



## Free Press Viewpoint

### Colby schools: dive into swimming

Colby High School should sponsor a girls' swim team. High school sports are beneficial in a number of ways. Beyond physical conditioning, they teach teamwork and help students bond with one another. They can also provide things to do outside of school, which helps some kids stay out of trouble.

Perhaps the biggest advantage of offering a team is that the students could qualify for swimming scholarships. Neither Fort Hays State nor Kansas State have swimming programs, but the University of Kansas does. It's a competitive program, with a good showing at nationals this year and one swimmer in tryouts for the U.S. Olympic team. The schools should support any potential avenue for students to attend college.

The school board is right to be cautious. The idea of adding a sports program at a time when the district has had to cut more than \$1.5 million is going to meet a lot of resistance. However, the proposal on the table is to form a team at no cost to the district, with all the money coming from fund raising.

We know full well how generous Colby is. In recent months: people have donated more than \$75,000 for a walking trail; Sunflower Bank donated more than \$2,000 to county school districts; and each time the Tubbs dealership has run its test drive fund raiser, it has gotten far more than the maximum number of people required to get the full donation.

These are just the big fund raisers. There are countless other small ones run by teams and activities that are successful. The swimmers could sell concessions, get sponsorships and run other fund raisers. The most popular fund raisers right now are golf tournaments. The Colby Community College basketball team is holding one next week and the volleyball team the week after that.

Colby citizens have show how willing they are to support local sports teams and other student activities, so why not add another?

Swimming is a popular sport in Colby. The swim club has more than 100 kids of all ages each year, including some at high school age. There are so many kids that to print the scores usually takes up an entire page in the *Colby Free Press*. The club routinely places in the top five at meets and won the league meet this year, which was held here. If the high school were to sponsor a team, the swim club would provide a great way to keep the swimmers' skills in top condition during the off season.

The swim club could also be a good resource in finding a coach. The Kansas State High School Association requirements are probably different than the club's for licensed coaches, but they could still help find one if they don't already have a coach that's qualified.

As for where they could practice, the college has been looking for a way to increase usage of their pool, and it's likely the rental fee wouldn't be too high.

We think that when the school board meets again next month, they should approve offering swimming in the spring, as long as the girls can come up with the money.

—Kevin Bottrell

We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the *Colby Free Press*, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701, or e-mail [colby.editor@nwkansas.com](mailto:colby.editor@nwkansas.com). Opinions do not necessarily reflect those of the *Free Press*, its staff or the owners.

