

# Chalkboard

By

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From time to time I have used the *Chalkboard* to state the obvious. I have done so because over the years I have learned that the obvious is not always obvious. Or stated in another way, something is only obvious when you are aware of all aspects of the situation.

Something that has become obvious to me is that it is time for our school district to start considering building some additional classroom facilities. That perceived reality may or may be obvious to you.

The need to do so is based on our growing student enrollment and the need to have additional instructional space to house staff for some necessary add-ons to our school curriculum.

Let me offer some brief examples of the latter. At the high school our vocational agriculture program student enrollment “maxes out” each year. For two years the school board has considered adding an additional teacher in this field. The problem is that such a program requires a classroom and shop area. What is obvious is that since we opened a new vo-ag building in 1999 we still have the old Agri building to use. What may not be so obvious is that the classroom of that building now houses both our in-school suspension program for the high school and middle school and an ESL classroom. The shop space is being used for a district storage/warehouse. A new vo-ag teacher cannot be hired because there is nowhere to put the teacher. What would seem obvious is to move the in-school and ESL classes. Yet there are no empty classrooms to move them to.

At the middle school the principal recommended adding a reading specialist for grades 7 and 8. It was obvious to him that such would be necessary to improve his school’s performance on state requirements to address the AYP status of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. The question was where to put the classroom. He decided to close the general use computer lab and turn it into a reading lab. There were no other viable options.

At the elementary schools auxiliary instructional personnel are already two-to-a-classroom in several instances. A desire to add a keyboarding class has been put on hold and the old Impac Computer lab will be scrapped in order to open a new second grade classroom. All of the above are obvious

examples of why we need to begin thinking of construction of new classroom space.

It should be obvious this is a great problem for our school to be having because it means our community is growing. Equally obvious is that such is better than being in a community that is dying.

What may or may not be obvious is that this is an uncertain time to be considering a building program. The most critical and costly and yet unanswered question in the recent efforts by the state to reform education is the question of school facilities.

Our current means of financing school facilities construction is to have you levy additional school mills on yourself which in turn are used to generate local tax revenue which is used to make the yearly payments on the bonds which are issued to generate the money to pay, up front, for the construction. In capsule form, you, the parents and patrons of the district, pay to have the type school buildings in which you want the students to attend.

The unanswered question is whether or not this system will remain in place for the future. It has become obvious that our courts have reaffirmed that education is a function of the state rather than the local school district. If that be the case, some would postulate that it is the state's responsibility to assume costs for all new construction of school facilities. A companion thought is that the state would get to choose which district needed what building when.

True or not, that is not yet the system in operation. True or not, any future action of the state does not address our present need in the Gentry Public School District.

Monday night your school board will begin to address this issue. What is obvious is that they will deliberate at great length as to whether or not to put a millage increase before you in September. Because they represent you, and in a certain sense are you, they will be hesitant to ask you to levy more taxes on yourself/on them/on us. They will feel that way because they know that no one in our general district population needs an additional lien on his or her family budget. They will be hesitant because they will not know what the state is going to do in the future regarding the construction of and paying for school buildings.

On the flip side of the coin, they will recognize that school buildings obviously are not mushrooms; they do not just pop up overnight. They will understand that the process often takes up to two years before students are sitting in a new room. They will understand that in a time of growing

student enrollment and expanding curriculum needs and requirements, that to do nothing out of indecision may be an obvious mistake.

After reading those last two paragraphs, you are no doubt wondering about my mind-reading ability with regard to what the board members will be thinking. I am sorry to disappoint you but this is not evidence of any psychic ability on my part. You perceptive readers will know that I am merely projecting my own “I am not sure what the best course of action is” thoughts aloud and attributing it to them. I doubt if I am far off the mark by projecting my hesitations to them. I doubt if I would be too far off the mark making that projection represent your thoughts.

Sometimes it’s obvious that the obvious is not obvious.