



COLBY FREE PRESS

Thirteen students suspended in drug incident

By **PATTY DECKER**

Free Press Editor

An incident reported Friday involving a Colby Middle School student passing out a prescription drug on Thursday to other students has resulted in suspensions and possible charges of possession and distribution, said Gary Shull, Colby Police Department investigator.

There were 12 eighth grade students who

allegedly took a drug known as Ritalin, which is used in treating attention deficit disorder, he said.

Police officer Kevin Diercks arrived at Colby Middle School around noon on Friday after receiving a telephone call from Robb Ross, principal, reporting the incident.

Ross told the officer that a 12-year-old sixth grade student who was using the medication for the disorder allegedly offered it to the other stu-

dents who apparently wanted to try it.

Shull said the 12-year-old was taken into custody on Friday and later released to his parent.

No charges have as yet been filed on the 12-year-old. However, the case was forwarded to the Thomas County Attorney's office with a recommendation to charge this juvenile with distribution of a prescription drug.

As for the other 12 students, who are alleged

to have taken one or more of the pills illegally last Thursday, they were all suspended from attending classes beginning today.

In addition, police officials received a list of the 12 students involved and began contacting their parents on Friday and throughout the weekend, Shull said.

As of today, none of the 12 students who are alleged to have taken the pills illegally have been charged with anything, but reports on each

will be filed with the county attorney later this week, he said.

"It is possible that these 12 juveniles could be facing charges of possession of a prescription drug," Shull said today.

Ross nor Kirk Nielsen, superintendent, could be reached earlier today for comment as to how long the suspension will be or how officials became aware of the alleged exchange of the prescription drug with other students.

Reluctance to cut school aid could mean tax increase

By **JOHN HANNA**

Associated Press Writer

TOPEKA (AP) — As their session nears an end, legislators are feeling more pressure to raise taxes to help close a \$700 million budget gap.

But some of that pressure is self-imposed, as lawmakers reject proposals to reduce aid to public schools.

Their stance is notable because other parts of the budget are seeing cuts consistently in proposals to eliminate the shortfall.

And state aid to elementary and secondary schools would seem a logical target for cutting, since it consumes more than half of the state's general tax dollars — \$2.3 billion of the total \$4.54 billion this year.

Some legislators attribute the favored status of public schools this year to the ability of superintendents, teachers and school boards to generate mail and political discontent.

Others say more legislators believe — as education officials have argued — that even keeping state aid at its current level will force sacrifices by school districts.

Whatever the reasons, legislators are making the job of eliminating the shortfall more difficult for themselves — and increasing the chances of a tax increase.

"When you take half the budget and hold it harmless, the numbers don't fit," said Sen. Tim Huelskamp, R-Fowler, a member of the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

Legislators cannot finish their business for the year without reconciling expected revenues with spending. And they cannot do that job with making a decision about school finance.

In the current fiscal year, which ends June 30, the state sends school districts \$3,870 per pupil, plus extra money for special education and other programs.

For the next budget, the House has approved increasing the aid by \$10 per pupil, at a cost of \$5.7 million. The Senate went higher, approving an extra \$20 per student.

Even conservative Republicans opposed to any tax increase acknowledge that cutting aid to schools is difficult.

"You're dealing with your kids, your grandkids and your neighbors," said Sen. Stan Clark, R-Oakley, one of the conservatives. "It's all up front and personal."

School boards and superintendents have put the Legislature's budget debate up front in their communities by discussing possible cuts in programs and teacher layoffs.

Even if state aid were spared any cutting, many education officials say

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their districts will be strapped because of rising costs for health insurance and energy plus periodic negotiations with teachers for pay raises.

In community after community, superintendents have produced lists of money-saving options: laying teachers off, imposing fees for extracurricular activities, eliminating programs for troubled or poor students, cutting back on electives.

"I think school districts and administrators and teachers have done a good job of being specific," said Sen. Christine Downey, D-Newton. "They've been more aggressive in communicating with their legislators."

Too aggressive, some conservative legislators say of districts and teachers' unions.

Sen. Kay O'Connor, the Legislature's leading advocate of giving parents tax dollars to pay private school tuition, was taken aback recently by the sight of a Kansas-National Education Association lobbyist briefing a group of students visiting the Capitol. In her view, the students were hearing propaganda designed to turn them into political activists.

"It's horrible, this exploitation of children," said O'Connor, R-Olathe.

Huelskamp said many legislators fear the power of the K-NEA or its local chapters to mobilize during campaigns. He also noted that school districts hire lobbyists, either directly or through associations.

"We pay them with tax dollars, to lobby us for more tax dollars," he said.

Education officials have heard similar complaints for years and say critics exaggerate the intensity of their efforts.

"We really haven't generated massive amounts of phone calls or letter writing campaigns," said Bob Vancrum, a former state senator who lobbies for the Blue Valley district in Johnson County.

Whether it's affection, fear of political retribution or concern about the future of education that drives them, legislators are reluctant to cut aid to public schools.



