



## Free Press Viewpoint

### 'No Child' meets no school's needs

It's time to admit that the grand No Child Left Behind experiment is, in fact, leaving children behind. Proposed in 2001 and signed into law in 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act requires states to administer standardized tests each year and requires schools and districts to meet ever-increasing progress goals. It put in place sanctions and restructuring efforts if schools fail to meet adequate yearly progress. It also requires "highly qualified" teachers in all positions. It is left to the state to decide what that means.

There's nothing wrong with the sentiments behind this law. We should hold schools and teachers to high standards. We should want to know how our schools are doing, and we should want to know that our children are learning.

The problem we're running into now is that the federal government is requiring all students to meet or exceed state standards in 2014. This is an unattainable goal. You will always have some kids that don't test well, kids that don't understand the ideas and kids that just don't care.

Kansas recently applied for a waiver to get out of that requirement, but was denied.

The problem with No Child runs deeper than an unattainable goal. You can't standardize testing because kids don't come standard. Kids aren't made in kits you assemble to be just alike. Kids have different strengths and learning styles and a multitude of other factors that determine how they do on tests.

For example, one kid may be a good test-taker, score well whenever you put multiple choice tests in front of him, but have bad grades. He might not really get the principles that tell him why the answer was A or B or none of the above.

The kid next to him might be a lousy test taker, but get an A+ whenever you have a hands-on activity because she understands how and when to put her knowledge into practice. Has our system failed either of these students? No Child Left Behind would say we have failed the second student but not the first even though the second is more likely to succeed in life.

It comes down to this, you can't measure whether children understand concepts behind facts unless you are sitting in front of them, looking them in the eye. Even then, it's still subjective, not quantifiable. You can't reduce it to a number and say "kids in this school get it, kids in this school don't."

The best tool for accountability is one schools already utilize. Colby Public Schools recently went through the accreditation process that is required of them. That included an exhaustive audit of the schools by a team that physically went to each building. This hands-on approach is a much better way of figuring whether a school is doing well or not than a one-size-fits-all approach determined a thousand miles away, because districts and schools are as different as kids. You can't judge Colby schools on the same scale as Kansas City schools.

This accountability tool measures districts, schools and teachers, rather than students. This is the way to go. If we make sure district staff is doing a good job and if we make sure we have the best and most dedicated teachers we can get, they will see to it that our kids are prepared to be successful adults.

There are many proposals to change No Child Left Behind, but what we need to do is repeal it entirely and leave only the laws that require excellence in staffing and teaching. We all have different ideas on what that means, but that's good. We're a nation that prides itself on individualized approaches, we should extend that to education.

And, by the way, Colby passed its accreditation audit with flying colors. —Kevin Bottrell

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MEANWHILE, BACK ON EARTH...

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### Here's to the graduates' ... parents

In a graduation speech I was listening to several days ago, a message was directed at the graduates: words to the effect that graduation is an ending, but commencement – the name of the ceremony – refers to beginning.

This is a difficult time of year for parents – almost as tough as the first day of school, or even worse, the first day of college.

It's a season of endings. The graduating kindergartner is ending a phase of life and will be a quite different person in another year. Saying goodbye to grade school or junior high is a rite or passage that may or may not be recognized and made much of, but it marks a young person's entry into a new, unexplored world.

With each transition, a child goes from being the bigger kid, the older kid, the smarter or wiser or more experienced kid, back to being littler, slower, more clueless. They have to start over learning where things are, what the rules are (both written and unwritten) and what to do to get by.

Most kids don't start the school year thinking about all the wonderful things they are about to learn, I suspect. They are more likely to be thinking about more important things, like whether they have time to go to the bathroom between classes, who to sit with at lunch and whether they can get by without shower-



**Marian Ballard**

• Collection Connections

ing after gym class.

But it's May now, and kids are thinking about not getting up in the morning.

Parents, on the other hand, are dividing their attention between past and future. They wonder where the year went. They worry about babysitters, swimming lessons and summer jobs.

