

Chalkboard

By

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In late November, the Arkansas Supreme Court reminded us that the Arkansas Constitution grants the exclusive responsibility for ensuring that each child in the state receives an adequate and equitable education.

Restated, education is not a constitution-mandated function of the local school district or of the home, it is a function of the State Of Arkansas.

So stated, (pun intended) today's *Chalk Board* will offer some ideas, a few of which may be plausible, that could be implemented to aid the State in assuaging its detractors. A few of these I have offered before; if you have already read some particular idea, then skip on to the next. It is guaranteed to be compelling reading until you get mad.

Thought 1: Eliminate the option for Arkansas residents between the ages of 5 and 21 to attend home schools, private schools, parochial and/or religion-affiliated schools or make all such schools an agent of the state for the purpose of education only and thereby eligible to receive state funding or, in deference to separation-of-church-and-state purists, give every child a voucher and let the parent pick the learning entity of his or her choice.

Thought 2: All certified educators shall become employees of the state, shall be hired at that level, shall be assigned from that level, and shall be rehired or fired at that level.

Thought 3: Adopt a statewide salary schedule for teachers, administrators, and classified employees. Choose the highest existing salary schedule in the state as the model. All teachers now have the same maximum class sizes regardless of the number of total students in the district. The same expectations are now required by the state regarding the academic performance of the respective teacher's students. If education is a state function, why should a teacher's compensation vary according to where he or she lives?

Thought 4: Consolidate school districts by county. Use existing school district boundaries for "zones" to select one representative per existing district to serve on the new Consolidated County School Board. This board will oversee, for the State, the schools within the county. Elementary and middle schools will remain in their current status at their present location unless the Consolidated County School Board deems

otherwise. Number and location of high schools will be determined by the State on recommendation by the county board.

Thought 5: Allow all, or combinations of high schools, in the county to “co-op” together to offer an extended curriculum that includes both trades and arts. In conjunction, revise A.C.A. 6-18-206 to make Public School Choice mandatory for all state school districts. Allow the parent to send his or her child to whichever public school district he or she chooses. If the parent chooses a school, other than their “neighborhood” school, the parents shall be responsible for transportation.

Thought 6: The State shall assume responsibility for all existing bonded debt of the new County School Districts. A millage rate sufficient to make the bonded debt payment shall be levied against the real property within the county school district. Revenue from this millage may only be used for the intended purpose in county school district where it is levied and will be changed each year to reflect lower payments or higher assessments thus additional revenue.

Whenever the bonded debt that currently exists is paid off, the millage then cannot be renewed at the county level. (A constitutional amendment will be required to implement this thought and the next two. Note that this millage and the one described next in Thought 7 are to replace currently existing local mills.)

Thought 7: A 25-mill tax will be imposed on real, personal, and utility holdings within each county. All monies garnered at the county level will be forwarded to the state where it will be redistributed on an equal basis per ADM (per student) to the county school districts. Raising this millage rate will require a majority vote in a statewide election.

Thought 8: An initial 1-mill tax will be imposed on real, personal, and utility holdings within each county. All monies garnered at the county level will be forwarded to the state where it will be maintained in an escrow fund to support new school facilities within the state. This millage rate will be set by the General Assembly at each session based on the amount of revenue projected to fund new school house construction within the state. County boards will request funding for new facilities to the State Board of Education.

Thought 9: Repeal Amendment 59 to the State Constitution regarding rollback of millage rate based on increased assessments.

Thought 10- Revise the “Arkansas Standards For Accreditation’s” K-4 curriculum requirements. Separate out K-2 to focus only on literacy and math with regard to academic expectations. Work off the assumption that if

a child leaves the second grade reading on grade level and proficient in math for that level, then the all other content area skills can be taught in a later grade.

Thought 11: Eliminate all student extracurricular activities from within the academic school day. (All sports programs or others will occur before or after school.) Reassign coaches an academic class that period(s).

Thought 12- Base the renewal of all certified contracts, whether teacher, counselor, librarian, principal, curriculum coordinator, superintendent, or so forth, on the students' academic performance in the classroom. Implementing this thought requires three mandates. They are thoughts two and three and a reworking of the "Fair Teacher Dismissal Act." (A.C.A. 6-17-1501 to 1510).

Are you still reading? I hope so and I hope that none of my musings have offended you. Understand that I am not necessarily promoting any of these. For example, consolidating present school districts into county school districts, as described in Thought 4, might well cost me my present job. But also understand that as preposterous as some of my thoughts might have seemed to you, none are beyond the realm of possibility.

Changing education in Arkansas may mean the sacrificing of some sacred cows. Absurd as some of the above thoughts may seem to be, no thought should be struck down just because it challenges someone's territory, in either the figurative or literal sense.

Whether or not any of the above ideas are viable, if the court mandate is to change education for all students in the state for the better, maybe educators and legislators all can avoid becoming mired down in political posturing as some particular power base seeks to retain status quo. It is good to remember the real constituents are the children of the state.

Remember, if everything always stayed the same; nothing would ever change. What is the recent cliché? Insanity is continuing to do the same thing while expecting something different to happen.