

### A new way to measure a school success is needed

I'm not writing a doctoral thesis on education (thank heavens) but my daughter is. For some reason she thinks everyone she comes into contact with is interested in the topic, so she recommends reading. From this I have come to a conclusion: no one knows how to fix education.

**This Too Shall Pass**  
*Nancy Hagman*



Education guru, Diane Ravitch originally supported "No Child Left Behind" and school choice then changed her mind (several times) about how to reform education. In her book "The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education" she is critical of everything that has been tried to date.

She is supportive of teachers, saying "The best predictor of low academic performance is poverty---not bad teachers."

In the concluding chapter, she accuses the government of abdicating responsibility for schools by offering "choice" or vouchers. If "experts" cannot agree on what constitutes a successful school, how do families?

Ravitch makes an analogy: Your house is on fire, 911 takes your address and mails you information about the effectiveness of fire stations in the area. After studying the outcomes you decide which fire department you want to fight your fire.

The one thing Ravitch does not do is tell us how to fix education.

The projected budget shortfall for the Norton Schools makes me sad. Economically times may be hard so I can understand the state's position of holding the line on school funding, but cutting it?

Governor Brownback appears to think the state will experience population growth if people pay fewer taxes. But don't people want effective schools?

As I visit and read about what teachers are thinking, it surprises me that they seem most distressed over the fact that Kansas school districts will no longer deduct KNEA dues from their paychecks.

Just how hard is it to write a check or have the dues automatically withdrawn from a bank account? Unions fight this type of law as it benefits them if their members do not write checks. If members think about the benefits versus cost each month as they write the check membership may go down.

On the other hand how difficult is it for school districts to continue to withhold dues? Doing so helps teachers feel they are supported and respected by their schools rather than in an adversarial relationship.

A teacher relayed this experience from her non-school life to me: She had a deadline, at the last moment she discovered the wrong document had been submitted. Despite her best efforts the proper paperwork was not signed in time.

Her first reaction upon receiving the news she would be penalized for the mistake was "Why can't they make an exception?" Then the realization: of course, she expected someone would change the rules and bail her out. It happens every day at school. Teachers are expected to fix things. Kids are never accountable.

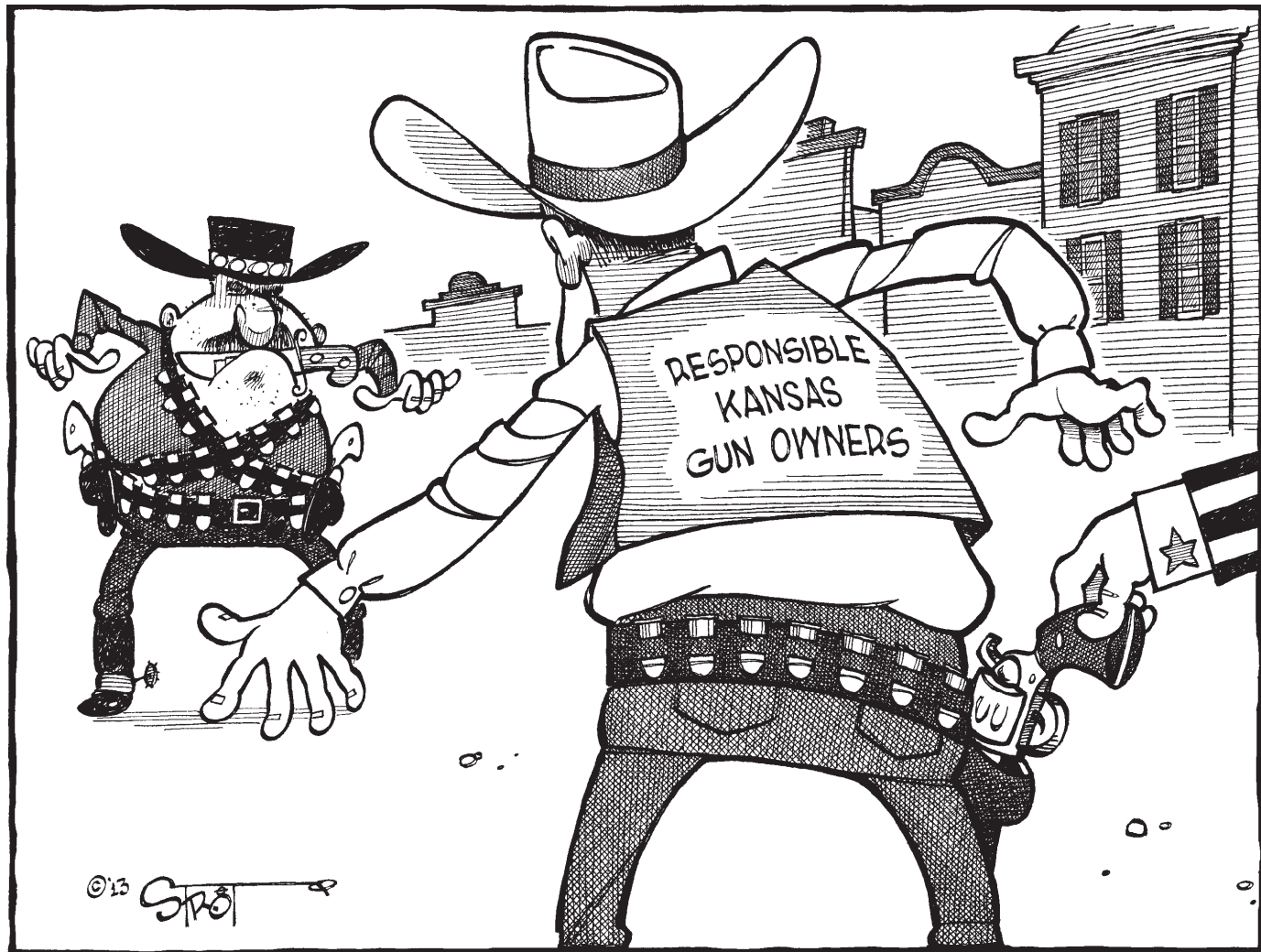
As the daughter and mother of teachers I admit a bias. It seems the only people held accountable are teachers. Students do not fail; teachers fail. Administrators do not choose the wrong curriculum; the teachers present the material in the wrong fashion. Standardized tests are not structured poorly; teachers should standardize students so each gets a perfect score.

