

# Chalkboard

By

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**Guest Author: Bobby King, Principal, Gentry High School**

*This Chalkboard is the fourth of a five part series authored by one of the school district's four principals or the assistant superintendent. If you make a commitment to read all five articles, you should end the series with a both a general understanding of the programs that drive our curriculum and the perspectives of the people who implement them.*

I would like to start this article by saying thank you to all the parents and members of our community for the continuous support that you keep putting forth for us on our endeavor of educating your children or grandchildren, preparing them for a chance to enter the next level of higher education and helping them be successful in life. My “thank you” also goes out to the entire faculty, staff and administration of the Gentry Public School system. Without the continuous teamwork/effort of all these people, our mission would be unreachable. As the principals have done in previous *Chalkboards*, I too will address our mission for the High School.

The mission of Gentry High School, as it is for all the campuses, is to have continuous improvement in the areas of Literacy and Math. The Arkansas Department of Education along with the No Child Left Behind Act regulates to what level of improvement schools should be at for the next 12 years. The one major factor in determining improvement is student learning. One of our goals is to ensure that students learn while they are in the classroom. Every member of my teaching staff has been through several hours of in-service that address different styles or strategies of teaching that will enable students to be better learners.

“Step-Up-to-Writing” models are used by every teacher to improve students writing skills. “Reading Across the Curriculum” works with teachers on how to improve reading skills. These two strategies are set up to work effectively in every class that is taught at GHS. “Highly Effective Questioning: Developing The 7 Steps to Critical Thinking” by Dr. Hannel is another strategy that works on improving learning in the classroom. The way that a teacher asks questions in their class can be a major hurdle for some in understanding material in the classroom. This workshop is designed to assist teachers in the way that they ask those questions by teaching them to ask more, simplified questions that will assist students in being able to answer

questions on a higher level. These are not new ideas, but some old ones that have been modified to meet the needs of today's students. With all of the requirements being put on teachers today due to the new laws and mandates comes some tension and uneasiness. Teachers that have many years of experience have a saying "this too shall pass", meaning that several things have come along in educational reforms that have ended up on the chopping block. I have talked with my staff about this issue and have assured them that no matter what the State decides to with the educational system across the state, they need to be putting the students first and see to it that they are learning.

Along the lines of the last statement we are working on a continuing in-service called "Professional Learning Communities at Work" by Dr. DuFour. This program is designed to build teamwork skills amongst our faculty. It brings teachers together from all content areas and gives them time to align curriculum issues, discuss concerns, talk about strategies that work for them and to create a sense of ownership in our programs at GHS. Something else that builds on a teamworking program that we already have in place is our CAP conferences/Arena registration, which assigns a teacher to a group of students that they are responsible for seeing that they are on track for graduation. This requires teachers to communicate back and forth gathering information required to complete schedules for students. The high school teachers are also beginning to meet with the 8<sup>th</sup> grade teachers throughout the year to see that each of our classes are meeting the standards from grades 8 thru 12. I have talked about how we all work as a team. Our teams are not complete without the support of our community. For that reason, we have created a Parental Involvement Coordinator to come up with creative ideas to increase the number community players for our teams. The more that we can get to be involved, the better the opportunities will be for students to be successful.

I want to conclude with a look at our End-of-Course test scores for the last three years. These are the scores that the State Department holds schools accountable for. In 2001, the schools around the state went through a Pilot Test in the areas of Literacy, Algebra I and Geometry, which gave the State a starting place for setting the percent of improvement required each year. Pilot Scores looked like this: Literacy, 10% scored proficient; Algebra I, 6% scored proficient; Geometry, 3% scored proficient. In 2002, we made some adjustments and modified things to see that continuous improvement was made. 2002 brought on a major increase in our scores. Literacy, 44% scored proficient; Algebra I, 33% scored proficient; Geometry, 28% scored proficient. 2003 scores also show improvement. Literacy, 44% scored

proficient (stayed the same with fewer taking the test); Algebra I, 43% scored proficient; Geometry, 33% scored proficient. As you can see, we are continually striving to make continuous improvements in the number of students scoring proficient in the areas of Literacy and Math.