

commentary

from other pens...

Education plan faces economic downturn

The Salina Journal on education plan:
Last month, members of the Kansas State Board of Education made the rounds of state news outlets, hoping to increase awareness of an ambitious plan to improve the state's public schools.
The tour couldn't have come at a worse time. Board members are recommending the Kansas Legislature approve \$1.16 billion in new money over the next three fiscal years — just as the state and national economies go into a slide.
At first glance this eye-popping total is easy to dismiss as gold-trimmed dreaming. But the board has done its homework. Members back up their plan with measurable goals and accountability — something lawmakers complain has been lacking in the past. ...
Each of the points offered by the board deserve attention by lawmakers. However, some in the Legislature have already dismissed the plan, largely because of its price tag.
That is a shame. As argued by board member Val DeFever, when lawmakers set out to improve the state's highway system they approved \$11 billion in new money.
Isn't education worth one-tenth of that?

The Chanute Tribune on school funding:
Certain Kansas legislators are in a snit over a letter, signed by the governor, that solicits money for candidates committed to public education.
Rep. Melvin Neufeld, R-Ingalls, grouses that it's an attempt to intimidate conservative lawmakers. He's complained that the governor shouldn't be raising money to support candidates to run against incumbents.
Oh? Since when are incumbents sacred cows. ...
The governor, who has been candid about the fact he failed to push hard enough for education funding, notes legislators bear some of the blame. ...
If Kansas neglects to put more money into education, it will quickly run into trouble finding quality teachers to work in its schools. Quality education doesn't happen without quality teachers.
And each generation that neglects education produces another that values it even less. It's a deadly downward spiral.
Any legislator threatened by the governor's letter simply hasn't been doing their job.

The Hays Daily News on education plan:
Public emergence of state Board of Education members is refreshing. Unfortunately, their campaign for \$1.1 billion over three years in new money for public education in Kansas is likely to be mostly futile.
Give members credit for being aggressive in their vision and trying to develop grassroots support for education through a statewide tour. ...
Their massive plan for education, however, faces equally big roadblocks. It will not go far in the state Legislature for a couple of reasons.
First is the sheer size of it. It would cost a lot of money, and many legislators would like to look at how existing resources are allocated, not just pumping more money into the system. ...
The next negative factor is the economic environment. The next legislative session promises to be brutal on all state agencies, as Kansas government faces the problem of a shortfall in revenue in the current budget year on top of a bleak outlook for next fiscal year. ...
The board's priorities are good: raising teacher salaries, getting teachers' health insurance in line with other state employees and boosting early childhood education programs. The board's goals also focus on student achievement and performance, tied to quantitative measures.
The question is, is the strategy of the board itself effective? Asking for the moon in hopes of getting something in between can work. Or, in this case, the plan could be dismissed altogether for being unrealistic.
Hopefully, the priorities and intent will survive both the politics of public education and the dismal economic climate.

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AN EXERCISE TAPE

The stresses that parents don't realize

It could have been the library of any suburban high school on any night. Except that something unusual was about to happen.
Students were going to tell their secrets — the thoughts and feelings that hunch alone and mute in the shadows — behind the volleyball victories and algebra grades and college-application essays.
These kids know they have great lives. Their homes have basketball hoops bolted to their garages and rose bushes along the side windows and parents who sit in the stands at their soccer games.
As one girl would say later, "I think we live in denial about what's going on and how we feel because we feel we don't have a good enough reason to be feeling down. So many people have so many bigger problems than you do, so you feel stupid and spoiled saying anything."
But on this night, they were going to say out loud what their parents and teachers don't know about them.
Inspired by the Diary Project, an online forum for teens around the world where they can post their thoughts and feelings (<http://www.diary-project.com>), a group of students organized an evening for parents to hear the truth, or at least a different truth, about their lives.
The students, mostly junior and senior girls in bell-bottoms and flip-flops, sat scattered among 10 wooden tables. On each table was a red hand-written sign: "Depression," "Relationships,"



joan ryan
• commentary

"Drugs and Alcohol," and so on.
Also on each table to spark discussion were two anonymous "diary" entries.
Students wrote, for example, about the stress of everyday life in a community of high expectations: Get perfect grades, play flawlessly in a sport, stay thin, have a boyfriend or girlfriend, get invited to the right parties, have someone to eat lunch with every day, score high enough on the SAT to get into the UC system, do community service and take advanced-placement physics and calculus courses to boost the transcript — all while maintaining the appearance of a happy, appreciative kid.
"I'd just once like to stop and enjoy what's around me today," one girl wrote. "But more often than not, just when I think I'm ready to stop, I push harder for that A. The worst part is, as I sit here and write, I'm really thinking about a physics test."
When the piece was read aloud, a mother asked why this girl wouldn't share her feelings with her parents. We want to hear this, the mother said.
"I think a lot of kids feel like a disappointment if

they come home with these problems," said a girl named Jennifer. "And I think we're always comparing ourselves to others, and it seems no one else is having these problems but you."
Instead, you get smashed on the weekends or smoke weed in the garage every day after school. Or you binge on food and throw up. Or you slip into a funk that your parents write off as hormones until a row of Ds shows up on your progress report. You withdraw into dark Internet chat rooms.
One girl, whose parents weren't at the session, said she lied to them because they had forbidden her to go to any parties. She goes because that's where her friends are.
"I don't want to betray my parents' trust, but I also feel they're in denial about the reality of being a teen-ager," she said. "Parents who say, 'Oh, my kid just goes to the movies and comes home' are kidding themselves."
These are the kids we don't much notice. They haven't committed some horrible crime. Their problems seem so ordinary — and they are. But horror begins in the ordinary, as we learned at Columbine and other schools, in the everyday rejections and failures. Our children don't tell us.
Maybe it's because they are embarrassed and afraid. Maybe it's because we are.
Joan Ryan is a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle. Send comments to her e-mail at joanryan@sfgate.com.

