

Chalkboard

By

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The 2003-04 school term has almost come to an end. The eighth grade “graduation” will be Friday, May 21st. The next day will find our Seniors marking the end of thirteen years of public school education at 7:00 p.m. at Pioneer Stadium. The remaining grades will end the year on Wednesday, May 26th. Finally, after all but the year-round employees have “gone home”, the fiscal year itself will come to an end on June 30th.

It has been a good school term. As in any year there have been a few bumps in the road. Having 1365 students and 180 employees sharing the same environment on a daily basis guarantees a few of those bumps. That is to be expected, as many of those bumps are as intrinsic to a person’s education as learning how to conjugate a verb or how to find the length of the hypotenuse of a right triangle. The public school years are “growing up” years. Learning to co-exist with others in a peaceful yet productive manner is a critical part of the educational experience as such is required for successful living within and without the walls of the schoolhouse.

For lack of a better word, in some ways it has been a bizarre year. I ascribe that to the attempt of our state government to reshape the face of education in the state. Equally important in that arena has been the impact of the federal *No Child Left Behind* laws. The pressure that both have placed on Arkansas public schools to show improvement in student academic performance is intense. I embrace the motives of both of those regulatory agencies; I sometimes cringe at the proposed mechanics of complying with all the new rules and regulations in regard to their practicality.

It has also been a year where continued student growth has necessitated the need to begin thinking about building more classrooms and/or a new elementary school. The school board has determined to ask you for a millage increase in next September’s school election. They made that decision after much deliberation. Not a single member was excited about the prospect of asking you to raise your taxes. But neither did they want the Senior class of 2017 to have been packed into classrooms sardines. The final thought that I perceived to tip the scales was that the matter would be left up to you. The thought expressed was that it was their duty as board members, in the best interest of the students, to put the facts of matter before you and let you decide on the outcome.

From a few more steps backward, I note this will be the fourth graduating class of this century. I marvel at the change in education, and the change in society, in the last 100 years or even the last 50 years. Good or bad, change happens. Good and bad, change happens. Perhaps even more frightening or intriguing, depending on your perspective, is that it is becoming more difficult to determine if the changes are good or bad because the very definitions of good and bad are gradually and subtly being redefined by our society. If you doubt me, sit down with your teenager and watch a 1950's television sitcom. Then watch a 2004 version. Check the difference in plot and dialog. Note the difference in the make-up of the television families. Check out the difference in attitudes expressed by the T.V. children toward the adults in the program. What did you see in 2004 that you did not see in 1954? Profanity? Sex? Homosexuality? Lack of parental respect? Lack of parental control?

Treading the fine line of personal hypocrisy and skirting the borders of parents' rights, I note that public education of the future may need to become more involved in moral issues. Somewhere in the mingling of ideas and issues, in the proliferation and propagation of educational pedagogies the very fabric of what has made ours the greatest nation in the world stands at risk.