

Chalkboard

By

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I hope that you have enjoyed reading the works of the guest authors who penned the last six *Chalkboards*. If you had the time to read each carefully you should have good grasp on what your respective schools, that comprise the district, are doing. Additionally you had the opportunity to read reports concerning our federal programs and results of state mandated tests. You should have been left with the overall feeling that your school district is doing, at worst, an average job of educating the students of the district. Perhaps you were left with the feeling that our job performance is even better than average. I surmise that is a matter of perception based on how well we presented the information; perception based on the clarity and timeliness of our communication.

In the same papers that carried those above referenced articles you also should have seen some “front page” stories that gave you pause for concern. One story dealt with allegations of students being sexually harassed at the middle school by another student. The next week, another story had to do with a fight in the high school gymnasium where the police were called for assistance. Then the next week, yet another reported that a serious threat of violence had been made at the high school. The last incident had so many rumors associated with it that some parents felt compelled to keep their children at home on the date of the announced disaster.

I have a favorite cliché that I have tried to instill on numerous occasions with the administrative staff of the district. The saying is, “Perception is reality”. It has a corollary; a cousin maxim that states, “The only way to kill a rumor is to smother it with truth”.

So here is the truth, as I know it, with regard to the above stories. We did have some students who reported that a male student had harassed them. The truth is that the middle school’s harassment awareness program is what sparked the girls to come forward. The rest of the truth is that the male student in question had been moved away to another state for some while and was not present at the time the reports were made leaving the school unable to verify or resolve the issue. We were left with only the option to tell the students to go home and tell their parents about the matter which they did.

We did have a fight in the high school gymnasium and the police were called for assistance by another member of the police force, the School Resource Officer. The fight was in itself not overly dramatic but it did occur in a confined area which could have escalated into a serious problem had it not been dealt with promptly. I respected the SRO's decision then and still do today.

We did have a written threat of violence scribbled on the wall of one of the high school restrooms. We did take immediate steps in-house and with the local police to make sure the possibility of any threat actually being carried out was as minimal as possible. We always take such matters seriously.

Was I disappointed that some parents heard "stories" and kept their children home? I was disappointed that I and the other school officials had not done a better job of communicating both our knowledge of the situation and our contingency plans to you. We needed to do better in that regard. Again, your perception of a matter is as real as the facts you possess. If you have none from us, you are left, at best, wondering and at worst, panicked. If I were a parent and did not feel it was safe to send my child to school then I would keep them home also. On the day in question, if my sons who both graduated from Gentry had been school age, I would have sent them to school.

The next truth for this article is this. I am in my fourteenth year as your school superintendent. The principals have been around for several years also. I hope in that length of time that none of us have given you any reason to think that the safety and welfare of you children is not of critical importance to us, as it is to you. I am not saying that I think that you do or should agree with everything we say or do. Nor am I saying that your school people never make mistakes; we do. I am only saying that I hope you trust us to be doing our very best work when we are being the "day parent" of your child.

Here is the final truth for this *Chalkboard*. I cannot guarantee you that your child will be safe at school on any given day. Nor can I guarantee you that they will be safe in the Wal-Mart parking lot the next time you shop for groceries or at the Mall when you are shopping for Christmas presents this year. I can guarantee you that, to the best of our ability, we will be vigilant every day the doors to the school house open.