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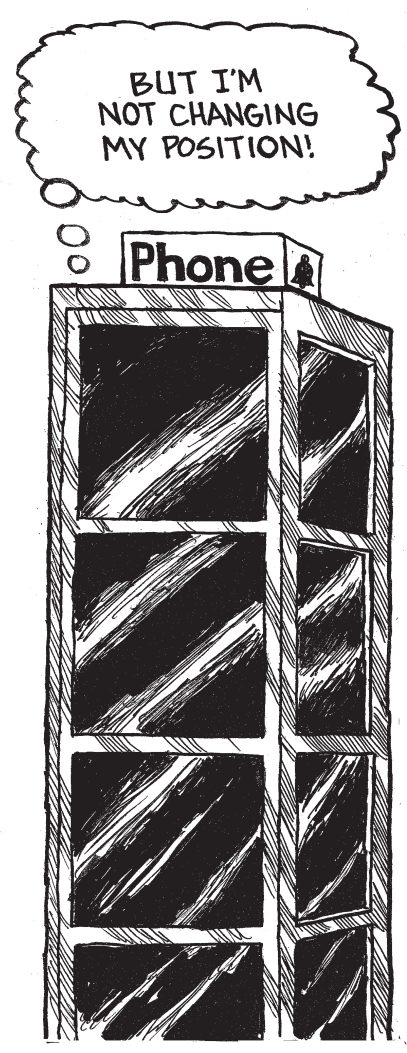
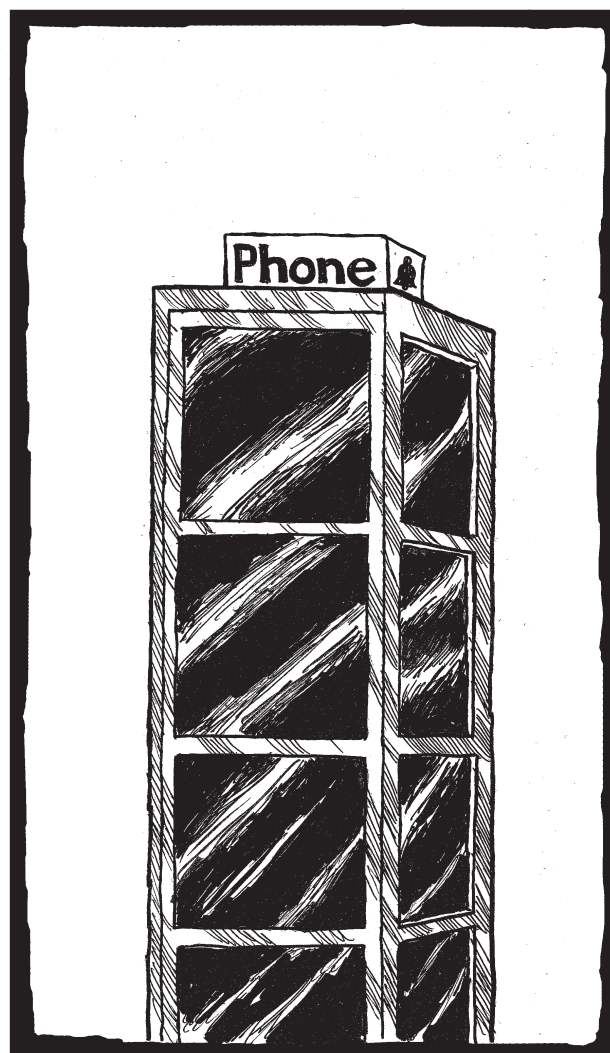
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## Online classes have benefits, pitfalls

Dear Community:

As I write this, I am reminded how special living in a small town can be. The businesses, churches and civic groups who came out to welcome the college students back at the campus Block Party Tuesday were tremendous.

I have mentioned the importance of Colby Community College to northwest Kansas for educational opportunities. However, when you consider the time and money students and their families spend at stores, restaurants, motels and health care facilities, the college is economically dynamic as well. By coming to welcome the students, those at the block party have helped engage the students in the community.

Speaking of engaged, my family made a trip a few weeks ago to Colorado. We stopped along the way at our home away from home – McDonald's – and as we sat down, I noticed a middle-aged gentleman engrossed with his laptop computer.

He was obviously frustrated and the reason became clear when he looked over and asked if I knew anything about connecting to the wireless router. Before I could embarrass myself by answering that I probably would not be much help, I realized he wasn't speaking to me at all but to my 12- and 15-year-old sons. For the record, Walter and Michael came through for the guy in about 60 seconds.

I laughed to myself when I thought about the technology gap between even relatively computer literate individuals my age and the next generation my children's age. It also caused me to think about how technology impacts higher education in our country, especially in online education, or distance learning as it is sometimes known.

Online instruction in higher education is not new. The proliferation of online courses offered, however, is staggering. A recent article I read stated that around a third of all students in higher education took an online course during the fall term of 2010.



**Steve Vacik**

• From the president

And why not? Television commercials let us know that online instruction has made things so simple you can attend college in your pajamas. Research has supported advantages to pursuing an online education. Shanna Jaggers stated in a recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that with online courses "students can complete coursework around their own work and family lives."

We have committed to using the technology, developing courses for online delivery internally and cooperating with five other community colleges in western Kansas to offer classes to our students externally. No one should dismiss the possibilities distance education offers.