America is a large, diverse country. Countries with the highest test scores are small in population and land mass. Their population is homogeneous, they value the same things.

What do American students value? I give you Ferris Bueller: "I did have a test today. It's on European socialism. I mean, really, what's the point? I'm not European. I don't plan on being European, so who gives a crap if they're socialists? They could be fascist anarchists - that still wouldn't change the fact that I don't own a car."

How do you fix Ferris Bueller? Do we really want to? He's creative, fun, even smart. He's American.

Our boldness and ingenuity is not something that can be measured on a standardized test. I'm not suggesting we accept failing schools. But it may be time to find a different measure of success.



### The lack of moral courage today

The recent trial in Steubenville, Ohio, has captured the nation's attention and mine as well. Not the trial so much, but the tragedy of young lives caught up in partying and a lack of moral courage. There is plenty of blame to go around in this rape of a sixteen year old girl by two prominent high school football players and then broadcast on social media. The girl was unconscious as the boys carried her around like an animal.

The first to be blamed are the boys who committed this horrific act, but what about the youth who also lacked "moral courage" to call for help. Due to the large number of pictures taken on cell phones, any one of those individuals could have reported the crime before it became a crime. The party occurred in a private home. Where were the parents?

Young girls also need to be held accountable. Underage drinking is

**Phase II**  
*Mary Kay Woodyard*



illegal. Have we become so troubled by drugs that we do not focus on the dangers of drinking, and the very real threat of being incapacitated from alcohol? All too often, I have heard parents say they would rather their children drink than start using drugs. Clearly, this is not an either/or situation, it is a tragic life changing event.

Where did these young people get the alcohol? Sometimes minors are able to buy it, but more frequently they obtain it from an adult, from their own home or a friend's home.

At the very core of this, is the tragic

lack of compassion and respect for a fellow human being. In all our efforts to make us more accepting, what happened to respecting and caring for each other?

The event in Steubenville is repeated across the nation countless times each year. As members of a community, we need to ask ourselves, are we addressing the issues which brought about this breakdown? Do we protect our youth? Do we encourage compassionate behavior or do we want so badly to be friends with our teenager that we behave more like a 16 year old than the needed parent? Do we demand and support police and judicial action to curb these types of crimes? It is in our hands, not just those of parents, but grandparents, aunts, uncles, neighbors, and friends. We were all young once, but let's make sure each youth has a chance to grow into a full life. Mail to: mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net

### The joy and humor of working with small children

Many of you know I volunteer at the local elementary school. This year I spend my time at the school in a second grade classroom. I believe that second graders are some of the neatest human beings I have encountered. They have an innocence we usually associate with young children. This means they sometimes say things that adults might consider rude or inappropriate. They blurt out questions and answers without raising their hands or waiting to be acknowledged. Their quest for knowledge is sometimes unlimited, so the questions they ask may not have answers they can understand. These children are affectionate and give hugs spontaneously.

This does not mean their behavior is perfect; part of being this age is learning what behaviors are appropriate in different settings. But they readily model behavior in adults whom they want to impress, while often giving in to the natural impulses of their age.

This classroom is a microcosm of our culture. Some children are tempestuous

**Life is Good**  
*Rita Speer*



and impulsive, often acting first and speaking later. Others are cautious and unwilling to risk trying new things without encouragement. There are leaders and followers in this group. Some of the youngsters seek attention, while others seem to be content to wait for someone to single them out.

They are grateful. With all the commercials on television and the ads in the print media telling us we will only be happy if we have this gadget or that device, these children express gratitude for little things: a new pencil or eraser, a special Valentine or an opportunity to have some time for fun in the classroom. Of course some of them have access to electronic devices, but they also appreciate expressions of

care.

I sometimes work one-on-one with some of the children, helping them with a "stuck point" they may be having. That is one of my favorite assignments, as I feel I am a part of their lives, even if only for a short period of time.

When one of "my" teachers retired last year, and surgery loomed in the future, I considered not going back this year. But I was drawn, as I am every year, to engage these children. I love being around them, receiving and giving hugs, explaining what needs to be done to a paper that's been returned with corrections needed and sharing my own life experience. They do so much for me, and that's why I continue volunteering.

I can sum it up in a comment made by a second grader with whom I interacted a couple of years ago; she said she wished I were her grandma. Wow!

So I will "sign up" for next year and watch the next group of second graders change and make process in the long and often difficult task of growing up.

**THUMBS UP!** Letters to the Editor and Thumbs Up: e-mail [dpaxton@nwkansas.com](mailto:dpaxton@nwkansas.com) or to write 215 S. Kansas Ave.

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