

Chalkboard

By

Dr. Randy C. Barrett, Superintendent
Gentry Public Schools

“The Butterfly Effect”- taken from a scientist named Edward Lorenz who espoused an idea he called the Chaos Theory that had a recognizable quote, “When a butterfly flutters its wings in one part of the world, it can eventually cause a hurricane in another...”. Mr. Lorenz’s work was in the field of meteorology; his model was used to predict global weather patterns.

I believe this is how I started another year’s *Chalkboards* back at the beginning of school. I told you I had singled out two points to apply his theory to that of education. Those two points for the staff were – “Have you ever thought about how your behavior, your speech, your attitude affects the students you teach?” and “Do you accept that all of those above things affect somebody whether you want it too or not?”

In hindsight, it is doubtful that ever again will our staff adopt a theme that has the word “chaos” anywhere in its title. Several instants this year had the appearance of chaos in ways not envisioned by Mr. Lorenz. It was of no consolation to me to know that, not only was it Gentry experiencing some moments of foolishness, but several of Northwest Arkansas’ area schools as well.

Some of those moments were almost bizarre- evacuating the high and middle schools because of broken natural gas lines and lacquer over-spray. Obviously, both were accidents and both were unexpected. Equally unexpected, but apparently premeditated, was the virus-like epidemic of “threats written on the bathroom walls” that several Northwest Arkansas school experienced. In the mix some confusion spawned regarding the onset of early signs of gang-related activity and some problems that seemed to be race related. Into that mix add too a special session of the state legislature and the implementation of new rules and procedures regarding school facilities.

Why rehash less than positive happenings at the end of an otherwise good school year? Mostly because it’s important not to forget or sweep under the rug things that you want to consciously plan to prevent for a new year. Unlike the private sector, we operate in a fish bowl environment.

As it is in the world we live in, these atypical happenings have a tendency to blot out, at least for a while, all the good things that happened in our school district and those other districts that also experienced some problems this year. Whether

that is good or bad, perception is indeed reality. There must have been a butterfly flapping the breeze somewhere; check out this year's Katrina in New Orleans.

As I write this last Chalkboard for this school term, I especially want to acknowledge the hard work of all those 200+ employees of the Gentry School District who faithfully performed their duties each day. Because of their hard work and dedication to their chosen profession, the district survived the low points, celebrated the victories, and made routine the daily opportunity for the students of the district to get a quality education.

As I have written often this year, change in a growing community is not without both birthing and growing pains. Not for long time, if ever, will "business as usual" be satisfactory.

In closing this year, I want to say a particular "thank you" to the parents and patrons of our district. Every year as I sit on the stage at graduation it becomes more and more clear to me that a school is a mirror of the community. Thank you for the trust and support you have shown in numerous ways; the chief of those is allowing us the occasion to educate your child and to attempt to instill in each of them a love for learning. To you parents of future years' graduates, I would ask those same two questions, with only slight modification, that I asked the staff. Have thought about how your behavior, your speech, your attitude affects your children? Do you accept that all of those above things affect your children whether you want it too or not?

Exciting times lie ahead in public education for the state and for the Gentry Public School District. I look forward to the continuing partnership between our school and the community it exists within.

But as for now; please, no more butterflies.