

# Chalkboard

By

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From time to time, I receive e-mails, letters, telephone calls, and a few personal visits from parents. The tone of these communiqués varies, as you might expect, based on the parent's child's circumstance at the moment. One recent such example is an e-mail I received last week. I quote it in its entirety in the following paragraphs.

"I am in need of your help. My family is building a home in Gentry and will be enrolling our child in your school system this fall. I know that I have the freedom to send them anywhere, or even home school for that matter. What I would like to know is what is so special about your school system? Why should I send my child to your schools? I am not being brass. I am just concerned.

I am coming from the (name deleted) system. He has had difficulty with reading, spelling and writing. The (name deleted) school system has taken great lengths to help in these areas. I have great concern that he will slip through the cracks in a new school. How can I know for sure that this will not happen?

I hope you understand why I am writing to you. I want the best for my child, and I know that since you are the Superintendent, you are the one that sees that the best is done for the children in your school system. I am trying to plan ahead so that I know what to expect. So that I know how to take care of my child and see to it that he receives the very best education that he can receive.

I look forward to hearing from you soon. Please send your response using the following address, as this is a friend's email address and I am not on line."

This mother was correct with her query. I did not think she was being "brass" at all. I thought she was fulfilling, as she should, a crucial role of a parent- making every effort to guarantee that her child receives the best education possible. The body of the letter sent back follows below.

"I am writing this letter in response to your e-mail of Tuesday, March 30, 2004. As a parent I can assure you that I understand and respect your concern for your child. As a superintendent of what I consider an excellent school district I am also eager to assure you that we desire to provide all students, whether new or returning, a quality education.

You are correct in that you have a window of opportunity to choose any school district for your child under the Public School Choice Act of 1989. This Act allows you to petition for your child to attend a non-resident district without having to have the approval of your resident district. This must be done no later than July 1<sup>st</sup>. You are also correct in that you have the option to teach your child at home as long as you file a Notice of Intent to Home School form with your resident district prior to August 15<sup>th</sup>.”

Since I do not know precisely how old your child is, and because I feel there are countless reasons why our district would be an excellent school for any child, I will give you a general overview of what we consider our mission in relationship to our students. We are consistently and diligently looking for new ways to improve the education we provide for our students. Whether college bound or ready to join the workforce immediately after graduation we want each child to be prepared for the world he dreams to conquer. From the earliest grades to our graduating seniors we place a high priority on math and literacy. We have a district wide Title I program for students who need a little extra help in these areas. For our special education students we also strive to help them be all they can be and have developed a class to teach them basic life skills they will need in order to work and care for themselves after high school.

Our district also places a high value on the partnership between school and parents. We are consistently exploring new ways to encourage parent involvement. This past year each campus hosted a series of Parent Night activities designed to encourage parents to take an active interest in their child’s education. We provide scheduled parent/teacher conference days each semester to give you the opportunity to discuss your child’s progress with his teacher or teachers. Each of our campuses also has a qualified counselor and administrator who are always willing to discuss any concerns you may have regarding your child. You asked how you could insure that your child doesn’t “slip through the cracks” and to that I would say; no child whose parent is so obviously concerned and willing to be involved need worry that he will “get lost in the shuffle” of a new school.

If you still have concerns I would like to encourage you to make an appointment with the appropriate principal to tour the campus and visit with the counselor if necessary. I have listed the phone numbers below for your convenience: Gentry Primary School – (K-2) Principal, Ms. Gayla Wilmoth – 479-736-2252, Gentry Intermediate School – (3-5) Principal, Dr. Don Rose - 479-736-2252, Gentry Middle School - (6-8) Principal, Mr. Larry Cozens – 479-736-2251, Gentry High School – (9-12) Principal, Mr. Bobby

King – 479-736-2666. If I can be of further assistance, please feel free to contact me via e-mail or by phone at 479-736-2253.”

I wish I could have given this parent a guarantee that her child would be happy and successful at Gentry. But no superintendent can make that guarantee for any student.