

Chalkboard

By

Dr. Randy C. Barrett, Superintendent
Gentry Public Schools

A long time ago in a school district far away, an older staff member remarked in one of those after school staff meeting something like, “My goodness, the playground be looking like a barn yard with all those strutting roosters chasing the hens.” I believe her intent was to convey that spring had arrived with all of its inherent joys.

While the weather has made the demarcation between winter and spring somewhat confusing this year, the calendar says that spring has to wait a few more weeks to arrive. This year, the first day of spring is also the first day of Gentry Public Schools’ Spring Break. Our district will be closed March 20th through March 24th. Some other key dates are the regular school board meeting on March 13th, Prom on April 8th, school closed for Good Friday on April 14th, and graduation on May 20th.

Spring is the season for rebirth. For the Christian, the season holds the promise of redemption. For everyone, the greening of the grass and the tender shoots pressing through the wakening soil is a reminder that life has cycled one more time. Soon a new crop of spring calves will be running and jumping and bucking in some farmer’s pasture.

In some small likeness, the birth of a new school year has its conception in spring. It is a time when the renewal of contracts for staff is considered by the school board. It’s a time when salary schedules, which are the lion’s not the hare’s share, of a school budget are studied. It is a time when, like flower bulbs awaiting the warming of the earth, new ideas for improvements are squirming to germinate.

In the case of school districts that are experiencing growth, like Gentry is, it is a time to cultivate; both in making sure adequate space is available to house the students and staff and programs and that adequate staff are hired to teach those students. Public school teachers/gardeners do not have the luxury of over sowing and then weeding out the extras. Whatever “comes up”; stays.

With regard to school facilities, the district should be in good shape for the coming year. The new Primary school is still on track to open next school term. The school board will soon be considering finalizing a change order to add seven more classrooms during the initial construction phase of the building to accommodate “all those new plants”. And, keeping “crop rotation” in mind, the board will study plans on renovation of the old Primary classrooms.

This is the month when I generally propose to the school board revisions to the next year's salary schedules for staff. It is important to me that the staff of Gentry Public Schools has comparable salaries to other "farms" our size. I probably will wait until April to sow those seeds of change, as there is reasonable chance that the Governor will call a Special Session of the Legislature this spring to address some issues springing from the most recent Arkansas Supreme Court ruling regarding school funding. There is a danger in setting out some type plants before the last frost.

Regarding new ideas, spring is a time when the professional staff development plans are being made. Following this week's spring analogy, I suspect this is most akin to sitting down with the pesticide and fertilizer catalogs and deciding what combination is best to ensure the finest crop possible. In all public schools in the state, all certified staff members must receive a minimum of 60 hours of training/re-training in "gardening techniques". School board members are now required to obtain 6 hours each year. For Gentry, one gardening technique that we may need some help in understanding is that purple-hull peas, butterbeans, and pole beans can all be grown successfully in the same garden. One other area will always be how to have higher yield "crops".

Ah, Spring!