The Road to Acme Looniversity
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With a “click,” the television set goes on. You hear that familiar music and see the Warner Brothers logo indicating it’s time for Looney Toons. We’ve all watched them, including the many episodes of Wile E. Coyote and his never-ending quest to catch the Road Runner. Secretly, we’ve all wanted Wile E. to succeed, although long before the end of every episode we know that his hard work will only be rewarded by his being dropped from a cliff, smashed by a falling rock, and run over by a truck. As if that’s not bad enough, Wile E.’s defeat is made more miserable by the Road Runner driving over him with his tongue stuck out and a shrill “Beep! Beep!” One thing is clear: Wile E. has a problem, and it is time for him to solve it.

One of the easiest ways to get rid of the bird would be for Wile E. to hire an assassin. This way, he could rest easily knowing a professional was at work. Wile E. could use the money usually spent on Acme products to cover the assassin’s fee. This would also save additional money because Wile E. would no longer have to buy Acme equipment or pay all of those expensive hospital bills that result when the Acme equipment fails. A professional would be a quick, easy, and cost-effective solution. The major drawback is that Wile E. would miss the satisfaction of doing the job himself. After so many years of working so hard to catch the Road Runner, he might want to be part of the event.

A better way for Wile E. to kill the Road Runner and still participate might be to get some help from his friends. Wile E. could call on Elmer Fudd, Yosemite Sam, Sylvester the Cat, and Taz, the Tasmanian Devil. By constructing a plan in which he and his friends combine their natural talents, Wile E. would have the satisfaction of being part of the bird’s demise. Taz, with speed equal to the Road Runner’s, could chase the bird into a trap designed by Yosemite

Sam: a small mound of birdseed in the Road Runner’s path. When the bird stops to eat, a cage would drop. Then Sylvester’s natural bird-catching instincts could be of use in disabling the bird to prevent escape, perhaps by breaking its legs. After that, Elmer could use his extraordinary hunting skills to finish him off. The only flaw in this plan might be that his friends don’t have much of a record of success: Elmer, Sam, and Taz have never caught Bugs Bunny; Sylvester has never caught Tweety; and you know the results of all Wile E.’s plans. The chances would thus seem infinitesimal at best that even together they might catch the Road Runner.

Wile E.’s major problem in his pursuit of the Road Runner never seems to be the plan itself, but the products he uses to carry out the plan. None of the equipment he buys from Acme ever works correctly. It may work fine in a test run, but when the Road Runner actually falls into the trap, everything goes crazy or fails completely. In one recurring episode, Wile E. buys a rocket and a pair of roller skates. His plan is to strap the rocket to his back and the skates to his feet, and thus overtake his speedy prey. The test run is fine. Then the bird runs by, and Wile E. starts the rocket, which immediately runs out of fuel, blows up, or does not go off. If Wile E. used a company other than Acme, he might avoid the injuries he suffers from faulty Acme equipment. Of course, one obstacle to this plan is the cost of doing business with a new company. Since Wile E. probably receives a sizable discount from Acme because of his preferred-customer status, he perhaps would not get the same treatment from a new company, at least for a while. On his cartoon-character salary, Wile E. may not be able to afford higher prices.

Given the range of possibilities for catching the Road Runner, the best solution to the problem might be for Wile E. to use his superior intellect. Wile E. could undoubtedly convince the Road Runner that a dramatic death scene on the show might win him an Emmy. Since roadrunners are known for their vanity, this Road Runner would seem likely to leap at the prospect of winning fame and fortune for his fine acting skills. With such a prestigious award, the Road Runner could do what every actor dreams of doing: direct. He would win not only fame and fortune, but the respect of his hero, Big Bird.

If and when Wile E. catches the Road Runner, the cartoon, of course, would end. Although this might at first seem tragic, the consequences are really not tragic at all. Wile E. would have more time to pursue his movie career and perhaps even teach at Acme Looniversity.
He would have more time to devote to his family, friends, and fans. And he could finally stop paying a therapist since his psychological issues would be resolved. Wile E. would gain self-confidence and no longer doubt his ability as he did when the birdbrain outsmarted him. He would finally recognize his own genius and realize his lifelong dream of opening a theme restaurant.

After years and years of torment and humiliation, it is time for Wile E. Coyote to catch the Road Runner. Although it is feasible for Wile E. to pay an assassin to kill the bird, to enlist his friends for help, or to stop using Acme products, the best solution is for Wile E. to use the immeasurable power of his brain to trick the imbecile bird. Regardless of the method Wile E. chooses, one thing is clear: the bird must die!