Doing what your body says



red green
• north of forty

I have a friend who's a pediatrician, and he's against vitamin pills for children. He says that the child's body will direct the child to take in the right foods. In other words, he believes that the body knows best and doesn't need any kind of medical or even parental intervention. I find this to be an interesting theory, and, if it applies to children, it must also apply to adults. So I made a list of everything I consumed last week, to see how I was making out on the laissez-faire approach. With apologies to my friend, I have concluded that my body has absolutely no grasp of the big picture. It doesn't force me to take in what I need. It forces me to take in what it wants. My body has no sense of cause and effect, no remorse for past indiscretions and no foresight for future consequences. My body lives completely in the moment — let's do what feels good right now. In short, my body is an animal. And if I hope to be able to live with this animal, it's going to need to go to obedience school. Luckily, my wife is a licensed instructor.
THE FIVE-YEAR PLAN
My father ran his own business, and I often heard him talk about a five-year plan. I don't know whether anybody still does five-year plans, but if they do, I don't think they should. Too many unexpected things can happen in five years. You could have five kids in five years — you could even have six if you're into time management. And technology moves way too fast to be able to see five years into the future. We may all live in Styrofoam boxes and drive magnetic cars by then. I can even

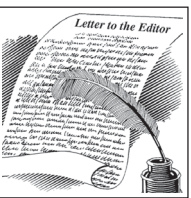
see the day when computers decide we're not smart enough to use them, and they just carry on without us. So, if your company asks you to come up with a five-year plan, I suggest you look backward rather than forward. Identify half a dozen blunders the company made over the last five years and recommend that you don't do those again. If you can stop repeating mistakes, you may eventually run out of them. On the personal side, you have the exact opposite problem. A five-year plan isn't nearly long enough. You need an 80- or 90-year plan. And you have to make it work. You can't quit or get fired. And no matter how successful you get, at the end, you go under.
THE MIDDLE-AGED CHANNEL
With the proliferation of television channels these days, I'm wondering why nobody has come up with The Middle-Aged Channel, where all programming is geared to people in my age bracket. If they ever do, here are some program suggestions:
— "Stop Children, What's That Sound?": A series that identifies digestive noises and what they mean.
— "The Midlife Late Show": Late-night talk show that runs weeknights from 9 p.m. to 10 p.m.

— "Friends": Six bald, fat guys sit in a garage watching a football game.
— "Judge Honey": A reality show in which men testify in court and are judged by their own wives.
— "Middle-Aged Survivors": Couples compete to pay off their mortgages and put their children through college.
— "The Weakest Link": Candid conversations at a family reunion.
THE MESSAGE IS CLEAR
Three weeks ago, I dropped my cell phone off to be fixed at the phone store. I didn't hear anything from them, so yesterday I went in to see how things we're going. They told me the phone was fixed 15 days ago and that they had called and left me a message saying so. I did a little research and found out that no message had been left at either my office or my home. They had left the message on my cell phone — the very cell phone that was lying in their drawer waiting for me to pick it up. I think that's called circular logic.
QUOTE OF THE DAY: "If you never laugh at yourself, people will think you're stupid." — Red Green
Red Green is the star of "The Red Green Show," a television series seen in the U.S. on PBS and in Canada on the CBC Network, and the author of "The Red Green Book" and "Red Green Talks Cars: A Love Story."

Thanks for story on Indians

To the Editor:
Hey, you guys finally came around.
Nice article about our Saintry Indians — of which we are justly proud.
Thanks for the article and for printing my comments. However, my last name is Boll, not Bold.
I guess I was somewhat "bold." Maybe the reason you published it as such — anyway thanks again.
Laverne Boll
St. Francis
PS: Cheylin, Tribune, Hoxie, Atwood, Burlington and Idalia also had very good football teams this year.

To the Editor:
I've noticed several articles in the paper again about prairie dogs. People really must prefer prairie dog steaks over beef steak, because prairie dogs destroy native grass pastures that cattle eat to survive on.
I don't know if these prairie dogs are black tail



from our readers
• to the editor

or while tail. I don't know who is proclaiming that they are facing extinction. The critters that I've seen are so prolific that somebody ought to hire them as well diggers.
Whoever, or is it whomever, wants these critters saved — bring out your cages, trap them and put them on federal lands. I won't shed one lousy tear — just make sure they stay on federal lands and not migrate back here.
You people can have these prairie dogs — come get them — put them in your back yard and see what damage they can do, and all within a very short time.
Ruth Nichols
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