

Chalkboard

By

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Since the Governor called the Legislature into session to begin Monday of this present week, I will postpone my venture into the explanation of norm referenced testing and devote this Chalkboard, and at least the next, to the implications of this special called session for the Gentry Public School District. The Governor's has indicated that his desire is for a short session, perhaps just this week in length.

There were thirty-one items listed on his Executive Department Proclamation. Seventeen of the items relate directly to public school education. Of those seventeen items I have highlighted the following items 13, 14,15, 16, and 20.

13. To consider an act to ensure a general, suitable, and efficient system of public education for students by addressing issues raised by the Arkansas Supreme Court; to amend the Minimum Teacher Compensation Schedule; to increase the foundation funding provided under the Public School Funding Act of 2003; to require districts to dedicate nine percent (9%) of foundation funding to utilities and costs of maintenance repair and renovation activities for school facilities; and to limit the employer contribution rate for teacher retirement.

14. Consider an act to address the issues raised in the most recent Lake View opinion regarding the ninety-eight (98%) collection rate for property taxes by creating a mechanism to provide for uniform accounting by adopting a statewide set of instructions to establish uniformity in reporting requirements for each county; to allow the assessment coordination department to create a uniform statewide set of instructions for reporting county property tax collection information.

15. To consider an act to ensure adequate funding for students in a school district with declining enrollment and to provide up to thirteen million dollars (\$13,000,000) in prorated funds for students in isolated school districts receiving special needs funding.

16. To consider an act to develop detailed uniform reporting requirements for school district fund balances.

20. To consider an act to require the Department of Education to develop a uniform superintendent contract.

The immediate implication of items 13 and 14, if enacted into law, is that the Gentry district should receive some additional state revenue this year; I estimate between \$100,000 and \$150,000. While this would be an enormous amount of money to me personally, it would only be about one percent (1%) of this year's overall school budget. While relatively small in amount, it would certainly help offset increased transportation and utility costs.

An interesting concept is provided by item 20 dealing with mandating uniform superintendent's contracts. The gist of the bill I read by Senators Argue and Jeffress and Representative Elliott was that school boards could terminate such contracts under certain conditions without having to "buy out" the remainder of the contract. If I properly understood the intent of the bill it had mostly to do with situations where the school had been "taken over" by the state because the district was in academic, fiscal, or facilities distress or had fallen out of compliance with standards for accreditation. I certainly found no fault with the concept.

Item 15 will have no impact on our district as we are growing, not declining in student population. Growth has its problems but such are less painful than loss.

Item 16 dealing with identifying and reporting fund balances may have little impact on our district. Only slightly speaking facetiously, our school's end-of-the-year balances usually would cause me to think more of Item 20 than giving rise to concern over explaining why our "cash on hand" is too great.

Too much money, now there's a problem I would love for our district to have.