



# Reporter

Volume 20, Number 5

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**SCHOOLS FOR QUALITY EDUCATION, INC.**

## Letter from the President

### Education as an Investment

As parents of ten children, my wife Barbara and I have been big customers of Kansas Public Education. Our first five children are now college graduates. Three are engineers and two are teachers. I would like to view education as an investment and review the returns to the individual and the State of Kansas.

My oldest son designs bridges for a Kansas City firm. At his graduation, the commencement speaker said we spent \$33,000 on his education at KSU and the State of Kansas spent \$100,000 [Engineering education costs more for facilities than most college subjects]. Since I helped him with income taxes the first two years, I know he made \$23,000 the first 6 months and over \$46,000 the first full year on the job. I can only say this is a pretty good rate of return for our family investment. He is a product of a rural 3A school district.

In Kansas we pay nearly 7% sales tax and 6.25% or 6.45% income tax when you exceed \$30,000 or \$60,000 in annual income. This doesn't include gas taxes, vehicle registration, property taxes, etc. He is now a Certified Professional Engineer and in the \$50,000 plus annual income range. So I will use a very low 13% estimate as an annual state tax rate for this paragraph. This translates into \$6,500 for the state's coffers. In less than 15 years the state gets back its college investment; in less than 10 years the state also gets back the \$65,000 it spent on his K-12 education [this estimates USD 288 got \$5,000 per year per FTE from 1982 to 1995]. He will probably work from age 24 to age 69; that will be 45 years of taxpayer duty. So the State of Kansas will get a \$130,000 [20 x \$6,500] profit from educating him. It looks like the State of Kansas

made a pretty good investment in a rural 3A school and in KSU.

The best part is his company does work for Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas plus they are now doing some work for Mexico. He and the State of Kansas are in the export business selling intellectual property developed in Kansas Public Schools. That's almost better than selling corn, wheat and beef: you have to have adequate rain every year for those exports to be profitable. We cannot afford to starve out the education profit center in Kansas.

His fiancée is a product of a 1A school (Morland, KS), Fort Hays State and KU with a master's degree in Physical Therapy. Similar story. Both of them needed a good solid K-12 education to achieve their college dreams. They got them in rural schools. Every rural school district has these same types of success stories. Education is our best investment in Kansas.

There are some good web sites for addresses and other legislative information. These include [www.kasb.org/legislative.html](http://www.kasb.org/legislative.html), <http://skyways.lib.ks.us>, [www.kslegislature.org](http://www.kslegislature.org) (this one was not fully up to date as of 1 Mar 05), [www.ksbe.state.ks.us](http://www.ksbe.state.ks.us), [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov), and <http://thomas.loc.gov>. The last two give you federal government information.

I see some fundamental weaknesses in the current Senate and House Education bills. One of the largest is no specified funding source for long term increased education financing; this could lead to a Governor's veto or the KS Supreme Court taking over the education funding process. If the courts take over education funding, our legislators will have failed in a primary duty. Write and call your legislators, please. Thank you.

*Lester P. Wuertz  
USD #288 BOE Member  
Schools for Quality Education President*

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# Suitability

Suitability is in the eye of the beholder. If you are an educator, it probably means meeting students' needs and preparing them to be able to move forward to be productive citizens. Educators also have to struggle to meet all the associated demands outlined in statute, regulations, and mandates. Some policy makers are more likely to limit their focus to satisfy the requirements of the State Board, the legislature and the federal government. Then, of course, it depends which body you belong to just how responsible you feel for meeting the objectives that ensure that Kansas's children are "suitably" educated. And although we are looking at that end product in the eye each day, we must keep in mind that those that are farther removed from where that suitable education is being delivered are more concerned about the monetary element of what might be required to ensure that a suitable education is provided. They also might be pondering future potential lawsuits and how best to sidestep liability. Educators are forced to keep their eye on the ball-the end product-the child or young adult who must be prepared to become a responsible, educated Kansas citizen. The following article by Dr. John Cleek will no doubt speak to all of us.

Val DeFever  
Public Relations Representative

## A Suitable Education by Dr. John E. Cleek

*A school is a building with four walls and roof on it with the future inside.*

*"If you expect a nation both ignorant and free, you expect what never was and never will be."*

*Thomas Jefferson*

*"What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children."* John Dewey

*(b) The legislature shall make suitable provision for finance of the educational interests of the state.*

*(Article 6, § 6: Finance, Constitution of the State of Kansas.)*

Surely the people of Kansas could not have anticipated how much effort would be expended to define the simple mandate directing the legislature to make suitable provision for financing the educational interests of the state. Rather than searching for a definition that can be used to support increased funding or defend the status quo, why not ask what the framers of the constitution intended.

It is not plausible to assume that the framers had

in mind a level of finance that would provide for an education suitable to the environment for which the students are being prepared? I think it is. A suitable education in 1861 when Kansas was admitted to the Union would be radically different from a suitable education in 1961 when the era of space exploration was beginning. And a suitable education at the beginning of the 21st century must prepare our children for meeting the challenges of the brave new world of the information age – an age in which the jobs that most of the children in our schools today will hold in the future have not yet even been invented.

