



Other Viewpoints

Education dollars just keep dropping

A report produced by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and released this week by the Kansas Center for Economic Growth revealed some concerning statistics for anyone who cares about quality education in Kansas.

Specifically, since the 2008 recession, Kansas has cut education spending by 16.5 percent. Only three states have cut education spending more than Kansas – Alabama, 20.1 percent; Arizona, 17.2 percent; and Oklahoma, 22.8 percent.

And when it comes to education spending and quality outcomes for students, these states are not the sort of company Kansas should want to keep.

The U.S. Department of Education’s National Center of Education Statistics reports that Kansas students outperform students in Alabama, Arizona and Oklahoma in every measured category. And Kansas exceeds the national average assessment scores in all categories except fourth grade writing. It records that remarkable performance for about half the average cost of other states and considerably less than the aforementioned states that have significantly reduced education spending in recent years.

Even the American Legislative Exchange Council – one of the primary proponents of reduced spending for education – highlights in its Report Card on American Education that Kansas fares considerably better than Alabama, Arizona or Oklahoma.

According to the council, Kansas has a 77.5 percent graduation rate, compared to 74.3 percent for Oklahoma, 63 percent for Arizona, and 64.5 percent for Alabama. Likewise, Kansas has a higher percentage of students who perform at a proficient or higher level in both the fourth and eighth grades.

“Good schools and an educated workforce foster economic growth, and we are shooting ourselves in the foot by reducing our investment in our schools and students,” said Annie McKay, executive director of the Kansas Center for Economic Growth. “These cuts have undermined our ability to educate Kansas’ children, and there will be consequences for Kansas’ economy.”

While there can be debate about the most effective methods that can be used to educate Kansas’ children and prepare them for a vibrant and successful future, there is no dispute that Kansas’ current education system outperforms its peers and does it for less total cost.

And there is no question that the path to failure has been mapped out by those few states that have reduced more than Kansas their investment in education.

– The Hutchinson News, via the Associated Press

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Education critical to our survival

Education is the key to success in life.

Human beings have limited survival skills at birth. A baby’s education begins almost immediately. Survival depends upon that baby being able to communicate its needs.

Later on, survival depends on the ability to acquire the bare necessities to sustain life. All children are not born into equal environments or with highly-skilled parents. That’s why it takes extended family, the village and sometimes the nation to raise a child.

We need a system that adequately meets general education needs from preschool through post-secondary. We need to provide opportunity for those with teaching skills to acquire specialized training in their academic fields. We need to provide opportunity for advanced training for the technical skills needed by industry and health care.

Simply putting children in preschools and mandatory attendance in school is not the answer. But it is certainly an opportunity to prepare them for finding their own answers to life’s problems. Providing affordable, adequate, and accessible school for all is a must for our society.

We need to place great emphasis on the academic skills of reading and writing. Certainly those are skills necessary to survive in the economic and communication environment of the day. They are also prerequisites to science, math, engineering and all other high-tech aspirations.

We forget that the human relationship to learn how to use those academic skills is acquired by exposure to everyday interaction with others. (preschool, elementary school, secondary school, playgrounds, sports, arts, drama, music, church activities, social clubs, etc.) Geniuses who possess extremely high



**Ken Poland**

• Ken’s World

levels of academic and technical skills but don’t know how to deal with the ordinary mundane activities of life seldom ever are able to enjoy a balanced social life.

And, believe it or not, whether human beings are here by creation or as a result of evolution, we are, by nature, social creatures. The most pious religionist, dedicated humanist or evolutionist requires a social structure and order. Even the most vile individuals will gravitate toward a social structure of like-minded and -acting individuals.

Private (especially the elite ones), religious and home schooling does not have nearly as broad a range of opportunity and exposure to the realities of real life society as do public schools. Even if they do, a small percentage of youngsters have the privilege of attending private, religious or home schools. That is not to say those schools are not worthy of private support and funding. However, money acquired through government taxation should only be for public schools and those schools should have standardized rules and regulations. Economic status, gender, religious persuasion or even illegal residence should ever prevent children from attendance and participation in public schools.

