

Chalkboard

By

Dr. Randy C. Barrett, Superintendent
Gentry Public Schools

“So if we are building a new elementary school, what will we do with the old one?” Last week’s *Chalkboard* ended with the promise to answer that question. If you missed last week’s article, some background is in order. If you did read last week’s, feel free to skip down to the third paragraph.

On Tuesday, September 21, 2004, the Gentry School District will have its annual school election. Polls open at 7:30 a.m. and remain open until 7:30 p.m. Gentry Public School’s citizens from all zones will cast their votes at the First Baptist Church’s Youth Building. Along with selecting a candidate to represent Zone 4, voters will decide whether to raise the district current millage rate from 35 mills to 40 mills. The additional 5 mills would be used to finance a \$7,000,000 bond issued dedicated to building a new elementary school and adding classrooms to the middle and high schools. The purpose of the new construction and additions is to address the need for additional classroom space at all grade levels within the school district. The most recent thinking is that the new elementary school would be for the Primary School, which now houses grades K-2. The leaning toward a new Primary School rather than a new Intermediate Schools results from consideration that the current Primary School is the oldest of the district’s classroom facilities, is the most “open” campus to the outside world, and the fact that the students who attend that school are the district’s youngest.

The answer to the question, **“So if we are building a new elementary school, what will we do with the old one?”** can be given on two levels: long-term and short-term. Let’s first examine the short-term answer. If you do not know the elementary teachers by name and grade, the answer may be meaningless on the surface but struggle along with me,

The Primary School has eighteen grade level teachers, six each in grades Kindergarten, First, and Second. In addition there is a P.E. teacher, a librarian, two Title I teachers, a Special Education teacher, an Enrichment teacher, and a Counselor. Only the 18 classrooms are considered in the space reallocation because the P.E. teacher shares the gym with the Intermediate School P.E. teacher, the two Title I teachers are in rooms the size of closets, the librarian shares the Library with the Intermediate School

Librarian, the Primary Counselor's office is inside the Library space, and the Enrichment teachers shares the Intermediate School Art room.

So what or who would go in the vacated 18 classrooms? The first priority would be for those staff now sharing space at the Intermediate School to have their "own space". Dr. Andrew Zambrano, the Intermediate School ESL aide, would get a room of his own. Naomi Wilson, Intermediate School Title I teacher would get a room of her own. Becky Glass, Intermediate School Migrant Aide, would get a room of her own. Debbie Allred, Elementary Nurse, would move into a full size space. Gale Carreira, Intermediate School Special Education teacher would get a room of her own. One room would be converted to a Parent Center. Space would be available for the current "outside" providers for Physical Therapy and Speech Therapy to each have a room. The same would be true for the counselors from Ozark Guidance. Linda Mason, the Intermediate School Counselor could move to a full size room. Two rooms for each grade level at the Intermediate School, grades Three, Four, and Five would be reserved for renovation for future growth in those grades

If you were counting, that's 9 or 10 of the 18 spaces with instant occupants. With the reservation of 6 rooms for growth, two or three rooms are left open for open for district storage or other use such as a District In-School Suspension classroom that is now in a makeshift space in the old vocational agriculture shop space at the high school.

While it does not require explanation, it is worthy to note that the elementary campuses are basically land-locked in regards to new construction at that site. Something would have to be torn down before something could be built. Nothing can be built over the summer break so nothing can now be torn down because to do so would leave students without a classroom to return to in the fall.

The long-term answer deals with 10 to 20 years down the road. At some point the Intermediate School would too move across town to join what would then be the Primary, Middle, and High School Campuses. The buildings left behind might well become a vocational campus, a satellite campus of NWACC and/or JBU and/or the U of A. They could become the home of both adult and early childhood centers. They could become the home of an Alternative School. Depending on need, some of those programs might come to life earlier while the Intermediate School still resides in its current location.

I invite you again to the regular school board meeting to be held a week early on September 13, 2004, at the middle/high school cafeteria. As noted last week, included within the regular order of business, the Annual

Report to the Public will be presented, the district's Teacher Of The Year will be named, the candidates for the contested board seat will be invited to speak, and the architects will be present to give an update on the proposed building program. Since it is a regular meeting, you have the opportunity to voice your opinion during the "Public Comments" item on the agenda. You have a standing invitation to attend.

Next week's Chalkboard will tackle the issue of **"So what about all that money the state put into education by raising the sales tax? Why aren't we using that to build new facilities?"**