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

ABOVE: Valerie Melvin, 3, was one of nine children Friday afternoon helping to place posters around the city recognizing the "Week of the Young Child." Others helping, but not pictured were Jared Gray, 3; Erica Moore, 4; Derian Horinek, 8; Paige Armbruster, 6; Jessica Koon, 7; Troy Koon, 10; Gracie Melvin, 1; and Nicole Carpenter. **BELOW:**

Children at Barb Alber's daycare worked on their poster last week as well. Pictured with Albers is Kora Schindler, 2; along with Jaxon Haas, 4; Kolby Brook, 5; Alexa Vaughn, 3; Kelly Sloan, 5; Alexa Haas, 7; Hailey Schindler, 5; Alexa Schindler, 6; Ashley Lanning, 8; and Callie Siruta, 3, not pictured.

'Week of Young Child' observed in Colby

By **PATTY DECKER**

Free Press Editor

Many local preschools, childcare homes and child-related organizations are celebrating "Week of the Young Child," which began Sunday and will continue through Saturday, said Shannon Koon, childcare provider and one of the coordinators of activities.

"Each year," she said, "children and early childhood education are recognized across the nation."

The primary goal of the week-long observation, she said, is in raising awareness on the importance of making a difference.

"As parents, teachers, policy makers, community leaders and concerned adults, we have the responsibility for making sure young children get the most of their early opportunities," she said. "It's up to us to make the early years count."

In addition, and as part of the celebration, many children in town were busy making posters and other artwork to support the week.

This work can be viewed at many locations to include Pioneer Memorial Library, Sports Shoppe, First

National Bank, His Shop and Colby Free Press.

Children participating in making the posters and other artwork displayed at these places attend either Puddle Duck Preschool, Sacred Heart Preschool, or are under the supervision of daycare providers, Barb Albers, Tera Edmundson and Koon.

Other groups taking an active role in the special week are the Resource and Referral Agency headquartered at Colby Community College and SmartStart and on Friday 10:15 to 11:15 a.m., the Colby High School parenting class is inviting everyone to attend an hour of activities designed to work with young kids.

Among the activities, which will be held in Room 409 at Colby High School, are hearing a story, singing songs, planting flowers, doing a flower craft and making and eating "dirt cups," said Brenda Mazanec, infant/toddler consultant.

The event will be open to all young children in the area and daycare providers or others planning to attend should respond no later than Tuesday by calling 465-5300 between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. or 462-3049 after 4 p.m.



Briefly

Weather: Turning warmer

Not much to cheer about, but it did cloud up and some dampness moved in, but Colby's "rainfall" amounted to no more than a trace up to 8 a.m. today. Chances for rain aren't encouraging, according to the National Weather Service forecast. Tonight, mostly clear, lows in the middle 30s and east winds 10-15 mph, becoming south late. Tuesday, mostly sunny, highs in the middle 70s and south winds 10-20 mph. Tuesday night, partly cloudy and windy, lows in the lower 40s. Wednesday, mostly sunny, highs in the upper 70s. Wednesday night, increasing clouds, lows in the upper 40s and a 30 percent chance for showers and thunderstorms.

Colby's high Sunday was 67 and the overnight low this morning was 44. The soil temperature at the 4-inch depth is averaging 52 degrees. The records for April 8: 89 in 1978 and 14 in 1914. *(The temperatures and precipitation are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)*

Fire at administration building

The Colby Fire Department responded to a structure fire alarm early Friday at the Colby School District Administration Building, 210 S. Range, according to Fire Chief Bob McLemore. "The alarm showed as a structural fire," McLemore said. "It turned out to be a burned-out heater motor on the north side of the third floor. There was no structural damage and no smoke damage."

Forensic tournament planned today

Colby High School will play host to the Northwest Kansas League Forensic tournament today beginning at 2:30 p.m. and continuing into the early evening, said Nancy Rundel, head coach. Everyone is invited to attend the event and cheer on the Eagle team.

Fair board to meet Thursday

The Thomas County Fair Board will meet at 8 p.m. Thursday in the 4-H Building to plan for the coming fair,

and conduct other business. The meeting is open to the public.

Commissioners to hold interview

The Thomas County Commissioners will meet at 11 a.m. Tuesday in the commissioners room of the courthouse. They will interview a candidate for director of EMS. The meeting is open to the public.

Health/Exercise program set

Michael Bradshaw, K-State Research and Extension Health Specialist, will present "Health Benefits of Exercise" at 10 a.m. and 7 p.m. Tuesday, at the Thomas County Office Complex. RSVP to the Thomas County Extension Office (785) 462-4682 by Monday, April 8.

Kindergarten Roundup scheduled

Heartland Christian School announces its Kindergarten

Roundup. The event will be held on Friday, April 19, from 8:20-11:30 a.m. at the school in Mingo. All students entering kindergarten for the 2002-2003 school year are invited to attend with their parents. To reserve your spot or to receive additional information, please contact the school office at 462-6419 before Monday, April 15.

Endowment meeting today

The Colby Community College Endowment Association will hold their annual meeting in the Fireside Lounge at the student union today beginning at 5:30 p.m. Members of the Endowment Association are encouraged to attend this meeting. For information, call (785) 462-3984, ext. 684.

Spring turkey permits available

Spring turkey permits are available at the Thomas County Clerk's office in the courthouse. The season dates are from April 10-May 19. There is a youth season between April 5-7.

