Education budget cannot be ‘held harmless’

By John Richard Shrock

“A billion here. A billion there. Pretty soon, you’re talking real money.” This quote by the famous Illinois Senator Everett Dirksen applies to today’s Kansas budget.

Our tax shortfall has grown into “real money.” Since K-12 school funding consumes over half of every state tax dollar and tertiary education is a significant part of the remainder, it is no longer possible for education to be “held harmless” from budget cuts.

There are two actions that could save substantial money, one at K-12 and another at colleges.

K-12 school consolidation has long been political suicide. Now, only large scale school consolidation can save substantial money.

The time has come to implement some variation of the 40 Regional School District proposal that would draw down our 297 Unified School Districts into 40, without any child riding the bus longer than one hour. In 1945, Kansas had 8,000 little school districts, virtually every attendance center was its own school board. By 1960, this dropped to 2,600.

The Kansas legislature set up our unified school district system that gave us 303 USDs in 1963. In the last three years, rural population declines have made additional consolidations inevitable, and more will soon occur but in an unplanned haphazard fashion.

These shrinking schools have growing per-student costs due to duplicate administrations and school boards, and from undersized classes. Just as rural Kansas now has health clinics that hub around a few hospitals, most communities would keep their elementary schools and send secondary students on to regional high schools.

The initial construction costs for the shift in students might be eligible for the Obama plan infrastructure funding, pending the final fine print on that future legislation. Kansas’s college and university systems also need to trim expenditures. The percent of Kansas high school graduates who entered college in the mid-1980s was just over 40 percent, and perhaps three out of four were college material.

Today, over 70 percent of graduates go to tertiary institutions, but the number who are college material still remains low. Thus, Kansas colleges and universities are spending substantial money on remedial courses.

With funding now being enrollment-driven, there is pressure on universities to retain students for credit hour production, regardless of student performance. Admissions criteria are low, and only apply to the six regents schools.

The community colleges are a major end-run. Also driven by enrollment at all costs, some schools and outreach courses are hiring any warm body to give easy A’s.

Time has come for Kansas college admissions standards to be raised dramatically. Students with an ACT of 14 or 15 have no chance of graduating from a bona fide bachelors program.

There are some potentially good students who score low because they come from K-12 schools without resources or good teachers. But Kansas is in hard times and can no longer afford to take in 20 students with low ACTs, 19 of whom will never succeed, in order to save the one who will.

Any raise of minimum ACT must include community colleges as well. That means the Kansas Board of Regents will have to do more than “coordinate” community colleges and technical schools.

KU is already working toward raising their minimum ACT by 2014. But that is way too late to address this budget shortfall.

The ACT score for college enrollment could be raised without significantly reducing the number of students who get bachelor degrees. That would save substantial money in university salaries, which is where 80 percent of the academic operating budget is located.

Neither of these actions will be popular, but this is the time in history where it could and should be done.

— John Richard Schrock
trains biology teachers and
lives in Emporia
Bonser Graduates From LeaderShape Institute

FOR THE CLARIÓN

LAWRENCE — Sixty-two University of Kansas students have graduated from the 2009 LeaderShape Institute, sponsored and coordinated annually by the Student Involvement and Leadership Center.

Shay Bonser, former Maize High School graduate, was among the LeaderShape graduates.

The six-day intensive program to develop leadership abilities was held Jan. 8-13 at the Tall Oaks Conference Center near Linwood.

“This was the 12th anniversary of LeaderShape, which means we have just over 700 Jayhawks who have graduated through KU LeaderShape and 60 colleagues who have volunteered to be cluster facilitators,” said Rueben Perez, director of the Student Involvement and Leadership Center and one of the lead facilitators for the institute.

KU has sponsored the LeaderShape Institute since 1998.

During training, KU students work in groups to create ideas for projects, then refine goals, plans and implementation strategies to accomplish those ideas within their own organization, living group, community or workplace. They learn about leadership styles and work through simulations of situations they could face.

