

Chalkboard

By

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Depending on when you read this, there will be approximately 17 days of school left. I have been told that the older you get the quicker the passage of time seems to appear. I am beginning to buy in to that philosophy.

It has been a good year to date, both for present happenings and for the district's future. When the year started about 1365 students were enrolled for class; as the year winds down to a conclusion the number is around 1430. I anticipate that number will grow again next year. How much? That is difficult to say. Our enrollment numbers for the last four school terms are as follows: 2001-02 was 1214, 2002-03 was 1316, 2003-04 was 1367, and this year is 1430. Unless we hit a plateau this year, a safe estimate would be to plan for 50 to 75 new students. When I begin budgeting for next year, I will budget new expenses for 50 new students and budget new revenue for none. Sometimes being conservative prevents unwanted surprises.

Growth is a double-edged sword. Growth means additional state funding as the predominant block of funding is based on the number of students present. Growth also means additional expense as more students often require more teachers and ancillary employees, more classroom space, more school buses, and so forth.

Thanks to your support of the district as evidenced by your willingness to "put your money where your mouth is"; i.e. raising your taxes by 5 mills to generate revenue for a seven million dollar school construction bond issue, our district has a chance to grow as the community is growing. It is highly commendable that you place such a high value on providing quality facilities for your students to attend.

All regular readers and most others realize that the Gentry School District is in the process of building a new Primary School at the middle/high school site and also building a 12 classroom expansion onto the high school which, when completed, will be shared by the middle and high schools. Both projects result both from student growth and the need to maintain adequate facilities for all students.

If you read last week's paper you picked up on the fact that the district is looking to lease six classrooms, in the form of "portable classrooms" for

the next school year. This too results from student growth and the need for additional classroom space. Our district has tried to avoid having to use modular buildings, preferring rather to invest your tax dollars in permanent structures. Yet necessity often trumps preference and such is the case here. We will probably lease used buildings, both to save as much as possible and in recognition that new construction of permanent buildings will soon be underway. There is no need for alarm on your part should your child's class be assigned to one of these buildings- while they may not be "brand new" they will be clean, safe, and installed according to local and state building codes. They will also be at least 40 years "newer" than some of our existing classrooms.

Regarding our two construction projects, bid invitations for both should be going out this month. Actual work on the classroom addition will not begin until students go home for the summer but should be starting that same week. Work on the Primary school should begin sometime in June.

As I noted when I opened this article, this has been a good school year. Our students have worked hard in the classroom and our staff is united in believing that the students' hard work and their hard work, as instructors, will pay high dividends in improved student achievement. They are confident too that this achievement will be reflected on student performance on various statewide examinations.

Outside the classrooms the students have also experienced success in athletics and other extracurricular activities. Such success promotes further success and yields a climate of positive achievement from which all the students can profit.

Why do I include these last two paragraphs about student success in an article about buildings? Because I never want to forget, or let you forget, that it is the students for whom you are building.