

April 2018

I am a person who enjoys a routine. Needless to say, the last three weeks have been anything but routine for a parent, school employee, legislator or just someone driving around Guthrie at 7:45 a.m. on a weekday. On April 2nd the Oklahoma Education Association called for a statewide work stoppage of their membership. This action had not happened since 1990. I was a senior at Oklahoma State and student teaching at Stillwater Junior High School during that historic event. The 1990 work stoppage lasted 4 days and brought some of the largest reforms to education in state history as well as a teacher pay raise. Many of those reforms have been dismantled over the last ten years as our state has failed to increase education funding proportionally with our growing student population. This has led to a teacher shortage as well as greater class sizes.

The past three weeks we have seen the first tax increase levied by our state legislature in 28 years. It will fund the largest teacher pay raise in state history. Thankfully, a modest pay raise for the backbone of Guthrie Public Schools, our support staff has also been allocated. For the first time in two years, we will have an allocation of funds dedicated to textbooks. This was a cut all school districts took. GPS still purchased textbooks but that money came at the expense of other necessities we chose to do without.

During the work stoppage, many of our staff as well as parents and retired educators went to the capitol to advocate for more funding pushed to the classroom. Their tireless work was amazingly successful. Our projections are that GPS will have over \$300,000 additional dollars after the salary increases. Those dollars are a wonderful start to restoring the funding that has been lost over the last ten years.

Many families were affected during our time away from the schoolhouse. The work of our Child Nutrition staff as well as the cooperation of the Guthrie Ministerial Alliance was simply amazing. Some of our staff volunteered to provide meals for families we knew had a definite need through phone calls or deliveries. This was truly a "coming together" of people to help in our community.

During the two weeks when we were closed, I received many communications from parents and community members that were obviously fueled by the emotions of their routines being disrupted. The negative comments were countered by many positive remarks as well. Some community members even chose to join our teachers in advocacy for education. Teachers sacrificed in the short term to seek a long term commitment for our students. Thankfully, due to the arrangement of our school calendar, we will not have to make any adjustments to days or hours for our students. It is important for the community to be aware that our teachers will be required to make up each day they were out. As a group, that was a sacrifice they chose to make for our students.

Regardless of your feelings about the methods used to effect change over the last three weeks, it has been an amazing accomplishment that has begun to erase the neglect from the past ten years. It is only a start and the advocacy for education in Oklahoma must continue. Complacency has led us to this point and we owe our children so much more than what we have provided. I welcome our students and staff back on Monday so we can finish strong for 2018. Let's find our routine again.