

The Dallas Post

EDITORIALS

As school begins, let's raise education's stock

Elementary and high school students will return to the classrooms in a week, as America's annual late summer ritual takes place. Local schools are starting earlier than in the past, in part to reserve more potential snow days should the coming winter be as harsh as the last. Other than that, not a whole lot is changing, which is good or bad depending on your point of view.

According to the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress report, our nation's students have made little movement toward improved performance. While math and science prowess has risen to match or slightly exceed 1973 levels, reading and writing skills are stagnant. Even the gains in math are minimal, said Mark Musick, president of the Southern Regional Education Board. "While the trend is up in science and math — which is heartening — 'up' doesn't seem to be very high," he is quoted in a *New York Times* article. "Virtually all 13 and 17-year-olds can read, write, add, subtract and count their change. But as one moves up the scale toward slightly more complicated tasks, student success falls off rapidly."

The report's findings illustrate the point:

- Less than 10 percent of 17-year-olds can do "rigorous" academic work in basic subjects.
- Only 2 percent of 11th-graders write well enough to meet national goals set after 1983's "A Nation at Risk" report.

Perhaps the results aren't surprising when you consider that since 1971, the report found the number of books, magazines, encyclopedias and newspapers in the average home has declined by 10 percent. Houses with none, one or only two of the four types of material increased from 28 to 37 percent of all homes in which 9-year-old children live.

More to the point, Secretary of Education Richard Riley lamented that in many areas, "It is the kid who is working hard and excelling in school who is not part of the crowd," and is instead ostracized and belittled. Children often taunt high achievers because they envy their targets' proficiency; but there is no excuse for adults who try to quash emerging intellect or ability.

In the Back Mountain, let's begin the school year on this note — no matter what our differences over tax rates, teacher salaries or curriculum, we all adopt the goal to help and encourage each child to become well-educated, so that he or she may have every opportunity to enjoy a challenging, fulfilling life. By doing that, we'll assure that future generations not match — but exceed — their parents' skill levels, and pass on a commitment to education and excellence that will sustain them and their children in an increasingly competitive world.

Publisher's notebook

Ron Bartizek



We receive several newspapers from other parts of the nation at the office, and I'm an inveterate reader of local papers when traveling. Among other things, it's interesting to check real estate values from place to place, and I've lately been startled by the comparison of ours to other areas. Ten years ago, home prices here were 30 to 50 percent below those in Southern New England, as the economy there was on fire and demand drove the cost of even the most basic house over \$100,000 by 1985. But what comes up must come down, and prices have either stabilized or declined since 1989. Meanwhile, prices have risen enough here to essentially catch up with New England. That doesn't make sense to me, since incomes there are at least 25 percent higher than in northeastern Pennsylvania. A paper from Dover, Delaware offers another example. Dover is the state capital, and Delaware is a relatively prosperous state, but home prices in the *Dover Post* appear to be 20 percent or more lower than here. The same is true of the Midwest and much of the South, even North Carolina, which has the lowest statewide unemployment rate in the nation. I don't understand it.

Last week's heavy rains reinforced the point that each year it takes less rainfall to push streams out of their banks. The reason is quite obvious; as pavement replaces grass and dirt, more water runs into brooks and rivers instead of soaking into the ground. Needless cutting down trees adds to the problem, since trees can soak up large amounts of water from the ground. The solution may not be to halt paving, but more judicious use of it surely would help. Ultimately, we must create ponds or wetland areas to absorb rainwater runoff if we don't want it rampaging over our land and highways. The big risk, of course, is river flooding. It's clear that it won't take another Agnes-type storm to push the Susquehanna over the dikes that protect the valley. Raising them isn't the final solution either, as long as we don't address the core issue of increasing runoff.

EDITOR'S APOLOGY. Due to an error in paste up, Alene Case's column last week appeared with the photo and heading for J.W.J. Several weeks ago, we changed our layout for columnists, replacing a conventional headline and byline with a more artful setup. We've learned that carries hazards, one of which is selecting the wrong heading.

My apologies to the readers and both authors. We'll try to see that it doesn't happen again.

Do you agree? Disagree?

Editorials are the opinion of the management of The Dallas Post. We welcome your opinion on contemporary issues in the form of letters to the editor. If you don't write, the community may never hear a contrasting point of view. Send letters to: The Dallas Post, P.O. Box 366, Dallas, PA 18612. Please include your name, address and a daytime phone number so that we may verify authenticity. We do not publish anonymous letters, but will consider withholding the name in exceptional circumstances. We reserve the right to edit for length and grammar.



Only yesterday

60 Years Ago - Aug. 31, 1934 DALLAS TWP. GETS NEW VOTING DISTRICT

The first response to the current movement to have the Dallas/Tunkhannock highway reconstructed came this week when engineers from State Highway Department began a new survey of the section of the road between Tunkhannock and Evans Falls to determine if a new route there would be advisable.

In response to the request of Fernbrook residents who were compelled to travel nearly one and a half miles to their polling place, Luzerne County Court granted their petition this week to split the South Election District of Dallas Township and fixed the boundaries, polling place and officers of the new district.

