

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

Teacher situation is far from ideal

From The Wichita Eagle
Kansas' teacher shortage is becoming more than a problem — in many districts, it's a full-blown crisis that is undermining our children's education.
The Kansas State Board of Education's approval last week of more flexible teacher licensure requirements is admittedly a less-than-desirable stopgap measure.
But in a crisis, a stopgap is sometimes needed.
Long term, though, what's needed is a more aggressive, comprehensive strategy of recruitment and retention.
Kansas' teacher licensing standards have prohibited teachers certified to teach biology at the secondary level. ...
In an ideal world, that's how it should be.
But the teacher situation in Kansas is far from ideal. ...
Under the revised rules, science teachers could teach outside their certification if they passed the competency exam in that subject, and any teacher could add other endorsement by taking 50 percent of the course work and passing the test.
There are valid worries about going down this path. ...
But granting districts some flexibility to meet the teacher crisis appears necessary in the near term. ...
It was reassuring that a wide range of stakeholders, from school superintendents to department staff to teacher representatives, testified to the board that the changes wouldn't damage the quality of instruction.
To further that end, Kansas must put more effort into attracting a larger pool of talented teachers and bringing down the high rate of new teachers dropping out.
It also should do more to offer credible paths of alternative certification for mid-life career changers.
Board member Carol Rupe of Wichita called the changes the "first step" in removing barriers that have kept districts from having good teachers.
It is just that — a first step. And if there's no follow-up, the problems will persist.

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail jvannostrand@nwkansas.com or pdecker@nwkansas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-4774
U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-6521
U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2443 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124
State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St. Rm. 143-N, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7676 e mail: jmorrison@ink.org web: www.morrisonfamily.com
State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th St., Rm. 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, 785/296-7399 ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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John Van Nostrand - Publisher
jvannostrand@nwkansas.com

NEWS

Patty Decker - Editor
pdecker@nwkansas.com

Tisha Cox - General Assignment
tcx@nwkansas.com

Jan Katz Ackerman, Area Reporter
ackermanjk@ruraltel.net

ADVERTISING

Crystal Rucker - Advertising Sales/Director
crystalr@nwkansas.com

Kristi Powell - Advertising Sales
kpowell@nwkansas.com

Emily Wederski - Advertising Sales
ewederski@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Jeanette Applegate - Bookkeeping, Ad Building
japplegate@nwkansas.com

Everett Robert - Circulation, Classifieds
erobert@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Jim Bowker - General Manager

Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Judy McKnight, Jim Jackson, DeLisa Allen, David Erickson, Betty Morris, and Dana Huthansel

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You go girl

Jan Katz Ackerman

• From Where I stand



Anyone who says America's youth isn't proving it's doing anything for the county has not met Hoxie's Renee Mullins.
An avid car enthusiast, Renee, and a hand full of volunteers, organized Hoxie's first rod run and drag race which took place Saturday and Sunday. Renee's personalized license plate — 1TUFGAL — underestimates her.
Anyone who attended the event could see the entire production was well under control and in the hands of one energetic young lady — Renee. Seen jaunting here and there among some 106 cars, Renee's busy hands and almost running pace proved Hoxie, and Renee's family, has grown one dynamic young woman.
While I'm not a Hillary Clinton fan, her line about it taking a village to raise a child is true. Renee's family and the support of members of the community helped Renee pull off a major event for the town. But Renee's not just any child. On May 29, Renee started her sixth year as a survivor of synovial cell sarcoma, also known as tissue cancer, which claimed the ring finger of her right hand. But the loss of a finger has not dampened Renee's spirit or her love for cars. It is that love for cars which drove her to invite others to attend Hoxie's first rod run.
Cars lined both sides of Sheridan Avenue from Main Street east for three blocks and participants

