

Schools equality not more money

The Kansas Legislature so far has done nothing to solve the "school problem," and that may not be entirely a bad thing.

The state's schools probably will get some more money, but nothing like the billion dollars recommended in a consultants' report a couple of years ago — and demanded by a Topeka judge's ruling last month.

For one thing, no one can really say how much money Kansas schools need. They already take more than half the state budget

The state Constitution says the Legislature shall make "suitable" provision for the school budget. Half of everything might seem more than suitable to some, but schools are important.

Still, average test scores for Kansas students are high and they seem to do well in college or trade school. Kansas schools have better equipment and facilities than many, and the money is there for basic education.

There are inequalities.

Schools with shrinking enrollment — which includes most districts in rural Kansas, especially the northwest — are in a pinch, because student count is the biggest component of a district's budget.

Many put off the day of reckoning, but with times tight and no extra state money, they are cutting back. That hurts, but most Kansas businesses have been forced to do the same thing. So has the state.

It's easy to say that people can afford a tax increase, but most voters seem to disagree.

Then there are the growing suburban districts, places like Blue Valley, where wrestling mats retract into the walls of new high schools. These schools may not be exactly plush, but the evidence — and the copious course offerings — suggest they have more money than they could get by with.

Still other districts are pushed by demands for special education or English as a second language. Immigrants may bring growth and new dollars, but their children can be expensive to teach.

Other districts, eyeing the share of the pie going to neighbors, are unhappy with the way it's divided. That was the genesis of the lawsuit now making its way to the state Supreme Court.

We hope the high court throws the suit out. In our democratic system, it's the Legislature and not the courts that should decide how much to spend on schools. Only our elected representatives should decide what is "suitable."

It's true that the state needs to deal with the inequities in the system, but that's no easy task and there is no money to throw at the problem. It'll have to be solved within the current budget, or nearly so. There will be no billion-dollar bonus for public schools. There is no need for one.

But the Legislature does need to apply itself to the task of making the school budget system a little more equal, and it needs to do that before the next session ends.

In the meantime, the courts ought to back off and let the system function, even if that means little or no change until the voters demand one.

In a democracy like ours, that's the way the system is supposed to work. If the Legislature doesn't act, it's made a decision, and the losers should not count on the courts to bail them out.

— Steve Haynes

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She's a proud mother of college grad

She did it! I am now, officially, the mother of a certified, card-carrying, educated, college graduate.

They take graduation ceremonies seriously at the University of Maryland University College. In early March, my daughter, Halley, then referred to as "The Candidate," received a very official-looking document regarding ticket information, cap and gown size, lodging, luncheon and new graduate information.

On graduation day, candidates MUST be in line, at the auditorium, in alphabetical order, by 7:30 a.m. or they would have to be seated in the rear of the auditorium. And they meant it. Halley said several arrived at 7:35 and were not allowed to join the procession.

Each candidate was allowed six (6) tickets for the ceremonies. The ticket MUST NOT be separated from the stub or the ticket would be rendered void. Parking was allowed only in certain places. Guests were expected to stay for the entire ceremony, and so were the candidates.

Further study of the information revealed that over 1,300 graduates and 11,000 guests were expected.

Several long-time friends of my daughter flew to Washington to share the day with her and to celebrate her achievement. Amber is a young woman I have known since she and Halley were in high school together. Kristi is a friend Halley has had for almost that long and Rebekah is a relatively new friend.

That whole concept of friendship is unique. These young women are diverse. One is a programmer for a huge software company, one is a personal fitness trainer, and the other is a financial analyst for a

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



large hospital. They are from different backgrounds, but with one thing in common: they are loyal friends. This week, they were there for Halley. In two weeks, they are all meeting again to help one of them move into a new apartment.

The only way you get loyal friends like that is to be a loyal friend yourself. So, as proud as I am of my daughter for sticking with it and finishing something she started, I am just as proud of her for being the kind of woman she is and such a good friend.

—ob—

We celebrated that night by going out to dinner at a great Italian restaurant on DuPont Circle in the heart of Washington. It was loud and crowded. The aromas in the air made your mouth water. Waiters never wrote down a thing; they remembered your orders and got them all right. The meal was served family-style and Halley got carried away, ordering at least two more courses than we should have. But we brought the extra home, so we'll enjoy Italian food for a few more days.

Today is our tourist day. Halley took the day off and we are heading out to see Arlington National Cemetery and the new World War II Memorial. I want to go back to the Vietnam Memorial and the

Roosevelt Memorial. If the Martin Luther King Memorial is completed, I want to see that, too.

Yesterday, Kara had a tour of the West Wing. Halley's friend Lois, who has the security clearance to take guests through, came in on her day off, to escort Kara and Rebekah. (Refer to paragraph eight above). She is the same woman who stayed until 9 p.m. on a Friday night to escort me. We can't thank her enough for her kindness.

—ob—

On Wednesday, I am flying from Washington to Seattle for a mini-reunion with my sister, Kathryn, and her daughters, Patricia and Delight. Kathryn is planning a spa day for all of us as a special treat. This will be something I have never done.

I am told that if you are even the slightest bit claustrophobic, do not do the herbal body wrap. I don't think I'm claustrophobic, but being wrapped in scalding hot towels with a banana leaf over my face doesn't sound like fun. I might pass on the wrap, but I'm looking forward to everything else. Pedicures are my favorite.

—ob—

Jim is handling my extended vacation very well. This whole thing grew from a few days away into a 10-day excursion. And never once did he ever say he didn't want me to go or ask why I thought I had to be gone for so long. He was nothing but encouraging, knowing how important it was for me to do both things.

This, of course, means he is entitled to do the same. Hm-m-m-m, did I hear something about an antique engine and thresher show in Nova Scotia?

A good friend is something to cherish

I recently was invited to lunch with my daughter-in-law and two of her friends. As we ate and they shared some of their experiences and fun times, I couldn't help but think what a wonderful gift a good friend is.

When I was much younger, my good friend's mother told us, "You girls don't realize how fortunate you are to have such a good friendship."

Our reply was, "Yeah, yeah."

Now, as we've both grown older, lived thousands of miles apart, weathered many personal crises, we say, "How very blessed we've been."

My mother and her college roommate, Aileen Boxler, still talk frequently and through the years they have eaten countless meals together, shared stories, shopped and cherished their friendship.

The greatest thing about long-lasting,

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



good friendships is the unconditional love and lack of judgment.

We don't have to agree, but we agree to respect the other's beliefs. I have a dear friend who comes back to Norton twice a year and each time we share lunch, fight over the last piece of coconut cream pie, and sit for three to four hours just talking.

Our discussions become very heated at times, but always end on, "It was so good to see you and have our long talk."

WRITE:

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We know we won't change each other's mind. We are about 180 degrees apart on most issues, but we respect and love one another enough to overlook that.

I will never forget when one of our children was very young and they said to me, "Oh, I couldn't be friends with them they're 'Democrat/Republican'."

I pointed out that our best friends were the opposite of us. The child was in absolute disbelief because for some reason friends to them had become synonymous with like-mindedness.

The true beauty of friendships is the wide variety of thought we can share.

It is truly how we gain new insight, explore new thoughts and change or strengthen our own beliefs. And isn't that what friendship is all about, to help us become "better at who we are"?

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