

# Opinion

## Free Press Viewpoint



### Protecting jobs or improving schools?

While the state of Kansas hems and haws over how to fund public education, one legislator is proposing some action rather than just talk. Rep. Shari Weber, a Republican from Herington, is suggesting Kansas have only one superintendent for every county in the state. That would mean just 105 superintendents, opposed to the current estimate of 300.

Because of the highly competitive job market of public school superintendents, the local school districts and state would save a truckload of money because of the high-pay superintendents typically receive.

While the lone superintendent would oversee all schools, principals would still manage buildings. Each district would still have its board of education. Those boards would work together in hiring the superintendent.

Of course there are still some bugs to work out with her suggestion. The further west you go in Kansas the fewer school districts there are. But Thomas County, for example, is one western county that has multiple school districts; Colby, Brewster and Golden Plains. So which superintendent do you keep to run the entire county?

Making tough decisions is a part of public education. Just ask any board member.

Kansas National Education Association lobbyist Mark Desetti said the proposal would be detrimental to metro-school districts, like in Wichita and Kansas City. One person couldn't appropriately manage that number of students and responsibilities.

But having one superintendent for Sedgwick County is no different, in principal, than the CEOs of major companies, like Coca-Cola or General Motors. They too have many people and things to take care of. And like Weber's proposal, those companies have mid-level managers, like the principals at the schools.

Why should schools be treated differently? A Standard & Poor's financial analyst said having more money in the classroom does not guarantee better students.

But some districts may never see more money in the classroom, or anywhere else, because of the amount dedicated to administration and staff salary and benefits. That is a significant chunk of a district's budget.

So the school buses have to last a little longer. School boards still have to find the money to put the rising cost of fuel in those buses and heat in the buildings.

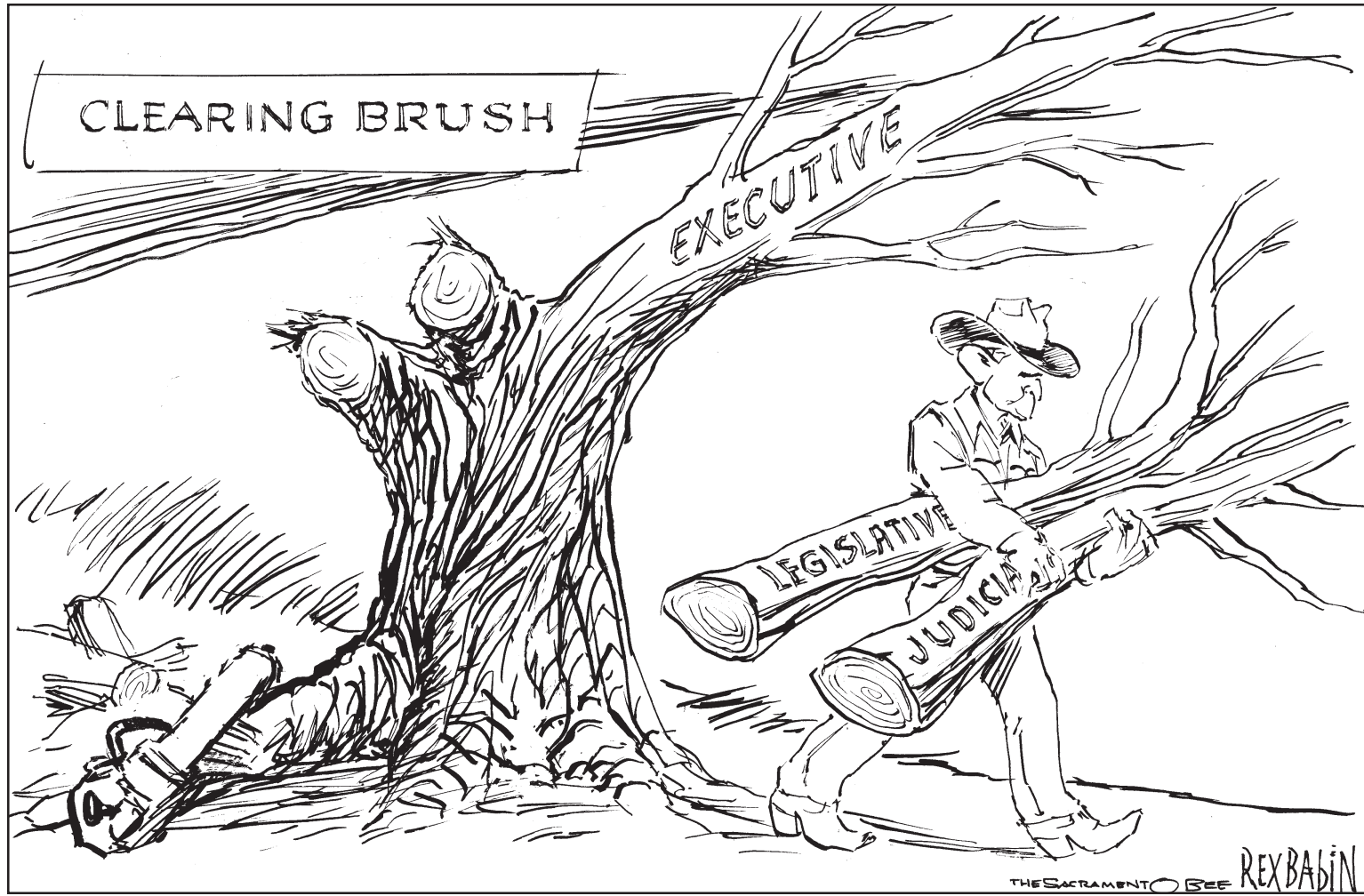
Weber is on to something, but the question to ask is what school boards and legislators are willing to sacrifice to improve public education.