The funeral of Ruth S. Waters, 34, postmaster of Dallas for a number of years who died Aug. 28, was held yesterday afternoon.

50 Years Ago - Aug. 25, 1944 POSTMASTER SETS XMAS MAIL DEADLINES

Postmaster Joseph Polacky announces this year the Christmas mailing period for Army and Navy overseas forces is Sept. 15 to Oct. 15. After Oct. 15, no gift parcel may be mailed to a soldier, without presentation of a written request from him.

James A. Martin, supervising principal of Kingston Township Schools, has announced schools will open Sept. 5, and school buses will start their routes at 9 a.m. that day. Beginning Wednesday the schedule will be the same as last year.

You could get - Pork butts, 35¢ lb.; cod filets, 31¢ lb.; lima beans, 2 lbs., 19¢; green peppers, 5¢ lb.; corn, doz., 23¢.

40 Years Ago - Aug. 27, 1954 MAMA BEAR AND CUBS VISIT FERNBROOK

A mother bear and her cub have been keeping residents along Overbrook Ave., from Pioneer Ave. to Huntsville interested this summer. On two successive mornings about 5 a.m. the Scuremen's were awakened by the barking of their dog and found the garbage can lid off, contents scattered and bear tracks in the flower bed.

The Executive Board of the Back Mountain Memorial Library at its recent meeting authorized investment of \$2,880 from the Auction receipts in U.S. Government Defense Bonds. This brings the total investment in Government Bonds to \$10,000.

With participants from a five state area taking part in the motor boat races at Harveys Lake, spectators saw local boy Sherwood Wilson race across the finish line to win the D Hydro Class. Races were sponsored by Harveys Lake Boat Club and Gilbert's Landing Club of Scranton.

30 Years Ago - Aug. 27, 1964 FALL FAIR TO EXPAND ITS ATTRACTIONS

Mrs. Mary R. Dale, new librarian at the Back Mountain Memorial Library, attended her first library board meeting and reported her observations of the library since she took charge August 1. She stated the library is definitely well established, its potential for service much broader than I had anticipated and possibilities for growth are extensive.

A complete intra-squad game featuring all 72 Dallas High School football candidates will be the star attraction of "Meet the Team" night sponsored by the Dallas Area Letterman's Booster Club, Sept. 3.

Business and commercial displays at the Dallas Rotary Fall Fair which created so much interest last year will be greatly expanded this year. The Fall Fair and Fashion Show will be held on Lehman Horse Show grounds Sept. 18 and 19. The Fair now in its 2nd year will offer a great variety of events for young and old.

20 Years Ago - Aug. 29, 1974 YOUNG APPOINTED TO BOROUGH COUNCIL

Dallas Borough Council once again has a full complement of councilmen. Ken Young, a teacher, was unanimously approved by council at its meeting. At last month's meeting council chose William Carroll, a professional engineer. The two appointments were necessitated by the resignation of Robert W. Brown and Robert Parry.

Due to many complaints of vandalism and juveniles causing disturbances after the 10 p.m. curfew hour, Kingston Township Police are warning parents that all youngsters under age of 18 who are on township streets after 10 p.m. will be locked up and held in accordance with a curfew ordinance passed by supervisors last year.

As I was saying



Jack Hilsher

WHERE THE DOLLARS ARE...If President Clinton's budget cutters would accept a suggestion, I can point them to a sizeable savings cut by just doing nothing...except stop producing films. Over the years various governmental bureaus and agencies have produced over 100,000 films, all paid for by you, me and our unsuspecting neighbors.

TV GUIDE has commented "Government film-making, to put it simply, is a colossus. It costs hundreds of millions. Several years ago Leonard Maltin's "TV Movies & Video Guide" listed 19,000 titles. Read some and grit your teeth: "Hacksaws, Part III," "Fuel Pump Disassembly," "Mopping, the Bucket Method."

I have a title to add, but it ain't a training film: "Oh, What Fools We Taxpayers Be!"

JAZZ ON THE AIRWAVES - Those who miss Swing Street Jazz on WVIA should try to pick up

Bits and pieces

Temple University's Public Radio program "JAZZ FM" any week night from six on, and sometimes earlier in the day. Tune your FM receiver to one of these WRYY settings: 91.1 Mount Pocono, 94.5 Wilkes-Barre or 105.9 Scranton. 94.5 is probably your best bet, although the others come in fine on car radios.

A wide range of jazz is presented nightly and almost constantly, both classic jazz and modern mainstream. There is very little chatter, although you'll have to get used to them bragging about "Phildadelphia's Own" but that's a small price to pay for getting the Swing Street gap filled.

SEND NO MONEY NOW - "You will be billed in equal monthly installments." "Crafted in fine porcelain, crystal and 24-karat gold." "Perfect works of art." "Unique - available for the first time." "Complete." "Valuable heirlooms."

Ever wonder about those ads? Well they do read like crazy, and I never see one but what I think of the poor guy I knew who, with his wife, bought set after set over a period of years. They must have every single one advertised, complete with the "Handcrafted Hardwood Shelf!"

