

Chalkboard

By

Dr. Randy C. Barrett, Superintendent
Gentry Public Schools

I hope that each of you who read the *Chalkboard* had a wonderful Christmas and have gotten off to a good start in the New Year. To date, I have only had one *deja vu* experience in the new year. A roof failed on the third grade wing and dumped gallons of water inside three classrooms. Probably a few of you were readers during my beginning years as your superintendent back in the early 90's and can remember one Christmas season when an identical thing happened to another classroom. That roof failure sparked the beginning of a "re-roofing" program for the entire district over the next few years. It is difficult for me to believe it, but it is about time for that cycle to begin again.

Not surprising, the first buildings at the beginning of the rotation are the wing buildings at the elementary campuses. I think that is probably an affirmation of the good decision the community made in passing a millage to build a new Primary School. It will be a great day when that building is finished and our very youngest students have a top-notch facility in which to attend. I thank you again for supporting you school financially as well as the many other ways you do.

This minor catastrophe brings to the forefront the difficult task that the Arkansas legislature, which just convened this week, will face in answering the mandate of the Arkansas Supreme Court in the Lakeview decision. The following is a quote from the report *Arkansas Statewide Educational Facilities Assessment Final Report to the Joint Committee on Educational Facilities*. "On November 21, 2002, the Arkansas Supreme Court affirmed in the Lake View School case (Lake View School District No.25 of Phillips County, Arkansas et al, vs. Governor Mike Huckabee, et al.) that **educational facilities serving the public school system in Arkansas were inadequate, unequal, and in violation of the state constitutional guarantee of a free, adequate, efficient, and substantially equal public education for the children of Arkansas**. The court has charged the Governor and the Arkansas General Assembly with the responsibility of correcting these defects in public policy. To meet these ends, the Arkansas General Assembly, in Regular Session of the 84th General Assembly of 2003, has established a joint legislative committee under Act 1181 of 2003, AN ACT TO CREATE THE JOINT OMMITTEE

ON EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES; AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES, to serve the General Assembly in exercising its responsibilities relative to the provision of adequate and substantially equal educational facilities for the State of Arkansas.”

According to the Joint Committee, the price tag to fix all the school building in the state and keep up with new construction is approximately \$4,504,230,180. In words, in case you thought the amount was a typographical error, that is four billion, five hundred four million, two hundred thirty thousand, one hundred eighty dollars. No one that I have spoken to believes that is the final number. Many think the amount is inflated, some think it is too small. The number shown for the Gentry School District was \$6,735,222. Of that amount, only about \$103,196 was deemed to be Priority 1 or critical, current needs. Of that \$103,196, the category “Specialties” cost \$85,829. No one has told me yet what a “Specialty” is. The bottom line is that our district has done a decent job in keeping our facilities maintained.

Whatever the final price tag is to fix the state’s school buildings, I suspect it will be large. I will go on record as predicting that the question of consolidation will surface again. I’ll further predict that the consolidation issue will be how to maximize the use of the school space that currently exists before any new buildings or building renovations are authorized by the state. I will attempt to expand this line of thought next week.