

OPINION

DAILY JOURNAL

JEFFREY W. OWEN
PUBLISHER
E-mail address:
jowen@thejournalnet.com

SCARLETT SYSE
EDITOR
E-mail address:
syse@thejournalnet.com

"The Daily Journal is dedicated to community service, to defense of individual rights and to providing those checks upon government which no constitution can ensure."

SCOTT ALEXANDER
founding editor, 1963

AT ISSUE

Several Johnson County schools were among those recently honored as four-star schools.

OUR POINT

The schools should be proud of the awards, but a lack of recognition should not discourage others.

Local four-star schools have a right to be proud

The Daily Journal

Seven Johnson County Schools were given the state's four-star-school award for high attendance and ISTEP scores in the 2004 school year.

Center Grove schools making the list were Center Grove Elementary, Maple Grove Elementary, North Grove Elementary, Sugar Grove Elementary, Center Grove Middle School Central and Center Grove High School.

Greenwood's Westwood Elementary School also received the award.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Suellen Reed said, "Individual schools, school corporations and communities can be extremely proud of the Four Star School Award. These schools are models of high level of performance and achievement, and we are proud of what they have accomplished."

About 10 percent of Indiana's 1,870 public schools earned the rating this year.

To be given the four-star-school award, schools had to:

- Meet adequate yearly progress goals defined by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and
- Perform in the top 25 percent of all public schools in the state in student attendance rates, mathematics proficiency scores, English/language arts proficiency scores and the percent of students passing both subjects.

Schools receive an award certificate to display in their buildings.

A banner hanging outside Westwood Elementary proclaimed the achievement, Principal Lisa Harkness said.

Once a month, parent volunteers watch students during lunch so that teachers in that grade level can talk about student assessments and testing data, she said.

The award gives staff a good tool for comparing how they rate against other schools in Indiana, Center Grove Superintendent Candace Milhon-Baer said.

"I think our staff does an excellent job of making sure that they're trying to focus on improvement," Milhon-Baer said.

Students, teachers and administrators at the county schools that received the awards have reason to be proud. The honor represents more than bragging rights. It marks real accomplishment.

However, the criteria are relatively narrow, and only a small percentage of schools are honored each year.

The state ought to create a second award. This one would honor schools that show significant improvement in their attendance rate and ISTEP scores. This would reward effort as well as accomplishment.

Other schools should not despair over not receiving the four-star award. They should continue their unique missions to serve their students the best they can. They shouldn't bend their efforts just to fit the honor.

Awards are a good thing to aspire to, but they aren't meant to be the focus of a school's program.

Focus: Deficit

Congress needs to put actions behind words

Scrrips Howard News Service

Congress has taken a first halting step toward reining in federal spending by approving cuts of \$39 billion during five years in the several large, politically popular social welfare programs.

The final House vote was 216 to 214, hardly a ringing endorsement for frugality, and it was a long time in coming. The most recent cut in the rate of growth of federal entitlement programs, where benefits are automatic and guaranteed, was eight years ago.

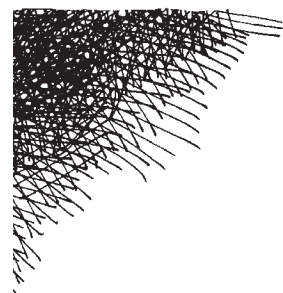
The programs being nipped in one fashion or another — higher deductibles, co-payments and premiums, lower subsidies — are Medicare, Medicaid, student loans and child-support enforcement.

The groups most affected — the poor, students, single mothers — are hardly among the capital's more powerful lobbies. Those lobbies that are powerful fared better. Congress preserved a \$1 billion subsidy for dairy farmers and flinched at a proposed 4 percent cut in Medicaid payments to doctors.

In the broader spending picture, a cut of \$39 billion is almost a symbolic gesture. During the life of these cuts, the government will spend \$14.3 trillion. And it will do nothing to address the cumulative budget deficit during the next five years, expected to total \$1.3 trillion. In fact, the deficit will go up because an upcoming \$70 billion tax cut bill will more than wipe out those savings.

Still, Congress can say it has "done something" about federal spending, although you do have to wonder what planet Rep. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., who shepherded the measure through, was on. "Once again, House Republicans are on record as defending budget discipline," he proclaimed. Beg pardon? Under the Republicans, federal spending has gone up 40 percent in the past five years. Some discipline.

Congress will soon face a sterner test on spending because President Bush says he will propose broader and deeper cuts in the fiscal 2007 budget he submits next week. Although Congress might not take another eight years to get around to them, it's a safe bet the lawmakers won't enact the cuts before next November. It's an election year.



Punctuation: Not just marks! It's etiquette for readers' eyes

My students and I sometimes take a side trip down one of the many highways and byways that thread through the wonderful world of English. These serendipitous journeys happen, I'm convinced, as the result of the short attention spans and extreme distractibility both my students and I share. We recently meandered down one such trail when the topic of "air quotes" came up.

