

June 2013

I've been asked by many members of the community "How did the first year go?" That is such a tough question because so many things have happened in education in this state as well as on a national scale. One of the most challenging aspects of being a school superintendent is keeping everyone happy...arguably an impossible task in any community. While public opinion cannot be relied upon for every decision, it should help guide the overall direction of the district. Finding common ground on opinions and seeking acceptance from those who had to compromise their vision are part of the job. I'll admit this is also one of the more challenging aspects of the job.

When I think back to the three most significant events of the year that I have seen to have far reaching effects in our mission for Guthrie Public Schools, none of them actually occurred in our district. However, all three generated significant interest in our community. The common thread among the three is student safety and public reaction.

The first event occurred on September 26th as a Junior High student in Stillwater shot himself in front of his classmates. Following this event, schools were encouraged to upgrade our counseling services. The next event was the December shooting in Newtown, CT, where students and teachers were tragically gunned down in a school building that had a brand new "state of the art" security system. Following this event, schools were encouraged to upgrade their security systems. The final event that frames our events of 2012-13 is of course the horrific events that Moore Public Schools endured when their community was devastated by the recent tornadoes. I watched from my office, as I feared the worst for that community on May 20th. Since then, we have heard the cry of storm shelters for each school site from both the national media and our state legislature.

Each of these events has caused us to examine what we do and how we do it in Guthrie. Our counselors have attended additional training on how to assist other students with the death of a classmate (sadly, this training has already been put into practice in Guthrie). We are currently installing a new locking mechanism for our buildings, which will provide greater security for our students against intruders. Finally, in the process of designing new buildings, I'm confident student safety against intruders or severe weather will be considered.

Every time a parent sends their child to school, they take a "leap of faith" that we will care for them as if they were our own. They want a caring environment that can recognize if a student is in distress and provide them the support necessary to cope without making tragic decisions. They want an environment that is impenetrable by the most deranged gunman with more firepower than our police have. Finally, they want a school that will look an EF5 tornado in the face and laugh as it protects our children.

When I think of how any of this is possible in Guthrie or anywhere for that matter, the difference can be found in the teachers and staff. I think of the teachers at Stillwater that acted quickly to evacuate that school. I think of the Newtown teachers that shielded their students from the gunmen and paid the ultimate price and finally I think of the teachers in Moore that shielded their students with their bodies as that tornado went over their school.

Just think about it...you get all of this for the mere cost of your taxes. I'd say that is a pretty good bargain. So what kind of a year was it??? I'd say it was a great year and I've never been prouder to be an educator!

Finally, if you have a child, grandchild or great grandchild, I would encourage you to support the Guthrie Public Library and their summer reading program. We have worked with the Library to integrate our curriculum with the offerings from the library. This greatly reduces the "summer slide" and allows our students to start where they left off from the last school year.