— John Van Nostrand, publisher

#### About those letters . . .

The *Free Press* encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, if at all possible, and should include a telephone number and an address. Most importantly, all letters must include a signature. Unsigned letters cannot be published. We reserve the right to edit for clarity and length, and, likewise, reserve the right to reject letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive or libelous.

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@nwkansas.com](mailto:jvannostrand@nwkansas.com) or [pdecker@nwkansas.com](mailto:pdecker@nwkansas.com).



### To find the answer to your question ...

While rummaging around the house the other day, I ran across an article by one of my favorite writers — John Rosemond.

He makes a lot of sense when it comes to children and parents and, in one particular article, he struck a chord. For those unfamiliar with Rosemond, he is a family psychologist who writes a column on subjects associated with schools, parents and children.

The article was talking about how parents duck responsibility for holding children completely accountable. He wrote about a teacher who proposed a new telephone system that was installed in their high school. Obviously, the teacher submitted phone messages that were a joke, but as Rosemond said, the gist of the messages spoke volumes about the problems plaguing education today.

While I hate to admit it, there were times I think I fell into the trap when my own children were growing up. Even though I came close to "rescuing" my children on more than one occasion — somehow I usually managed to bite my lip.

Although the following is exaggerated, can any other parent relate to this?

- Here it is:
- Hello! You have reached the automated answering service of such and such high school. To properly connect your call, please listen to all of the following options before making a selection:
- To lie about why your child is absent, press 1.
  - To tell us that your child was too tired to come to school today because of his basketball, soccer, football game last night, press 2.
  - To make lame excuses for why your child



#### Patty Decker ● Deep Thoughts

- did not do his or her work, press 3.
- To complain that a teacher is not treating your child fairly, press 4.
- To complain that a teacher is having a personality conflict with your child, press 5.
- To complain that you did not understand your child's homework assignment, press 6.
- To complain that a teacher is not teaching to your child's learning style, press 7.
- To demand that a grade be changed, for the better, of course, press 8.
- To inform us that your child has never told a lie and done nothing wrong in his life, press 9.
- To leave a threatening message for a teacher, press 10.
- To ask why you have not received messages that we sent home with your child, press 11.
- To threaten us with a lawsuit, press 12.
- To request another teacher for your child, press 13.
- To demand that your child be admitted to the gifted and talented program, press 14.
- To demand that your child be reinstated on the football team despite bad grades and/or atroc-

ious behavior because being kicked off the team ruins his chances for a football scholarship, press 15.

- To complain that the bus driver has it in for your child, press 16.
- To complain that school lunches are either too expensive or that your child doesn't like them, press 17.
- To tell us that your child simply must be given a higher grade than he or she earned so that he or she can get into the college of his or her choice, press 18.

As I looked over the list again, there were some messages that I couldn't believe were possible. There were also some that I know to be true because I have thought them myself or have heard other parents complain.

Yet teachers aren't the only ones who could come up with these types of answering machine messages. Government agencies, private businesses, media institutions — you name it — they get their share of complaints as well.

I suppose the point is that whenever people are involved, or people's children, in any system, there's bound to be varying opinions of how things should work and a lot of emotion.

Sometimes, though, it's more important for us to do the right thing...rather than be right...and when it involves children, keeping them accountable for their work is the right thing to do.

After all, as adults, aren't we supposed to be accountable for our actions? Isn't that one of many lessons we want to teach our children as well?

Decker is editor of the *Free Press*.

### Your turn

### Four rules to remember for child safety

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Every year children suffer needless injury. Children ages 4 to 8 who use booster seats are 59 percent less likely to be injured in a car crash than children who are restrained only by a safety belt, according to a study by Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

Children ages 4 to 8 are generally too small for adult safety belts (which lay incorrectly on their necks and along their stomachs). These kids need a "boost" to ensure the safety belt will fit securely across their chests, and low and snug across their hips - to help prevent internal injuries, neck, head and spinal injuries, and even

ejection and death in the event of a crash.

Help commemorate Child Passenger Safety Week (Feb. 12-18), by reminding parents and other adults responsible for children traveling in motor vehicles—if the kids are under 4'9" tall, they need to be in a booster seat. According to NHTSA estimates, only 10 percent to 20 percent of children ages 4 to 8 ride in booster seats.

As children grow, how they sit safely in a car, truck, van or SUV changes.

For maximum child passenger safety, parents and caregivers simply need to remember and follow the 4 Steps for Kids:

1. Use rear-facing infant seats in the back seat from birth to at least on year of age and at least 20 pounds;
2. Use forward-facing toddler seats in the back seat from age one and 20 pounds to about age

four and 40 pounds;

3. Use booster seats in the back seat from about age 4 to at least age 8 unless the child is 4'9" and

4. Use safety belts in the back seat at age 8 or older or taller than 4'9"

It is imperative to remember all children under age 13 should ride in the back seat.

Some parents or caregivers may regard booster seats as a hassle to use or a pain to convince their children to use. But protecting the ones you love means getting past the temporary complaints and perceived hassles. Use a booster seat because you love them.

For more information about National Child Passenger Safety Week and the proper use of booster seats, visit [www.boosterseat.gov](http://www.boosterseat.gov)

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