and onlookers cruised past them. At an almost unstoppable pace, Renee directed traffic, helped with registration and made public announcements, all with a big grin on her face.
About mid-morning on Saturday I asked Renee if she was pleased with the turn out. She said she's hoped for 112 cars, and the 106 which showed up were a delight to the soon to be Colby Community College student.
Renee plans to become a nurse and practice nursing in northwestern Kansas. She also told me she plans to help with Colby's rod run next year, while planning Hoxie's second.
So, at the conclusion of a well planned and orchestrated first rod run for Hoxie, my hat is off to 18-year-old Renee Mullins.
Hoxie's promoters took every precaution they could to assure spectator safety for a drag race event. The bleachers were set back from the run-

way and flagged off making the "DO NOT CROSS" line. While I didn't put a measuring tape to the distance between the runway and the first bleacher, it was, in my opinion definitely far enough back to protect people, barring a runaway car that basically nothing could have stopped.
A die hard race attendee when I was younger, I've seen crashes that no matter how much planning was done, not enough could have been done to safeguard everything or every one.
And, I'd bet that had Saturday's tragedy in Selmer, Tenn., not claimed the life of six people, no one in Hoxie would have even thought about how close the cars were to the bleachers. That accident happened during a charity car show when one of the drivers lost control of his car as he drag raced down a highway that didn't have any guard rails on it and six people died as a result. The victims were in their teens and early 20s. The accident, according to the Tennessee Highway Patrol, injured 20 others.
While I'm not downplaying the threat of, or actuality of accidents, during racing events, anyone who supports racing and attends races knows they put their lives at risk.
— Jan KatzAckerman is a reporter for the Colby Free Press

It's worth a look

Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa



A blockbuster proposal by two retired farm-state senators and an emerging Washington think tank urges Congress to eliminate direct payments to farmers and let them depend more on the market.
The plan, put forth by former Sens. Bob Dole of Kansas and Tom Daschle of South Dakota, would cap federal payments at a quarter million dollars a year, closing loopholes that allow some wealthy "farmers," including basketball players and other celebrities, to collect millions while others go broke.
Mr. Dole is a former Republican leader and Mr. Daschle a former Democratic leader in the Senate, and their experience in farm-bill battles is considerable. Their advice bears listening to.
No one is ever "happy" with the farm bill. It's something everyone lives with.
Farmers would be happier, no doubt, just to be able to make a living without constant interference, "help" and advice from the government. The evidence suggests they would be better off financially, too, but getting from here to there has always been the problem.
End federal price supports tomorrow, and you might break half the farmers — and half the banks — in rural America. The system is addicted to federal money, has been for years.

There was a time, when Pat Roberts was chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, that it looked as though the "Freedom to Farm" approach would loose farmers from their subsidy habit. We all know how that ended.
If federal programs really supported family farms or kept anyone on the land, we might want to defend them. The stark truth, told by declining population figures and farm numbers, is that these programs may keep the average operation afloat a few years longer than without them. The trend toward fewer, bigger farms is unchanged.
Since the advent of mechanical harvesting equipment and scientific seed propagation, the hard truth is it's taken fewer farmers every year of the last century to grow more food.
The government has tried to pay people to stay on the land while paying land-grant colleges to make farming more efficient. The efficient

farmer is winning, and surviving, while others leave the business in great numbers.
We see no end to that. The question is how to make farming more profitable and make life good for the best producers who remain. And for young men and women who will step up to take their place as the great mass of today's graying farmers retire.
There is no magic formula for farm success. It takes hard work, brains and a special kind of toughness. A lot of people around here have those qualities.
Farmers who grow unregulated, unsubsidized crops tend to make more money and be happier with their lot than those tied to a federal tether. Making more people free to farm ought to be a goal of the farm bill. So should ending subsidies to those who don't need them, and the real goal should be to ensure that — except in times of disaster — most farmers don't.
The Dole-Daschle plan is the first in recent years to look at that end. It claims to have nearly \$5 billion a year in budget savings while making farmers better off. It's worth a look, as is any plan to ease farming back to fiscal reality.
— Steve Haynes, president of Nor'West Newspapers including the Colby Free Press

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