Well, the couple eventually came to Splittsville (as we used to say in the good old days) and when the property came to being

divided, she took the furniture and he took the heirloom collection.

He really thought he got the better deal, until he tried to peddle them in a series of fancy gift shops, and was laughed out the door of each one!

Moral of this story: "Caveat Emptor!" Free translation: "Youse buyers better watch out!"

BEYOND THE STARS - Might be a sci-fi title, but NOT! It is found on the cover of a recent book by David William Ross about the West, when it was truly the West, populated by Native Americans. That's all you really need to know, except for this sample of the kind of writing that, unfortunately, isn't fashionable anymore:

"Sometimes in winter the sky would break scarlet and blue at dawn with the air as clear as gin, but the wind rose sharp and steady, and the temperature would plummet down, ever downward, mocking a sun that could only light up the snow mantle to a brightness that stunned the eyes but brought no more heat than the blue-tinged moon that mounted in its turn in the sky. Sometimes the wind would briefly lower and a quietude that said the land was dead as far as every horizon troubled the mind, and it was hard to believe that life still hung on under the snow, waiting."

OK. Now you can take a breath.

Guest column

Better care of dying is important issue

By SISTER SIENA FINLEY, RSM Executive Director The Ethics Institute of Northeastern Pennsylvania

The controversy over Dr. Kevorkian's endorsement of physician assisted suicide continues. Arguments, pro and con, persist and intensify, each reflecting significant concerns of large segments of our society.

To begin with, the debate on death and dying issues is relatively new. In the past, people became ill and were treated with as much medical expertise as was available. They died when there was no longer means to treat or cure their illnesses.

The scenario is different today. Advances in technology have made it possible for individuals to be cured of diseases that previously might have caused their death. Often they are given a new lease on life and a quality of life that, given the nature of their illnesses, was not possible in the past. In many instances people are living longer and healthier lives than ever before.

But the very technology responsible for prolonging life and improving the quality of life is often used beyond benefit or usefulness. In fact, technology has been canonized: many health care providers and recipients are convinced that if treatment is available it must be used. Such a position has resulted in what is known as the "medical imperative." As a consequence continued treatment has not necessarily improved life: it has prolonged dying. In many cases people have received technology-sophisticated medical advancements which have proven to be burdensome and do nothing to improve a person's wellbeing.

Having access to the newest and the best in health care technology may indeed be attractive if one is ill. It may also blind and blur the ability of both providers and potential recipients to make decisions to use such advances thoughtfully and resourcefully.

The confidence invested in advances in medicine has become what some now call "the terror of limitlessness." Indeed, the controversy surrounding physician assisted suicide is related to technological advances in medicine as much, if not more, than in any other cause.

But there is a bigger issue at stake here. It is the problem of how we care for our dying. Many argue if we addressed the manner of caring for the dying in our country, there would be less need and fewer demands for physician assisted suicide. Overtreatment, uncontrolled use of treatment and or technology, and poor pain management for dying patients are major factors supporting the need for physician assisted suicide.

For example, the ability to keep people alive with sophisticated technology does not mean everything must or should be done to keep them alive. The availability of new treatments does not mean treatment should never be withheld or withdrawn. In many instances, patients would be relieved if their families and physicians assured them that treatment, especially artificial life support systems would not be used when they were no longer beneficial, allowing the patients to die. If concerns about unnecessary interventions, about a drawn out dying process, about overtreatment beyond what is reasonable were nullified, the demand for active euthanasia would diminish considerably.

One of the best ways to assure patients that they will not be overtreated and their dying prolonged is to create an Advanced Directive or Living Will. Competent persons who execute an Advance Directive state their decisions about medical treatment which they want or do not want. Families and physicians must then honor the directives. Patients must be assured that their wishes will be respected, especially if they lose the capability to make decisions for themselves.

Another major concern is the fear of suffering beyond what is tolerable and without proper pain medication and management. Individuals who have seen loved ones in such circumstances may regard physician assisted suicide as an opportunity to escape an agonizing death. Pain management must receive serious study and attention, especially since a 1986 report by the World Health Organization noted that 50 to 80 percent of patients failed to receive appropriate pain treatment.

The use of pain medication disturbs health providers for a variety of serious and warranted reasons. However, providing pain medication to relieve suffering is particularly proper when it is in the best interest of the patient. Acting in the best interest of the patient requires sensitivity on the part of providers, so that the desires of the patient will have priority over other fears, no matter how justified these fears appear.

If the arguments for physician assisted suicide were countered by more sensitive and compassionate care of the dying, honoring the wishes of patients, and appropriate use of pain medication, such arguments would diminish.

However, compassionate care involves all of society, not just health care providers. We are all members of our society and have responsibilities to one another. It must become a priority for all of us to assure the ill, the fragile, the infirm, the feeble, the dying that we care for them and not see them as a burden, difficult as that final care-giving may be.

The decision of physician assisted suicide is, then, a question for all of us. Before we agree to support Dr. Kevorkian, I suggest that we examine how we care for the dying, that we assess whether the frail and weak member of our society can count on the rest of us, and that we consider appropriate use of technology. Unless and until we address these questions, euthanasia will win, like it or not.

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