If you've had a kid graduate this May, you've got more of the same to think about. Not only where did the year go, but where did the 12 years of school or the two or four years of college or the various years of other study programs go. Thought of summer jobs give way to thoughts of career and grandchildren. It's enough to make those future grandparents feel like they're about to dodder off into the sunset.

To distract yourself, you think about your kid being prepared for the big, bad world. That

gets really scary, when you begin to wonder if they can ever survive on their own. And, for moms at least, it can start you worrying about whether you – along with all those teachers, coaches, directors, sponsors – did an adequate job for all those years.

Parents learn on the job. To a certain extent, all those other adults who take on the task of shaping little people into big people also learn on the job. There's an old saw about whether a certain teacher had taught for 20 years or had taught one year 20 times. I've seen both.

Most of us start out our adult lives pretending we had the skills, the knowledge, the ability to get on with life and work. We discover, for the most part, that life is really just another school, one with paychecks instead of report cards, with bosses instead of principals, and with retirement parties instead of graduation ceremonies.

If you've got a graduation ceremony in your family this year, just take a deep breath and remember. You made it, so they can make it, too.

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

### Session ends on positive note

As we wrap up the final week of this session the primary focus was to pass a budget on May 12. We started the day waiting on print copies of the budget, which would first go to the Senate for passage then over to the House for approval. By the time the Senate passed it over to the House it was about 2 a.m. Friday. We worked until about 5 a.m. and, fortunately, the budget passed on the first try by six votes.



**Rick Billinger**

• This week in Topeka

**Budget Details**

At the beginning of the 2011 session, the anticipated budget shortfall was about \$500 million. The budget approved leaves the state with a \$50 million surplus. More than three-fourths of a billion dollars was cut out of the 2012 all-funds budget. This is the first cut to the all-funds budget since 1972.

Education saw a cut of \$18 on the base state aid per pupil to \$3,780. This was what Gov. Brownback proposed in his original budget.

Funding for community mental health centers totaled \$10.2 million, a \$3 million increase over what was passed in the House. This will be a significant help in ensuring that Kansans continue to receive the services.

Local health departments were allocated \$1.1 million and \$1 million to Safety Net Clinics.

The Oil and Gas Valuation Depletion Trust Fund, funded through severance taxes for counties with at least \$100,000 in severance tax receipts was left untouched. The ending balance for the fund is anticipated to be about

\$21.0 million for fiscal year 2012.

Kan-Ed received \$6 million to continue this important tool for schools, libraries and especially hospitals to use for telemedicine.

Several other important bills passed late in the day which were important to rural Kansas, including our emergency medical services. The bill amends current law on services provided by individuals regulated by the Board of Emergency Medical Services.

Changes made in 2010 allowed attendants to transition from authorized activities to scope of practice, changed the names of some attendant levels and allowed for enhancement of skills to provide for a higher level of care.

This bill makes changes allows emergency medical services attendants to option to transition to a lower level of certification; change the transition date to allow attendants to complete certification cycles; allow transition upon completion of requirements in addition to renewal times in current law; and permit several classifications of personnel to provide medical services within their scope when authorized by

medical protocol or upon direct communication by authorized medical personnel.

**Growing the Kansas economy**

Creating an environment to grow and attract jobs has been a top priority during the 2011 session. This year the legislature passed reform of workers' compensation that had not been updated in nearly twenty years. This will attract job-creating industries to the state while ensuring injured workers receive the care and benefits they need.

PEAK (Promoting Employment Across Kansas) and unemployment insurance reform were also passed to promote job growth, expand the Kansas economy and shore up the unemployment insurance trust fund. In addition, the House proposed a growth-driven reduction in personal and corporate income taxes which would drastically improve the economic climate in Kansas.

Gov. Brownback will be in Colby Thursday, July 21, for a Water Summit.

It has been an honor and privilege to represent the 121st District. Thank you for all your support and encouragement. If there are any issues or concerns I can help with please contact me at (785) 899-4700 or rick.billinger@house.ks.gov.

Rick Billinger is the state representative from the 121st District. He currently serves on the Commerce and Economic Development, Education Funding, Insurance and Local Government committees.

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**U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp**, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124. Web site: huelskamp.house.gov

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**Mallard Fillmore**

• Bruce Tinsley