Public schools should and must be available from early age through at least adolescence. Equal and adequate funding must be available

regardless of local economies. If isolated communities, regions or even states refuse or are unable to provide the funding and resources, then perhaps we do need federal assistance. After all, isn’t that a part of the dream the founders of our nation had? A United States means all States, communities and people willing to work together for the good of all.

We had a group of people identified by the color of their skin who couldn’t drink out of public water fountains, eat in public restaurants, etc. That group along with other minority groups did not have access to adequate schools, equal property rights and fair and balanced justice in the courts until the federal government stepped in and started enforcing their constitutional rights as citizens.

We have millions of children, today who do not have access or opportunity to learn acceptable social skills and education. Are the children to blame? Absolutely not. Perhaps those of us who had access and opportunity should be willing to provide resources and encouragement to those children and their families to give their children a chance.

I would challenge all of us, especially those of us identifying ourselves as Christians, to step up and accept the challenge to make public education available to every child and young person in our community and nation. If you don’t think the public system is doing an adequate and proper job, then get involved and help improve the system.

*Ken Poland describes himself as a semiretired farmer living north of Gem, a Christian, affiliated with American Baptist Churches, and a radical believer in separation of church and state. Contact him at rcwinc@cheerful.com.*

Texting can wait until you get there

You’re driving to work, when suddenly your phone buzzes with a text from a friend about weekend plans. Without thinking, you take your eyes off the road to tap a quick reply: “c u @ 8.” What you don’t see is a stopped school bus that your car slams into. When you come to in the ICU, the doctor tells you that you’ll be okay – but you have critically hurt two of the kids on the bus.

In an instant, you’ve changed your life – and others – forever.

This scenario may seem extreme, but it’s all too familiar for thousands of people. Texting while driving has become a dangerous epidemic. In an era when wireless connectivity is such an important part of our lives, the pressure to take your eyes off the road to respond to an e-mail or text is strong – it may even seem expected. It’s not, and it should never be. According to the National Safety Council, texting while driving causes more than 100,000 crashes across America each year, and if something isn’t done, the number will only continue to rise.

By making the choice to text while driving, you place yourself and others at a significantly higher risk of being involved in an accident, and place the importance of a message above your own life and the lives of others. The truth is no text is worth such a deadly risk.

It is up to us, as individuals and as a society, to combat this deadly practice. But it won’t be easy. Today, more drivers than ever recognize

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• **Steve Hahn and Julie Breitenstein**

the dangers of texting while driving, but continue to engage in this risky behavior. In fact, according to a Connectsafely.org and AT&T survey, the number of adult commuters that self-reported texting while driving has risen nearly 10 percent over the past three years.

Last year on Sept. 19, AT&T held the first “No Text on Board Pledge Day” – a nationwide event in which drivers committed to never text and drive. To date, more than 2.5 million people have made the pledge and joined the movement to end texting while driving.

This year, the “It Can Wait” movement took the campaign a step further by organizing “Drive 4 Pledges Day” on Thursday. We teamed up with hundreds of other organizations and advocates – including all of the major wireless carriers – across the country to help end texting and driving. To strengthen this cause, we need your help. We’re asking every driver to make a personal commitment not to text and drive and recruit others to do the same. Go to ItCanWait.com to take the

pledge.

The power of one voice can make all the difference between another senseless fatality and saving a life. Even more, it can produce ripple effects that can change behavior across an entire community. By encouraging your family and friends to join the movement to stop this often fatal habit, you can make the difference.

Tragedies happen every day. While many are out of our control, the ones caused by texting while driving are completely preventable. The message is clear, simple and lifesaving. When faced with the decision to text while driving, remember: It Can Wait. Together, we can end this tragic epidemic and make our roadways safer for all of us.

*Steve Hahn is president of AT&T Kansas. Julie Breitenstein is an It Can Wait advocate whose son, Austin, was severely injured in a texting while driving accident.*

Write us

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Mallard Fillmore

• **Bruce Tinsley**