Nevertheless, I think it is important to debunk some myths associated with online higher education. It is not easier than taking traditional on-ground classes; it is not faster than taking on-ground classes; and it is certainly not for everyone, no matter how computer literate. This holds true especially for students who plan to attend or are attending two-year colleges.

In fact, a recently published study conducted by the Community College Research Center at Columbia University found that "...students enrolled in online courses fail and drop out more often than those whose coursework is classroom-based." Students are often misled into thinking that online instruction must be easier and faster, since there is no commitment to attend class daily or weekly.

Unfortunately, because the human tendency is to procrastinate, students who enroll in

these programs regularly fail to assign time for the work. In addition, those students who are kinesthetic (hands-on) or auditory (listening) learners may struggle with online instruction, which often best serves those who are primarily visual learners.

Maybe most difficult of all, students who take classes online because they want an education but have limited time due to work and family obligations, are often those who need the most personal attention to succeed.

As Karla Fisher pointed out in a 2010 study for the Center for Community College Student Engagement, though, "...too many on-line students – especially those attending part time – learn in relative isolation, disengaged from their peers and faculty members." Communication students need is not always satisfied through e-mail or instant messaging.

I am not an opponent of on-line instruction. I have seen many students successfully complete entire college degrees online; without the technology, their circumstances would not have allowed an education. Many fine institutions – Harvard University, Oxford University, the University of Alabama – and all of the community colleges of western Kansas teach courses and entire programs online. At our college, we even hope to start a new entirely online program in veterinary technology in the coming year.

But, online instruction is not for everyone – maybe not even for most people. Be as discerning about the method of instruction which works for you as you would about what college to attend. The reality is that a quality education, whether in a classroom, over a computer or on the job, is never easy to obtain.

Sacrifice and hard work is always required in anything worth having.

*Dr. Stephen Vacik is president of Colby Community College. Vacik is a native of Fargo, N.D., and was vice president of instruction at East Mississippi Community College before moving to Colby.*

## Reporting laws need to be stronger

### Other Opinions

• Mike O'Neal  
Robert Siedlecki

Any parent who has temporarily lost track of a small child in a department store or public venue like the State Fair knows the feeling of desperation and anguish such a situation causes. So the fact that Florida mother Casey Anthony failed to report to the police in a timely manner that her toddler daughter, Caylee, was missing is difficult to comprehend. The child's grandparents finally reported her absence after a month had passed.

Sadly, the Casey Anthony case has made it clear that Kansas and other states need well-defined reporting standards for cases of child disappearance and stronger laws penalizing parents and guardians for failing to report the disappearance of a child.

One of the primary responsibilities of state government is to protect the safety of children. There is no defensible reason why a child's disappearance should go unreported.

We plan to work together to review our state laws regarding this issue in Kansas and hope to address the situation in the next legislative session. Kansas law needs to ensure that law enforcement and other authorities have the information necessary to safely recover missing children as soon as is humanly possible. And it should include criminal penalties that are rigorous enough to address the intentional failure

to report a child's disappearance or death.

The crafting of this law will be a deliberate process, and we will be looking for input from law enforcement and the criminal justice system before moving forward with the actual legislation. There are numerous approaches and suggestions as to how to write an effective law of this nature. Florida is considering a law that would make it a felony to fail to report the death of a child, or the "location of a child's corpse" within two hours of death. Alabama's proposal is to require the notification of a child's death within an hour, and a disappearance within 24 hours. It would be constructive to include an age-limit, perhaps 12 or 13, so that a teen-ager's disappearing act did not result in the unnecessary prosecution of his or her parents.

This is an emotional issue that goes to the

heart of both parental and government responsibility. Parental rights must be respected, but the final result must put the welfare, well-being – and survival – of our children first.

*By Mike O'Neal is Kansas Speaker of the House and Robert Siedlecki is Secretary of the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services*

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### Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