We were working on one of the Indiana State Standards for the seventh grade. (To be exact, standards 7.6.6. and 7.6.7, which deal with punctuation.) Now, anytime I can get a classroom of squirrely seventh-graders interested in or talking about punctuation, I figure I'd better go with it, so we proceeded to examine just what "air quotes" represent, when and how to use them, and so on.

You know air quotes, right? When you hold your hands up about shoulder high and move your index and middle fingers up and down to make imaginary quotation marks? One reason to use it is to be ironic, to cast some doubt on the validity of the idea you are quoting. For example, imagine making air quotes around the word "jokes" in the sentence, "Mr. Knight often tells us 'jokes.'"

Since the state standards were all about punctuation, we started wondering if there were other "air" punctuation marks. "Air periods" seem obvious enough. Can you guess that "air question marks" were easy to visualize?



Norman Knight

And "air exclamation points" were so obvious!

"Air dashes" and "air hyphens" were a little more problematic simply because they look so much alike — although they have quite different and multifaceted uses. We had a bit of disagreement on just how one should go about making proper "air semicolons"; it was never resolved. (Once again I tried my joke about how I thought it was unfair that truck drivers got their own punctuation mark; once again, they didn't laugh.)

I explained that, believe it or not, we adults didn't sit around thinking of pointless tasks for them to do in school. The things we learn in school have important and useful functions in the "real world," with the possible exception of algebra. (Kidding.) We learn punctuation, for example, for one reason: to be polite to our readers.

Punctuation is a form of good manners. Those little dots and squiggles seat the reader at the table and then help serve the banquet the writer presents, pausing to let the reader savor a point, noting an especially unusual tidbit, showing surprise

or delight at a particularly delectable morsel.

This comparison of proper punctuation to good manners is sometimes lost on my students. I think this is so because etiquette does not have a high value in our society anymore. As I work with kids day after day, it's obvious that many parents aren't teaching manners. And as I observe many adults behaving badly in public, it's obvious why.

(And please, lawmakers, don't think the solution is to add yet another state standard to our already overloaded plates here at school. Shouldn't etiquette be learned at home?)

Like manners and proper etiquette, punctuation may seem a little oppressive and restrictive. "Why not let me just express myself? Do my own thing?" a young writer might ask.

But just as good manners help order society while actually making social interactions easier and more pleasant, proper punctuation helps order writing and makes it clearer and easier to understand.

So in my classroom I'll continue to teach the Indiana State Standards on punctuation as well as various other language skills. And, when I can, I'll try to slip in some ideas about good manners. Also, I will continue to use humor in my classroom. (Imagine air quotes around the word "humor.")

Norman Knight, a teacher at Clark-Pleasant Middle School, writes this weekly column for the Daily Journal. Send comments to letters@thejournalnet.com.

Sputnik moment needed to put focus on shortage of math, science teachers

Let's get hopping with science education, America said to itself after Russia launched Sputnik in October 1957, suddenly making us realize that this Cold War competitor might be more technologically able than we were and an even worse threat than we had supposed.

It was a lesson that reached down to the consciousness of junior high and high school students at the time. I know this. I was there.

We students would be trotted off to assembly halls to watch on TV and celebrate as the United States launched its own satellites, and then we would slink out of those halls like whipped puppies after some of those rockets exploded on their pads. Kaboom, kaboom, kaboom. Those rockets seemed to be announcing an inferiority we could not understand.

But the fact is, Sputnik did what the two-by-four piece of lumber did in the old joke about the farmer who used it to slam his recalcitrant mule on the head, explaining that before you could get the mule's cooperation, you had to get its attention.

Sputnik got our attention, science education did improve, the government put more into research, and, in 1969, when I was a reporter in Albany, N.Y., I did man-on-the-street interviews to get reactions to the manned landing of Apollo 11 on the moon. I can promise you, the people I talked to were in no slinking mood.

The question in 2006 is whether America can rise to the occasion and do what is needed to improve science and math education in our schools without an incentive like Sputnik.

In his State of the Union speech, President Bush spoke just



Jay Ambrose

a few sentences on the subject. He said he wanted to train 70,000 high school teachers for advanced math and science instruction and persuade another 30,000 science and math professionals to teach. Students would profit by taking more math and science, he said. The courses would help them "succeed in life" and help ensure "America succeeds in the world," he told his audience. These were among the most important words in his speech. Was anybody listening?

A shrugging of the shoulders, after all, would not be surprising, given the fact that the United States is leader of the pack in basic and applied scientific research as measured by virtually any criterion you want to name. Experts who tell us that also tell us what we can see with our own eyes: The payoff has been enormous in our economic competitiveness, the health of the citizenry, transportation, communication and the end of the worst kind of workplace drudgery for most employees.