Tanya Williams, graduate assistant at the Residence Life Resource Center at University of Massachusetts-Amherst, was the lead facilitator for this year’s institute. Cluster facilitators from KU were Colleen Drazen, assistant director for Greek life and leadership; Annie McKay, assistant director of the Emily Taylor Women’s Resource Center; Matt Lehrman, past director of the Hillel Center and a master’s of business administration student; Mike Dickey, assistant director of the Ambler Student Recreation Fitness Center; and Heidi Simon, associate director of the Office of Admissions and Scholarships.

Two recent LeaderShape graduates were student onsite coordinators: Maggie Gremminger, a senior from Shawnee who participated in LeaderShape in 2008; and Nathan Mac, a senior from Lawrence who participated in the institute in 2007. Gremminger, the daughter of Robert Gremminger, is majoring in communication studies and a graduate of Mill Valley High School in Shawnee. Mack, who is majoring in linguistics and Russian, is the son of John and Karen Mack and a graduate of St. Sophia Academy in Lawrence.

For more information about LeaderShape, visit the Student Involvement and Leadership Center’s Web site.

This year’s LeaderShape Institute graduates are listed below by home county, state or country.

Sponsors for LeaderShape are Student Union Activities, the Office of the Vice Provost for Student Success, the Raymond F. Nichols League of Former Student Leaders, Coca-Cola, KU Hillel, Recreation Services, the Music Therapy Program and Union Programs.
KU announces students named to fall 2008 honor roll

Local and area students making the University of Kansas's fall 2008 honor roll are:

Katelyn N. Deckert, Ulysses; Rebecca Haddican, Sataunta; Hope E. Lucas, Sublette; Alison Ashley Edwards, Fowler; Karen Mae Kobs, Meade; Tai B. Houtz, Elkhart; Brandi Laura Broaddus, Hugoton; Chelsie Dawn Harper, Hugoton; Jurrell Jesse Medina, Hugoton; Hongthanh Le Do, Liberal; Elsa M. Fraire, Liberal; Alexis C. Kruse, Liberal; Cambrey Bao-Phuong Nguyen, Suong T. Nguyen, Liberal; and Kendal Ryan Reed, Liberal.
MERRIAM | Grad student dies in collision

A 23-year-old graduate student at the University of Kansas was struck and killed by a suspected drunken driver early Saturday along Shawnee Mission Parkway.

Merriam police said the victim, who was from France, was pushing a disabled vehicle on the roadway over Interstate 35 around 3 a.m. when a Dodge Dakota truck came up from behind and struck the car and the man. He was declared dead at the scene.

A second man inside the disabled car was taken to a hospital for treatment of minor injuries.

Johnson County prosecutors on Saturday charged Steven Kyle Cummins, 25, of Shawnee, with a felony count of involuntary manslaughter while driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs. His bond was set at $250,000.

The victim's name was being withheld because his family had not yet been notified.

| Rick Alm, ralm@kcstar.com |
TUITION PROPOSAL: The University of Kansas wants to give a tuition break to the children and grandchildren of out-of-state alumni.

Its officials are asking the Legislature for help.

They’re backing a bill to give the state Board of Regents more flexibility in setting tuition.

The regents could then permit universities to give groups of out-of-state students the lower tuition rates reserved for Kansans.

The House Higher Education Committee had a hearing Tuesday on the bill but took no action.

Provost Richard Lariviere (La-RIH'-vee-ehr) said the University of Kansas wants to adopt a “legacy” plan to help attract students from families of graduates living outside Kansas.

Kansas State University’s student body president also spoke in favor of the measure.

UNDER THE DOME:
Wednesday was the 24th day of the Legislature’s annual session, out of 90 scheduled. ... The House adopted, 124-0, a resolution congratulating Greeley County and the city of Tribune for consolidating their governments at the beginning of the year.