

May 2017

Last Sunday morning, while the kids were getting ready for church I was reading yet another dismal forecast for revenue to education in our state. It detailed lower than planned tax collections for this fiscal year and the effects to core services in our state. I must admit, I've gotten fairly proficient at tuning out our two children when I reach the level of focus I had on Sunday morning, especially with the topic of education funding. I often think about how our current financial picture will affect the 3500 students of Guthrie Public Schools. What will this do to class sizes or what programs will we be forced to eliminate in order to live within our means in this "new normal." But this day was different as I kept hearing a song coming from across the house. It seems my daughter was sharing her best rendition of "It's a Grand Ole Flag" for the world to hear. I listened while wondering where she learned the song. Later, I asked her that very question and she proudly said, "At school." I immediately walked away from the negative report and went to church feeling proud of our schools and what they are accomplishing.

Too often, the focus turns to the negative. Locally, I've watched social media this last week criticize the decision of a principal to place students in a safe place as bad weather approached. The criticism was an embellished statement about the amount of water in the basement of Central Elementary due to the heavy rains we were experiencing. I confirmed the circumstances and inaccuracies found on social media by visiting with the principal. Later that evening my own daughter, who was in the basement as well, confirmed the water was not knee deep but rather 1-2 inches in one area. Also, a visitor to our Spring High School Band Concert posted a very scathing account of the condition of the women's restroom as the concert began. Since I was in attendance at the event and was being updated about the post during the concert, I looked in the closest bathrooms and they were both very clean. Upon further investigation, this concert goer went to the bathroom that is farthest from the area of the concert. Our diminished custodial staff had cleaned the other bathrooms first because of the concert and had not yet cleaned the one described in the post. In each case, people voiced their opinions to the world without even contacting the school. Painting a negative picture without all of the facts does nothing to help any situation and is truly unfair to our staff who are accomplishing more with less.

Guthrie Public Schools is not perfect and we are continually striving to improve. Often this goal is hampered by a continual reduction of funding that has occurred in our state. Despite the ever increasing challenges, we have made some remarkable accomplishments this year. The beginning of centralized elementary enrollment proved to be very appreciated by our parents. Our Junior High School was removed from "FOCUS" status by achieving two consecutive years of improved achievement. The Guthrie Police Department secured a grant to fund an additional School Resource Officer which will improve the safety and security of our schools. Central Elementary has received some much needed improvements to both the interior and exterior which has greatly improved the learning environment for the students. A contractor for Charter Oak Elementary has been selected and the approved bid was under budget. The land for Charter Oak Elementary is being cleared and we hope to have an official ground breaking ceremony very soon. This will mark the first school building our district has built in over 27 years.

Since my last column, our community lost two amazing supporters of education who were definitely taken too soon. Anita Everett-Acker was a key person for Mercy Logan County but also a proud GHS alum who loved her community. She was very quick to volunteer her time and services for our Chamber of Commerce. Also, Dr. Dennis Clark, the retired pastor of First Christian Church, was a very strong advocate for our school district. During the spring of 2015, I approached the recently retired pastor to see if he would be willing to moderate two public forums in advance of our bond election. Knowing the perilous history of bond issue elections for our district, Dennis said, "Sure I'll do it. People might not yell at a pastor but probably would yell at the superintendent." Guthrie definitely has two remarkable angels looking down on us today.

Finally, I want to say congratulations to the Guthrie High School class of 2017. Finishing my fifth year as superintendent, I've watched these children grow into young adults. They are very much like Guthrie Public Schools; they aren't perfect but they continue to strive for improvement. They will soon get their license to learn (diploma). Wherever they go after graduation, they will always carry the spirit that comes from this community. As you can probably tell, I'm very proud of them and also the job that we are doing in this district.

And once again, I can almost hear Alice Cooper in the background. "School's out for summer!"