

# Opinion



## A Kansas Viewpoint

### Unchartered water in charter schools?

**From The Wichita Eagle**  
New Kansas Education Commissioner Bob Corkins has been pushing for more charter schools as a way to cut bureaucratic red tape and spur innovation in state schools. But do the 26 mainly rural-based charter schools in Kansas have a better record than public schools of raising achievement for at-risk students?  
“No, not necessarily,” said Alexa Posny, deputy education commissioner. Charter schools, which operate independent of public schools but can receive state funding, have about the same rate of success as public schools in increasing proficiency scores for at-risk students, who comprise about 83 percent of charter students, she said.  
Do charter schools cut through bureaucratic red tape to deliver more resources to students? Again, no significant difference, according to Posny. She pointed out that all schools that accept state and federal funds — and that includes almost all Kansas charter schools — have to meet the same paperwork and accreditation standards and federal mandates such as the No Child Left Behind law.  
Charter schools have been an attractive grass roots reform option in states plagued with failing inner-city public schools that are unable or unwilling to address their problems. But there’s a reason charter schools haven’t caught on in Kansas: By and large, our public schools are successful, and in recent years statewide proficiency scores for at-risk kids have risen dramatically.  
Corkins is right that personalizing instruction should be a key goal. But that’s true for all at-risk students, whether they’re sitting in a regular public school or charter classroom. In both kinds of schools, the obstacles to providing innovation and individualized learning remain the same: the need for more resources, funding and time.

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail [jvannostrand@nwkansans.com](mailto:jvannostrand@nwkansans.com) or [pdecker@nwkansans.com](mailto:pdecker@nwkansans.com).

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## Does not compute

Two years ago I made the following statement, “Computers are like toilets, a household necessity that goes unnoticed until it doesn’t work.”

This year’s version of the statement is that computers are a great invention, but if they go haywire they are like diarrhea, a major pain!

Working from a home office and having a computer go down is an event worth noting. You can’t run across the hall or into the cubical of a co-worker and continue working; you run the public library or a friend’s house to use their computer to file a story.

When my laptop computer monitor failed in 2004, I went out on a limb and bought a smaller, yet slower, laptop as a backup unit. It works great unless the Internet is down. If it fails, it’s back to the public library or to a friend’s house to file a story.

All that aside, I’ll tell you the latest glitch to my computer world in hopes you are never stumped by this one.

As a personal computer user linked to satellite Internet I’m always getting messages about the latest bell or whistle download. Thinking I was improving my system, I downloaded the upgraded toolbar and thought all would be well. Wrong!

After about two days of running the new toolbar my computer started to zig when it should have zagged. After numerous e-mails to Microsoft and dumping as many files as I could afford to delete I got the problem solved.

Seems the new toolbar from Microsoft didn’t like working with the Google toolbar I was running. Each time I’d log off and shut down my system I’d get a little pop-up box saying if I had a file open I’d loose any “unsaved” data. Ouch!



#### Jan Katz Ackerman

##### • From Where I stand

Concerned I would crash my entire system, I removed the Microsoft toolbar, restored my computer to a date prior to downloading it and yippee... problem fixed.

No more pop-up windows, it shuts down fine and things are running faster than ever.

Speaking of things being broke, how about our weather?

I was puttering in the yard Friday evening and looked up and in surprise saw big, fat buds on my Bradford Pear tree. It took a double take and close-up examination of not only it, but some Red Plum bushes adjacent to the tree to realize spring has sprung - two months early.

Knowing it takes highs in the 100s and lows in the below 0s to get a northwest Kansas average, our 60, 70 and 80 degree weather isn’t going to cut it without a bunch of -10, -20 and I’ll stop.

February and March will have to be record lows to offset our recent record highs. And thinking about the fact my birthday is in March, well, I’m postponing it until June.

Speaking of birthdays, 50 came and went as easily as did 40, 30 and 20. No, I don’t have

children running around the house as I did when I was 20, nor am I playing chauffeur to children as I did when I was 30. I don’t even have a child in college as I did when I was 40, and it’s true, life begins at 50.

Whoever said life begins at 40 has yet to be 50. After work we do as we want, when we want and where we want and the only thing restricting our time and activities is my infamous almost 2-year-old beagle, Katie. But even that’s getting better. She’s got me completely trained and house broke and all is well. As long as her schedule comes first that is!

Becoming empty-nested and jumping into raising a dog has been an experience I wouldn’t repeat, but it has been interesting. While I love the little critter to pieces, the bay of her “beagleness” often makes me wonder about getting her a barkectomy.

She doesn’t bark like a regular dog, it’s more like a distant cry of a cow giving birth during a blizzard.

In fact, on a recent trip to Hays the need to let Katie out of her kennel for a brief pit stop occurred.

Spotting a small strip of grass just east of Main Street on 11th Street, I took Katie for a walk. After a lady and her daughter tried to “chat” with my little four-legged friend, three people poked their heads out of their businesses thinking they needed to call the cops. “Oh, we thought someone was beating a dog,” one lady said. “I thought there was a wounded dog out here,” another commented.

Needless to say Katie won’t be walked in downtown Hays ever again.

## State needs to send the message

#### From the Lawrence World-Journal

It’s time for Kansas to get tougher on people who abuse and torture animals.

Kansas is one of only nine states that treat animal abuse as a misdemeanor. One state legislator has introduced a bill that would make extreme cruelty to animals a felony. Another has introduced a bill that would require animal torturers to undergo psychological evaluation, serve a county jail sentence and have a sample of their DNA entered into a crime database.

Those requirements make a lot of sense. It has been well documented that many people who abuse, torture or kill humans have previously

made animals their victims. Requiring psychological evaluations for animal abusers may allow them to get the kind of help that will keep them from moving on to crimes involving humans. A jail sentence and having their DNA permanently on file may help drive home the seriousness of their crime.

State Sen. David Haley, who introduced the bill making extreme animal cruelty a felony, said he was moved by a case in 1997 when a small dog named Scruffy was tortured, burned and beaten to death by three men who videotaped the whole episode. ...

Sen. Phil Journey, who introduced the bill

requiring psychological evaluations, said making a first offense of animal abuse a felony would reduce the bill’s chances of passage. That may be true, but 41 other states apparently think extreme animal cruelty justifies a felony conviction. Why not Kansas?

Cracking down on animal abuse is a protection not only for animals but for humans who later may be victimized by the same offenders. Extreme animal abuse is a horrific and sickening crime.

Kansas should send the message that such aberrant and dangerous behavior is a serious crime that demands a serious punishment.

#### Doonesbury

##### • Gary Trudeau

