

Chalkboard

By

Dr. Randy C. Barrett, Superintendent
Gentry Public Schools

Before the *Chalkboard* continues onward to today's task of presenting the Gentry Primary and Intermediate Schools "Annual Report To The Public" as required by the Arkansas *Standards For Accreditation For Public Schools*, I want to say "Thank You!" to the voters who passed the 5 mill increase. Many, many future classes of Gentry students will savor that victory.

I suppose one does become wiser as time, by Stephen King's definition, "moves on". In 1993, as your new superintendent, I was extremely exited that night at the courthouse when the results were posted and the 5-mill increase to build the middle school passed. At that time, it felt like a personal win of some kind.

This time, when the results went up on the wall, I saw the millage being passed for what it really was—a win for the students won by a group. It was the same a decade ago but I did not see it so clearly then. Years later, I realize that, in the final analysis, my vote then and now was just that-1 vote cast out of many.

I also want to say "Thank You!" to the 99 who voted against the millage increase. You may not have voted as I would have wished, but you did come out to vote. In our school district, about 2900 other eligible voters did not.

To you who voted "No", I want you to know that I think you have a right to your opinion as much as the 191 other voters had to theirs. I would ask one thing of you. If your vote against the millage had anything to do with being dissatisfied with the school, please let me know what the problem is. Drop me an anonymous letter in the mail if you want to remain unknown. If that is not a concern, here is an open invitation to come to my office and talk to me personally.

Now follows the reports from the Primary School principal, Gayla Wilmoth, and Intermediate School, Dr. Don Rose. Ms. Wilmoth begins, "At Gentry Primary School, we have learned that in order to increase student achievement we need to address three factors: curriculum, instruction, and assessment. These factors are the key ingredients in our School Improvement Plan. The Gentry Primary School Improvement Plan has two

priorities - improving Literacy and improving Mathematics. This plan is the basis of our curriculum and our efforts to improve student achievement.

Our staff development has focused on research-based instruction – especially in the areas of reading and writing. Our reading curriculum combines carefully designed systematic instruction in 5 areas: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Our staff has been trained in Step Up To Writing, Classroom Instruction that Works, and Writer’s Workshop. The connection between reading and writing is taught on a daily basis. Students write daily.

Students at the Primary School are assessed in a variety of ways: standardized tests, mastery checks, skills checklists, and teacher created assessments. In April 2004, Gentry Primary School second grade students were tested with the SAT-9 – a nationally normed standardized achievement test. Our second grade combined population scored at the 60th percentile in reading, and the 71st percentile in math. The teachers and I review standardized test scores, Arkansas Primary Benchmark results, and skills checklists, as well as teacher created materials to assess student achievement. We use this information to compare student performance to the state standards in our efforts to stay focused on what is being learned at our school. In March of 2005, all students in the Primary School will be tested with the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

In short, we are proud of what we do, and proud of what our students have accomplished. We think that the more you look at Gentry Primary School, the more you’ll find to like and appreciate.”

Dr. Rose writes, “The Arkansas Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (ACSIP) is what guides the curriculum at Gentry Elementary School. First we establish both a Math and Literacy Committee. The committees then analyze the Norm Reference Test (NRT) and Criterion Reference Test (CRT) Data. The analysis helped us set two main Priorities for the school: 1. Students in the Gentry Elementary School will perform at grade level in the curriculum area of Math. 2. Students in the Gentry Elementary School will perform at grade level in the curriculum area of Literacy.

Each priority has several Interventions and Actions to help us accomplish our Priorities. In the Intermediate school a very strong focus is placed on Reading and Writing Workshops.

Arkansas has changed the NRT to the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). Test scores usually drop when a new test comes out; however, Gentry’s Reading and Math scores stayed about where they were before. Gentry’s students were above the state average.

Gentry Intermediate Benchmark Scores remain in the 70s. We are most proud of the fact that only 13% in Math and 6% in Literacy were in below basic. Gentry's students are more than 30 points above the state's minimum Adequate Yearly Progress. We are very proud of the effort from students, parents, teachers and staff at Gentry Intermediate School."