

Chalkboard

By

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Beginning next week, and for the next three weeks thereafter, the *Chalkboard* will have a “guest author”. Okay. Quick, guess. Four weeks, four Gentry school campuses- who will be the guest authors? If you guessed the campus principals, you guessed correctly. Each principal graciously agreed to offer you his or perspective as to why his or her school does already meet the requirement of providing an “adequate” education for our school district’s students. I am excited, as I know you will be, to hear their thoughts.

For the present time, today’s article revisits an issue I first wrote to you about back in October of 1992 when the article was being called “The Open Letter”. The issue deals with the appropriate way for a parent or patron to communicate with the school board when it is in session. Whether you deem it good or bad, there is a protocol that needs to be observed. If you are to address the board during their meeting it will either be because you have arranged to be an item on their agenda or because you wish to speak during the time the board has allocated for public comments.

Each board meeting has a published agenda that the board follows to conduct business. One item “early on the agenda” that reoccurs each month is entitled “Comments From The Public”. This item is open to anyone in attendance to address the school on any subject other than personnel matters and specific student(s) discipline concerns. Those two items have their own rules of conduct that are governed by both board policy and state law.

Generally, both personnel matters and student discipline matters allow for problems to be discussed in closed session. Should the board allow a parent or patron a forum to lambaste an employee or another parent’s child, they would be committing an egregious dereliction of duty. The public comment section is for speaking of things not people.

There is one single exception. You may use the Public Comments Section to rake me, your superintendent, over the coals to your heart’s desire. I know that option exists in the board’s policy because I wrote that section myself. The excerpt from BCA Meetings reads, [“The Board will not accept written concerns regarding personnel or student matters that have not had prior submission to the superintendent of schools unless such concerns are directed only to the performance of the superintendent.”](#)

So what should you do if you have a grievance with a school employee? Let me quote from 1992. “Here is how the process should work. Let's assume that you as a parent disagree with something that has happened at school concerning your child. What should you do? The first step is to contact the school principal and arrange a conference. Next come with an open mind; usually there is more than one side to any problem. Depending on the nature of the problem, the principal will usually arrange a conference between you and your child's teacher(s) if that is where the problem originated. If not, the principal will discuss the problem with you. What should you do if you do not agree with the principal's decision? That is the time to schedule a conference with me. I will meet with you and the principal to arbitrate the situation. If you are not satisfied with my decision, that is the time to ask to appeal to the school board. If you request that during your conference with me, I will instruct you how to properly do so. If you are not satisfied with the board's decision, that is the time to seek restitution through Arkansas's legal system.”

Ten plus years later the system remains the same. It has not changed because it is a good way to resolve problems. Start your conversations; if at all possible, at the lowest level possible with that level being the person you have the difference of opinion with. Keeping moving up the ladder from there until you either get satisfaction or find out that maybe it was you that was wrong.

Next week- “What’s right at Gentry Primary School!” by Principal Gayla Wilmoth.