



Help pick out play equipment for trail

By Christina Beringer

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The Thomas County Coalition wants to know what local citizens think about fitness and playground equipment for the Community Walking Trail.

The coalition has invited two vendors to show their products from 3:30 to 6 p.m. on Tuesday in the parking lot of the Colby Aquatic Center. They are especially encouraging parents of preschoolers and elementary children to come and see what

the options are and give feedback.

Sterling West from Gothenburg, Neb., will bring fitness equipment that people can test out for themselves. The equipment is specifically made for outdoor use, is weather and rust resistant and is tamper proof.

Showcasing outdoor environments from the ground up is a business called Grounds for Play. They have a variety of outdoor playground equipment with many theme options and unique structures for kids of all ages.

"We are really excited about the play-

ground equipment that is available," said Sue Evans, member of the coalition. "They have all kinds of things from climbing boulders to barnyard theme toys. They even have a music deck equipped with xylophones, bongos and drums that we could put under shade for the kids."

Evans said the coalition is looking for dramatic play options for kids.

"We have a wonderful playground at Fike Park and we don't want to take away from that," she said. "We want to create a different playground unique from the other parks in town so kids will have dif-

ferent reasons to play at different parks."

Evans said construction for the play area will take place next spring. She said the City of Colby has dedicated some funding for the initiatives but donations are always needed to help ensure the continued success of the project.

On Tuesday, not only can residents check out all of the options available, but there will also be snacks and coalition members present to answer questions about plans.

"Snacks being provided will include information about the walking trail," said

public relations volunteer Paige Campbell. "We'll have things like raisins, cookies and trail mix and we'll tell you how many laps around the walking trail you'll need to take to burn off the amount of calories consumed by the snack."

For information contact the coalition at 460-8177. Donations can be sent to the Thomas County Community Foundation at 350 S. Range, Suite 14, Colby, Kan., 67701. Specify the Community Walking Trail in the memo line of the check.

Education summit held here last week

By Kevin Bottrell

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School boards and administrators from around northwest Kansas met in Colby last week for one of six regional education summits being held around the state.

The summit, on Oct. 6, was put on by the Kansas Association of School Boards, United School Administrators of Kansas, the Kansas Department of Education and the Board of Regents. Colby Superintendent Terrel Harrison said this is the first time all of those organizations held a meeting together in the region.

"It was wonderful to have everybody there," she said.

The summit began with a panel discussion by Dr. Diane DeBacker, Kansas education commissioner; Dr. John Heim, school board association director; and Cheryl Semmel, United School Administrators director.

"These are key people in education," Harrison said.

After the discussion were breakout sessions on dozens of education issues such as college readiness, parent involvement, technology and Medicaid reporting. There was also a session for board clerks dealing with open meetings laws and other legal issues.

Harrison said she attended breakout sessions on possible accreditation changes, advocacy, evaluation planning, common core standards and school finance. Colby Curriculum Director Diana Wieland also attended the sessions, Harrison said, as did several school board members. There were special sessions for new board members and a legal clinic.

Harrison said she plans to discuss what they heard at the summit at the school board's next meeting at 7 p.m. Monday at the administration building.

Other summits were held in Dodge City, Topeka, and Concordia, with two more coming up in Girard and Wichita.



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

Watch out for combines

With the corn harvest in full swing, drivers should watch out for combines (above) whether on county roads or in the city. Many custom harvesting crews are in the area, some staging out of the Thomas County Fairgrounds. There are also plenty of uncut fields left, with many farmers harvesting the dryland corners of irrigated fields. Hi-Plains Co-Op is reporting good yields and good test weights so far. The price of corn, however, has been fluctuating. Corn lost \$1.55 per bushel in September, and reached a low of \$5.71 on Oct. 4. At close of market Thursday, corn was \$6.28 per bushel.



Kansas now officially seeking No Child waiver

By John Milburn

The Associated Press

TOPEKA — Kansas has joined a growing number of states that will seek federal permission for flexibility from the No Child Left Behind law.

The State Board of Education on Tuesday authorized the Kansas Department of Education to request a waiver in February. The request would spell out how the state will continue to work toward the national

student achievement goals.

President Barack Obama last month encouraged states to apply for waivers, saying he was frustrated that Congress was slow to make changes. The law was passed in 2002 and was due for revisions in 2007 but has been delayed by ideological differences in Congress over how and where those changes should be made.

Thirty-seven states are planning to request waivers over the next several months. The first round of waivers are expected to

be filed in November.

Kathy Toelkes, spokeswoman for the Kansas Department of Education, said the state expects to know by May 2012 if its waiver application has been granted.

To qualify, the states must submit a plan showing how they will meet certain requirements such as enacting standards to prepare students for college and testing for those standards, and by making teachers and principals more accountable by setting guidelines on evaluations.

Under the federal guidance for the waivers, states could either maintain the 100 percent proficiency goal, establish a sound-growth model that shows continuous growth or set a target of reducing the gap between the 100-percent mark and where students or subgroups of students score on standardized tests within six years.

"There are people who think you are getting a waiver from accountability, but it's still there," Toelkes said. "This allows for a more realistic and meaningful measure."

'Jass' band to perform here

The Original Wildcat Jass Band will bring their traditional New Orleans sound to the American Legion club at 7:30 p.m. Monday, Oct. 24.

The band is stopping overnight in Colby on their way to a performance in Denver and wanted to hold a concert, said Legion Auxiliary member Terina Schmidt.

The six-member band from Tucson, Ariz., plays New Orleans- and Chicago-style jazz. Its members have toured around the world and performed with music legends like Maynard Ferguson, Ray Charles and Sammy Davis Jr.

Cost will be \$10 per person at the door. Half of the proceeds will go to the Legion. The club's bar will be open during the concert. The club is located at 1850 W. Fourth St.



The Wildcat Jass Band includes Jason Carder, trumpet; Rob Boone, trombone; Kelly Thomas, tuba; Ray Templin, drums; Rob Wright, banjo; and Kelland Thomas, saxophone. The band will perform in Colby at 7:30 p.m. Monday, Oct. 24, at the American Legion.

Governor announces plans to overhaul education funding

TOPEKA — Gov. Sam Brownback's administration is offering plans to reform Kansas' public school finance formula, the first significant change to the law in nearly 20 years.

The proposal includes setting a new baseline for state aid, giving block grants to districts and allowing counties to vote on a special sales tax for education. Brownback is expected to present the plan to legislators when they return in January for the 2012 session.

The Topeka Capital-Journal reports (<http://bit.ly/pwCQiN>) that the proposals were discussed with school administrators at a public forum Wednesday in Topeka.

Policy director Landon Fulmer said the proposal would allow the state to claim part of the money

collected from a 20-mill local property tax collected for schools. That money would be put in a state account and distributed to equalize financing in districts with low property valuations.

He said a state cap on local option property taxes would be eliminated, but state funding of special education programs would not change. A voucher program to allow parents to send their children to private schools isn't likely to be recommended, Fulmer said.

"We're not trying to design a formula that's going to have punitive cuts," Fulmer said. "We want this to be fair. This is not an attempt to 'gut' education."

School districts are dealing with \$100 million in their funding for the current academic year. The reductions were caused by expir-

ing federal stimulus funding and declines in state revenues caused by the economic slowdown.

Fulmer said block grants could be established, including an operating grant reflecting cost variations among districts and an at-risk grant linked to students living in poverty that would include rewards for teachers who improve student achievement.

Other grants might target training students in technical education and innovative programs at school districts.

"We believe excellence boils up from the bottom," he said.

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