

Chalkboard

By

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At its last regular meeting on April 17, 2006, the Gentry School Board voted to hire a full-time Athletic/Activities/ Administrator. During my 14-year tenure here at Gentry, that is a first for this type position. I note that when I came to Gentry in 1992, our enrollment was about a 1000 students; it is approximately 1460 now.

In the past, the job of Athletic Director has never warranted a full-time position. The job has always been added on as a supplemental duty, with supplemental pay, to some other full-time position. Many times one of the coaches was awarded the task. For the last few years, Larry Cozens, Gentry's Middle School principal has fulfilled those duties.

From my "inside" perspective, the chief problem with the job being an "add-on" duty is simply the number of hours in a day. I know of no full-time position at our district that does not require an employee's full attention during the course of a workday and usually some after-work hours. When several extra duties are awarded, paid or not, that day can become rather long. In the case of a growing district, such as we are, an employee with too many "added" responsibilities can simply run out of hours.

Any businessperson will attest that when an employee gets too many tasks to oversee the amount of time spent that can be spent on each task diminishes. Having limited time to devote can often mean mediocre performance on multiple assignments. Perhaps as it did with me, this line of thinking calls to your mind that old saying, "Jack of all trades, Master of none"?

I pause briefly here to commend Mr. Cozens for doing a good job holding down "two" jobs, principal and AD. I also note that I understood completely his choice or preference to devote his full energy and full attention to being our middle school principal; it was what he was hired to be.

When the board created this new position, they structured it so that the person's qualifications, which fill it, would require state certification as both a coach and as an administrator. The coaching endorsement means that the person who gets the job will have an understanding of the athletic side of the job. The administrative certification will allow that person to both evaluate the coaching staff and to perform other administrative duties as needed.

From this you may correctly surmise that the board intends for this position to “lighten the load” for the existing middle and high school administrative staffs as well as to give more attention to detail in athletics and activities.

The board also envisioned that this role would perform some tasks that are now only receiving cursory or sporadic attention. One of these is a coordination and oversight of all school extracurricular activities sanctioned by the Arkansas Activities Association. Another is to serve as a liaison to the community groups, such as the GYO, who have after-hours programs for Gentry students.

Because the role will be administrative in nature, I suggested, and the board agreed, that a screening committee be formed to seek out and recommend for hire the person this position. As you may know, that is the process we generally use to hire administrators at Gentry. The committee will be composed of two school board members, Merrill Reynolds and Le’Ann Watanabe; the middle school principal, Larry Cozens; the high school principal, Bobby King; the head senior boys football coach, Jeff Stewart; the head senior girl’s basketball coach, Brandi Muierhead; the president of the Athletic Booster Club, Pam Harwell; and the president of the Band Booster Club, Eddie Rotrammel. Mr. Reynolds was appointed by the board to chair the committee.

Some readers may wonder why in an age of academic accountability and intense scrutiny of athletic expenditures by the state, the board is willing to invest money in a non-instructional position. The reason is basically two-fold and both are simple. The first is that if we are going to have athletics and activities, and we are, then we need to have someone who has the necessary time to see that the job is done right and that it is done to the utmost with regard to quality in both performance and attitude. The second is to ensure that the people on staff, who are charged with academic excellence, have the necessary time to see that their job is done right and that it is also performed to the utmost with regard to quality in both performance and attitude.

Do you have a “dog in this hunt”? If you would like to offer any input in this matter, I encourage you to contact one of the committee members named above and share your thoughts.