

November 2016

When I think of my favorite holidays, Thanksgiving has always been at the very top. I'm not sure if it is the meal or the time away from school. Maybe the chance to eat the meal, followed by football or even an opportunity to eat leftovers later that day.

I think back to my childhood about what set Thanksgiving apart from other holidays in our family. It was truly a time for family and was never complicated by gifts or the pressure that can come with Christmas on so many levels. Today, I use it as a time to reflect on what I'm thankful for as well as an opportunity to re-connect with family over a meal. I worry about the students who will go without a Thanksgiving feast. Fortunately, there are many organizations in our community that work each year to provide an option for families who cannot afford such a meal.

I've followed government and politics all of my life. The favorite subject I taught while I was in the classroom was AP Government because human nature is such a large part of politics. That being said, one of the things I'm most thankful for this year is the end to the most recent election cycle. I can't remember a more contentious time at the national or statewide level. Both presidential candidates were, at best, overpoweringly polarizing, during the campaign. Hopefully, the bitterness that existed can diminish to provide a peaceful transfer of power that makes our country a model for the world.

Another thing that I'm thankful for is the outstanding staff of GPS. Recently, Dusty Throckmorton, an Assistant Principal at the High School was named Assistant Principal of the Year in Oklahoma by a committee of his peers. In reviewing the announcement of our good news about Mr. Throckmorton, I noticed an old friend from another school district among the finalists. I sent him a quick congratulatory email acknowledging his honor of being a finalist. His reply was full of praise for the quality of staff we have in our school district. As I thought of his kind words, it reminded me that often we don't see our own treasures until they are recognized by others. We have many individuals in our district that have received statewide honors from their peers. Assistant Superintendent Dennis Schulz has been honored for his work in school finance and is considered an authority among his peers. Our High School Principal, Chris LeGrande is a former finalist for Oklahoma Teacher of the Year and recently served as the leader of all Secondary Principals in the state. He is a highly sought speaker to aspiring and first-year principals regarding the work we are doing in Guthrie to improve instruction and learning. Just this last summer, two teachers from our High School, Stacie Andrews and Lori Lucas, were selected to participate with 41 other teachers from across the state to develop digital learning options for the new state learning standards. It is amazing how we often miss the treasures right under our eyes.

Having an outstanding staff doesn't happen by accident, it must be intentional. Attracting tomorrow's teachers is quickly becoming much more challenging as the perception of how they are valued continues to drop. Retaining the outstanding educators and restoring the perceived value of public education in our state is now the responsibility of our governor and state legislators. I would say to them something our teachers have heard me say before, "Our students are watching you. What will they see?"

Happy Thanksgiving!!