More than ever before in history, the words of the poet, W. B. Yeats, ring true, "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire." If we only equip our children with the tools they need to prepare them for the world of 2005, we will not have provided them with a suitable education for the world in which their lives will be lived.

From the days of the one room school house on the prairies of Kansas to the virtual classrooms connecting the schools of Kansas via the information superhighway, Kansas has consistently ranked among the leading states in the nation in the quality of education we offer to our children as measured by all of the recognized standardized tests. This performance is even more remarkable when you consider that we rank no better than the lowest quartile in the funding of our schools.

So, why not just rest on our laurels and assume that our teachers and administrators will continue to produce more bang for the educational buck than other states. For one thing, the competitive environment for teachers and administrators is becoming more challenging with every passing day. Our schools are finding it more and more difficult to find young teachers to replace those who are retiring. Our schools are finding it more and more difficult to retain young teachers losing a third of the new recruits within their first five years in the classroom.

But there are more storm clouds on the horizon that we ignore at our peril. The demographics of our state are drastically different than they have been in the past. The good news reflected in the averages belie the bad news revealed by looking at the performance of subgroups, such as minority students, students from non-English speaking backgrounds, and students in small, rural schools

*(Continued on page 3)*

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## New Publication Encourages Entrepreneurship

(Continued from page 2)

A new publication, *Learning by Doing*, which promotes youth entrepreneurship in the Appalachian region, is now available for teachers and would benefit students in any part of the country. The publication highlights programs that teach students the basic elements of running a business.

Americans live in a nation where entrepreneurs create a high standard of living, but many rural communities find themselves lacking in entrepreneurial vision. *Learning by Doing* is a handbook full of ideas especially designed to encourage young people to risk venturing into the world of business and becoming successful businessmen and businesswomen.

The educational programs featured in *Learning by Doing* range from a high-tech service project in a northern Mississippi middle school that stresses dependability and a strong customer orientation to a faith-based effort in Nashville where children as young as second grade cultivate character and initiative while learning how to make an investment bear fruit. This publication underscores the importance of interpersonal and social skills in achieving success.

The Appalachian Regional Commission and the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation collaborated in producing *Learning by Doing* which can be obtained by downloading it from ARC's website, <http://www.arc.gov/index.do?nodeId=19> or by calling its offices at 202-884-7750.

(From OCRE- Organizations Concerned About Rural Education Website)

### Report: "Distance Education Courses for Public Elementary and Secondary School Students"

This public school district survey is the first national survey to explore distance education courses for public elementary and secondary school students. According to the report, students in more than one-third of the school districts take courses over the internet or through video conferences especially in rural areas in the southeast and central sections of the United States. An estimated 36% of public school districts had students enrolled in distant education courses in 2002-03 year with 72% of those districts planning to expand these offerings in the future. A complete report can be obtained from: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2005010>

without the resources for fully staffed schools. Governor Sebelius spoke for all of us when she said, "A quality education should not be an accident of geography, but a right of birth..." (January 12, 2004)

Any solution to the funding of our schools must be a good deal for all of our children or it will not be a good deal for any of them. Whether a child is born in Liberal or Leavenworth, Colby or Coffeyville, they have the right to expect their schools to provide them an education suitable to the challenges of the 21st century.

A part of the genius of America is that we have always risen to the challenge and we dare not fail the new challenges of the information age. When the class of 2005 walks proudly across the stage to receive their diplomas, they must be prepared to enter college, technical school, or perform effectively on the job. They must also be prepared to take their place as leaders in society and protect our democracy against all threats.

(Dr. Cleek is Dean of the School of Education and teaches International Business at the University of Missouri at Kansas City. He is also a member of the Board of Education at USD 416-Louisburg.)

### New Relationships with Schools: Organizations That Build Community by Connecting with Schools (Volume II)

Collaborative Communications Group,  
November 2004

Both volumes of this publication were created from research the organization conducted for the Kettering Foundation regarding organizations that are working in other areas but take on education issues to further community goals. In their research, Collaborative identified a number of organizations that establish strong connections between communities and schools acting on behalf of the neighborhood, the community, or a constituency group. They create community change by helping residents build the networks, understanding, and power to identify and address problems with their schools.

The report contains three in-depth case studies and a survey of eight organizations, along with an analysis of how these organizations name and frame the issues and how they translate their beliefs into action.

Both volumes are available online for free download as PDF documents at: [www:publicengagement.com/practices/publications/newrelationshipsmry.htm](http://www.publicengagement.com/practices/publications/newrelationshipsmry.htm).

(Rural Roots, Volume 6, No. 1, Winter 2005)

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## Calendar

October 23-24, 2005  
27th Annual Rural & Small  
Schools Conference  
Manhattan, KS  
Contact: 785-532-5886

November 5-9, 2005  
97th Annual NREA Convention  
Tucson, AZ  
Contact: 405-325-7959  
website <http://www.nrea.net>

Contact: 785-532-5886 or go to our  
website at <http://coe.ksu.edu/sqe>.



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Schools for Quality Education  
124 Bluemont Hall  
Kansas State University  
Manhattan, KS 66506  
(785) 532-5886

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