

Chalkboard

By

Dr. Randy C. Barrett, Superintendent
Gentry Public Schools

(Today's Chalkboard has a guest author. He is Bobby King, the principal of Gentry High School.)

Four and a half years ago I was given the opportunity to move my family to the Gentry area when I was offered a job as the Gentry high school/middle school assistant principal. Since that time, things have changed around here and I really feel fortunate to have been a part of that change. We can be very proud of our school district for several reasons. Gentry Public Schools is a vibrant, growing, school in an area of Arkansas that is in a constant growth pattern. We have some of the best facilities of schools our size in the area. We have plenty of land that will allow for future growth and above all we have a community that stands strongly behind their school system.

You have already heard from the other three campus administrators regarding their specific campus changes and accomplishments by their students and staff. All the improvements that have taken place in the lower grade levels will only strengthen the accomplishments that can be made at the high school level. The faculty here at GHS, as well as throughout the district, is the most caring, understanding, open-minded and hardest working faculty that I have had the fortune to be associated with.

Let's discuss some of the things that the High School is doing. My staff has really buckled down and is focused on preparing your children for the End-of-Course (EOC) Exams in the areas of Literacy and Math. Every teacher across the curriculum is involved in helping our students become more familiar and comfortable with Open-Ended Response Questions. In each classroom students write functional paragraphs that include proper punctuation, sentence structure, and content knowledge. This increases the students' reading ability and comprehension level as well as their writing skills. Due to this, the students' EOC Literacy scores have increased 10-20% over the last year.

In the area of Math, we are working hard to improve the students' knowledge of basic math concepts as well as the higher level skills needed for the advanced classes by having constant daily repetition of problem

solving skills. Research shows, this is the best way for students to learn math. Our EOC math scores have also shown an increase of around 10-20% over the last two years. All of the scores are an increase in the number of students that scored in the Proficient Range for both Literacy and Math.

Now let's look at where Gentry High School stands in relation to the New Standards that have been proposed to the State Board of Education by Ray Simon, Director of the Department of Education. The new Standards would increase the minimum number of units, or courses, offered per year from 38 to 60.5. If this passes, then the state graduation requirements will also go up from 21 credits to 23.5 credits. Ms. Judy Hunt, assistant principal at the high school, and I were asked by Dr. Barrett to look at what effect this increase would have on Gentry High School. We looked at what we now offer, versus what is being proposed, to see if we would be in compliance with the new proposed Standards. Short of Technical Math and Applied Statistics, a second foreign language, and a reading unit, we offer as many units, if not more, than the new proposed standards will call for in each area. Currently, we require more credits for graduation than even the new proposal would require.

An important question to consider might be "Could we accomplish this with the staff that we presently have?" With a little adjusting, the answer would "YES". What does all of this say to me? It tells me that the Gentry School District is well ahead of the game.

Finally, let's take a look at the growth that we have experienced during the last few of years. Since the December 1, 1998 child count, the high school alone has had a 24% increase in student enrollment. That calculates to 80 new students (336 up to 416). In addition, our ACT scores for the past two years have been above the state average of 21.

As a first year principal, I am amazed at the teamwork that this district puts forth in working toward seeing that all of our children receive the best education possible. Again, let me emphasize to you how proud I am of the Gentry Public School District. I hope you are equally as proud.