than: How could we have been so naive that we just handed these devices to our kids?" *AP*

***Education:** At least 14 states have proposed laws to limit screen time in schools.*

Jocelyn Gecker *Associated Press*

A member of the Lower Merion Board of School Directors speaks with a student at a school board meeting last month in Ardmore, Pa. *Joe Lamberti, Associated Press*

Just a few years ago, America's public schools were rushing to get every child a laptop. Los Angeles middle school teacher Anna Soffer remembers it well: "The idea was that technology is the future, so we need to put tech in every child's hands."

Now, the conversation has flipped. After pouring billions of dollars into laptops, tablets and learning apps, many schools are facing a digital reckoning. Classrooms have become saturated with screens, and a growing number of parents, teachers and school districts are saying it is time to scale back.

"The Chromebook is just a world of distraction," says Soffer, who teaches sixth-grade English and history. She favors pen-and-paper assignments but is required to use laptops and online apps for certain activities. "Every day, I'm battling, 'Who would you rather listen to, Ms. Soffer or Minecraft?'"

The Los Angeles Unified School District, where Soffer teaches, recently became the first major school district to say it will stop giving devices to its youngest students. It is part of a new screen-time policy taking effect in the fall across the country's second-largest school system.

A sweeping resolution passed last month by the Los Angeles school board requires the district to eliminate devices until second grade; set daily and weekly screen limits for all higher grades; block YouTube on school devices; and ban the use of devices at lunch and recess in elementary and middle school. The district will also audit its education technology contracts, which the teachers union says amount to $1.6 billion.

The Los Angeles crackdown is adding momentum to calls for reform emerging around the country. In many cases, parents lobbied a few years ago for school cellphone bans, which have now become the norm. Realizing phones weren't the only classroom distraction, they pivoted to a new target: school-issued devices.

The campaign for change is becoming a public policy issue. At least 14 states have proposed laws to limit screen time in schools, according to Ballotpedia. The federal government issued an advisory last week warning that excessive screen use among youth is becoming a growing public health concern.

SCREEN LIMITS AT HOME

In Los Angeles, concerned parents last year formed a group, Schools Beyond Screens, and pressured the district by speaking out at school board meetings, on social media and in private talks with administrators. Many are frustrated by trying to curb screen time at home, only to have screens mandated by school.

As a mother of three, Katie Pace does everything in her power to limit screens. There is one family iPad and one television at home, no screen time during the week and no screens allowed in bedrooms. Her eighth-grade daughter, Clementine, does not have a phone.

But as soon as Clementine gets on the Wi-Fi-enabled school bus, her day takes a turn for the digital.

For the 30-minute ride to school, Clementine watches YouTube videos on her school Chromebook. In Spanish class, assignments are on the app Duolingo, but many students use Google Translate for answers, Clementine said.

SEE EDUCATION, A3

MICHIGAN POLITICS

If $5 billion in taxes go away, where is funding coming from?

The Michigan House passed the bills cutting state property taxes.

Danielle James *djames@mlive.com*

LANSING — Just after 9 p.m. on May 20, the Michigan House of Representatives passed bills cutting more than $5 billion in state property taxes.

House Speaker Matt Hall, R-Richland Township, has pointed to the package as necessary to bring down costs for Michiganders. But education leaders and some lawmakers have expressed concerns that the resulting revenue losses could leave schools and local governments without necessary funding.

The House bills were formally introduced in April, and the chamber had a first hearing on the plan on April 30.

The nine-bill package, which also includes a joint resolution, would eliminate the 6-mill education property tax, repeal the "pop-up" property tax and require public utilities to reduce rates in exchange for a removal of the personal property tax.

> "If Lansing changes the property tax structure without a guaranteed and reliable replacement, local communities are left with the consequences."
>
> **Rep. Jaime Greene, R-Richmond**

The majority of the bills in the package passed by a vote of 57-46, after one Democratic lawmaker who's been absent from the chamber for several months, Rep. Karen Whitsett, D-Detroit, returned to vote for them.

Yet to move is one bill meant to backfill the lost state revenue by creating a 6% tax on not-yet-determined services.

Hall said those details are being finalized with the state's Treasury Department.

He previously pointed to the potential for a tax on luxury services, but has not yet laid out what those services could be.

The intent, Hall said, is to negotiate property tax reform with Whitmer's administration during the budget process.

One Republican, Rep. Jaime Greene, R-Richmond, voted no on the bills. She called them a "tax shift" without a guaranteed revenue replacement for local governments.

"If Lansing changes the property tax structure without a guaranteed and reliable replacement, local communities are left with the consequences," she said. "That could mean service cuts, higher fees, new millage requests, delayed road projects or local officials being forced to come back to the state for help."

SEE MICHIGAN POLITICS, A3

Sean Astin sneaks into Michigan for movie role

"The Lord of the Rings" star is shooting a Christmas film.

Edward Pevos *epevos@MLive.com*

This isn't your ordinary Christmas movie. Sean Astin recently sneaked in and out of metro Detroit to shoot a nontraditional holiday film.

The star of "Rudy," "The Goonies" and "The Lord of the Rings" stars in "Scruggs," a Scrooge-inspired movie currently being shown at Cannes Film Festival in France.

The movie was mostly shot in Holly, with other scenes filmed in Detroit, Rochester and a few other spots in the area.

Astin says his Marley-type character used to be a good person, but is now quite cruel.

"I come back as his friend now and I'm trying to warn him that he used to be this lovely guy, but now only cares about business," Astin said.

"Scruggs" was co-written by Calvin Kassab and Brian Farstvedt and produced by Sam Logan Khaleghi.

Kassab, a Rochester native, also stars opposite Astin. He describes the movie as a modern day version of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol."

"I play a character called Edward Scruggs, who is usually the Scrooge character. This is a modern version of that and we take a lot of liberties. I'm a huge comedy fan. I describe this as a blend of 'A Christmas Carol' meets The Muppets meets an Adam Sandler movie. We have a lot of quirky characters in this."

Holly is known for being a festive city, especially late in the year. The village plays a big role in the movie.

"This is one of those films where Holly is even more so a character because it's sort of the community versus Scruggs," added Logan Khaleghi. "Kassab and I love showing that Michigan has so much talent and we can do high-quality films within a budget right here in the state."

The plan is to release the movie by the next Christmas season as it currently makes the rounds on the film festival circuit.

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