Waller, Texas, is a small town far from all other forms of civilization. There is no movie theater, no bowling alley, and certainly no mall. This place doesn’t even have a Wal-Mart. Residents of Waller have all heard the saying at least once: “There are only two things for kids to do in Waller, and one of them is drinkin’.” This may seem humorous at first, but unfortunately, there is some truth to it.

Teenage pregnancy is one of the biggest problems in Waller. I graduated from high school with 155 other students. On our graduation day, twelve of them were already mothers—two of whom were expecting a second child—and five were expecting their first. Seventeen students in all were pregnant while in high school, and those are just the ones that stayed long enough to graduate! These figures seem astronomical for such a small community, and they represent a significant problem. One result is the necessity for an on-campus day-care center at the high school, which was established in 1992 and, unfortunately, has been growing ever since.

The Waller school system has been trying to combat the dilemma for years. I cannot say how long the teen pregnancy problem has existed in Waller nor how long the school system has been struggling with it, but I do know that the situation has been like this ever since I started junior high school more than six years ago. One of the strategies that educators have used to help curb the pregnancy rate has been to bring in speakers to lecture students on the importance of abstinence as well as safer sex, including discussion of topics ranging from pregnancy to HIV.

Another strategy has been providing students with sex-education courses. I can report that I was privileged to be a part of the “guinea pig” class the school administration chose to use for the sex-education experiment. Let me say, firsthand, that some of the videos
shown in sex-education classes were horrifying. People with AIDS spoke about their experiences and of the pain they were suffering. Thirteen-year-old mothers shared their difficulties raising children at such a young age. Young women who had chosen abortion told of the psychological effects they experienced after terminating a pregnancy. Sex-education classes in the Waller public schools have been in full swing for four years, yet the number of unplanned pregnancies among teenagers is still high.

I suppose the thinking behind this strategy was to scare students into abstinence by bringing to life the straight talk of speakers who had experienced the consequences of irresponsible sex. Unfortunately, fear does not always work on teenagers who truly believe they are invincible. As a result, it seems a different approach is necessary.

A primary cause of teen pregnancy is the fact that many parents do not know how to talk to their children about sex and sexual behavior. If parents today were given “lessons” on how to handle the inevitable situation that every parent must sooner or later face, they would be better prepared when the time comes. Many parents are unsure about when they should talk with their children about sex. I propose that the school district’s next target in the attempt to educate teenagers about sex be the parents. Literature directed to parents regarding teen sex could be sent by mail to parents to heighten their awareness of the issues. Lectures, workshops, and classes could be offered to parents on how to approach the subject of safe and responsible sex.

Trained professionals from the community, including those hired to speak to the students, could also teach the parents. More economically, there are other resources within the community, such as ministers from local churches, who could offer guidance to parents on the ways to speak to children about intimate subjects. Mature high school mothers have said that they would be willing to talk to parents about what they felt was missing from the parental guidance they received, guidance that might have changed the course of their lives.

The Waller community must also think realistically about the problem if any solution is going to work. I know from past experiences with Waller High School that you can talk all you want, but talk is often not translated into action. For this reason, it is important that a committee be formed as soon as possible. Such a committee could consist of students, teachers, administrators, and concerned parents. The committee would be in charge of developing a program and recruiting speakers. Most importantly, the committee must be dedicated to solving what has proven to be a complex and difficult problem. Nothing will get done with half-hearted volunteers.

Not all parents, of course, are going to take the time to commit to this sort of action. If concerned people take the steps necessary to get parents involved, however, maybe the community will wake up to see the depth of this pressing problem. The question of whether the Waller school system should establish a clinic that distributes contraceptives, for instance, as other schools around the country have already done, is a difficult one that needs to be discussed. Waller is a small country town that would perhaps be uncomfortable with such a big jump that places responsibility for a solution almost entirely in the hands of students. The solution of getting parents involved by offering them resources, support, and education may be a more attractive and reasonable approach. To be frank, strategies that have focused directly on students have failed.

Since election for new school board members is approaching, I would urge the tax-paying citizens of Waller County to attend the next school-board meeting and question board members about the issue of teenage pregnancy and its prevention. After all, residents of Waller all know that unplanned pregnancy is a major problem, and it’s only getting worse.