But our scientific and technological predominance is slipping away. Test American high-school students in math and science, and what you find is that they are at or near the bottom of industrialized nations. We're not producing engineers the way we used to, and one reported prediction is

that 90 percent of all engineers and scientists will be working neither here nor in Europe just a few years from now. They will be working in Asia.

The just-retired Federal Reserve chairman, Alan Greenspan, said in a speech last year that at a time when the economy demands highly skilled workers, we have a shortage. The unskilled workers, meanwhile, aren't going to go far. As Stanford economist Paul Romer has pointed out, education has done far more for the average worker over the years than social welfare programs. Do it poorly and you shrink opportunities, as Bush suggested. You also shrink America's economic prospects, and not just a little bit, but drastically, as Bush also suggested.

The problem has many parts, but a major issue — no, the major issue — is a deficit of high-caliber, appropriately trained math and science teachers in the high schools, and especially in poor school districts, a deficit that will worsen as roughly two-thirds of the nation's K-12 teachers retire over the next 10 years or so.

The Bush idea of federal assistance in training new teachers and bringing outside professionals into schools could be more than useful, depending on program details as yet unknown. State and local districts have a bigger role here than the federal government, and the public must be willing to support their intelligent proposals, even without something of dramatic magnitude banging us on our nogginns.

Jay Ambrose is a columnist living in Colorado. Send comments to letters@thejournalnet.com.

YOUR VIEWS

Telecommunication laws in Indiana need updating

To the editor:

In today's plugged-in society, a top-of-the-line information infrastructure is a necessity for creating a world-class business climate. Case in point: broadband deployment.

Nationally, business and residential use of this high-capacity, high-speed transmission channel has increased by nearly 35 percent according to the latest Federal Communications Commission report.

Indiana, however, has yet to fully embrace this technology, ranking 34th among states for broadband availability and usage.

The Indiana Chamber prides itself on helping Hoosier companies gain access to the leading-edge products and services they need to compete in today's global marketplace.

Yet, if Indiana falls further behind other states in broadband access, businesses across the state will soon suffer from a significant competitive disadvantage.

What exactly is holding Indiana back? A major factor is that the state's telecommunications laws haven't changed in 21 years. Action in the form of comprehensive telecom reform is urgently needed.

This legislative session, Senate Bill 245 and House Bill 1279 have been introduced to address the need for greater broadband deployment and investment in Indiana's telecommunications network. These bills will encourage more choices, promote lower prices through competition, plus stimulate the development of new services such as super high-speed Internet access and create an environment that will encourage more investment in fiber optics and protect high-skill, high-wage jobs.

It's time for Indiana's telecommunications laws to catch up with marketplace realities. If we phase in the proposed legislative reforms, we can encourage and attract the telecom investment and broadband deployment needed to position Indiana as a technology leader.

Kevin Brinegar, president
Brian Bergsma, director of economic development policy
Indiana Chamber of Commerce

Plaque honors students, not their school building

To the editor:

It's time I spoke up. I started Franklin High School as a freshman in 1938 in the brand-new senior high building. We were the first graduating class to start in the building that is now occupied by the Johnson County Soil and Water Conservation District. Upon graduation in 1942, I started work as the high school secretary in this building.

I worked in the building as high school secretary and secretary to the superintendent until 1973 when the superintendent's office made the move to a new building on the Northwood Elementary School campus.

During World War II, the high school had very few outside activities other than doing what we could for the war effort. We lost many of our students as they went to war and didn't get to finish high school until after the war was over. Our boys killed and wounded in the war caused a very sad time for us students.

Some of our brave former high school men were killed. The 16 who gave their lives are listed on the memorial plaque — John Paul Buchanan, Roland Hatch, George Pettit, Norman Vandivier, William Wright, Stanley Barnett, James Lewis, Kenneth Rider, Harold Van Antwerp, Harold Williams, Loy Underwood, Eugene Clemmer, Gordon Mather, Thomas Thompson, Richard Wales and William Norman Jr.

Our classes of 1942, 1943 and 1944 presented the plaque (that Bob Weaver and Barry Barnett want to keep in the conservation district building) to the school so we could honor our Franklin High School friends. Many of our fallen men's families and friends still live in this area.

Others want the plaque at the museum where they can visit it when in the area. Many of the members of the classes of 1942, 1943 and 1944 have indicated interest in seeing the plaque moved. We realize that if the plaque isn't moved now, in a few years there will be no one left to care about honoring our former students.

How can the building gain historical status when the inside has been changed so much? I can hardly find the location of the office I worked in all those years. It is nothing like it was.

And the final fact, the building is not the Alva Neal High School. The Alva Neal High School was torn down many years ago.

Montrew Cross
Franklin