

I have a love-hate relationship with this time of the year. The greatest day of the year for me has always been the day of graduation. The events leading up to this day only build on the excitement. For the high school and district administration, our senior sponsors and maintenance staff, it is a draining marathon but a labor of love to honor the graduating class. It also becomes a round the clock weather watch to predict possibilities for Friday evening.

On Tuesday, we had the Academic Awards Celebration. At this event, we recognize those who have achieved the greatest academic honors from the Senior class and present many scholarships to our graduates. That evening is where I begin to watch the weather even closer aiming toward the Friday forecast.

Wednesday brought us to the Baccalaureate Service where the faith leaders of our community come together to bring a message of faith. This is held at a local church where all graduates and their families are invited to attend. This year, pastors from Community Church, First Presbyterian, Noble Avenue Baptist and First Christian Churches officiated and provided inspirational messages. After leaving this event, I check the weather as the forecast is closer to the big day and hopefully more accurate.

Friday, began with a morning practice on the big day. I always attend this event. It is a laid back affair where the students are excited because they know the sudden freedom of having an afternoon off following the walk-through allows them a break to enjoy with classmates before their huge event that evening. I enjoy the relaxed time where I can interact with them and spend some quality time.

The evening begins with a quick glance to the west for possible building storms as well as a radar look because having an outdoor graduation with the possibility of weather events is an ongoing evaluation. Why is this so critical? If we cannot have the graduation on Friday night due to stormy weather it will move to Saturday afternoon at the stadium. With many traveling to attend, there is pressure to complete this ceremony in a small window of time. Jelsma Stadium seats 4,000 for a graduation configuration. In the event that inclement weather persists, the event is then moved indoors into the GHS Gymnasium which only has 1,200 seats. Limiting Seniors to only 3 or 4 tickets is never a popular decision. This year we were blessed with the best possible weather for May in Oklahoma and those difficult decisions were avoided.

My role at graduation is delivering a simple traditional two sentence acceptance of the class and inviting them forward to accept their diplomas. What happens next is the absolute best part of the week. I have the honor and privilege of shaking the hands of each graduate immediately following their name being announced and receiving their diploma cover. I look into their eyes

offering a firm handshake and a simple congratulations. Their responses are what identifies the significance of the event. This year, I heard several different responses. One told me he was afraid he was about to pass out while another was afraid he would mess up a long-standing Guthrie tradition of delivering a gift to the High School Principal. Several said “congratulations” to me and I assume that speaks to being caught in a new situation and not knowing the proper response to share. I suppose it could also mean congratulations to me for our staff surviving their time in school (insert laughing emoji). For many, it is one of the most monumental moments in their life up to this point. For others, the significance will become more apparent in the coming days.

Sometimes it seems as if my work is so far from their lives that I could easily think it doesn’t matter. A moment following the Awards Assembly on Tuesday reminded me of how important the work of all staff members at GPS is in the lives of our students. I was walking out of the Gymnasium when I heard someone calling my name. I looked behind to see a familiar face chasing me down. It was Matthew Mahalik, our state qualifying wrestler, Senior Class President and band member who is headed to Harvard due to his academic accomplishments (yes, that Harvard). He wanted to shake my hand and thank me for what I had done to get him to this point. I was about as shocked as those students whose hands I shake on graduation night. I quickly assured him that he had done the work and I was beyond proud of him. It always makes me sad because time doesn’t stand still and graduation week is an annual reminder. The class of 2025 was in kindergarten when we moved to Guthrie! They are now headed out into the world! Walking to the car on Tuesday night was yet another reminder of why graduation is the favorite event of my job.

Congratulations Class of 2025! Go do great things! And once again, I can almost hear Alice Cooper singing “School’s Out For Summer”!