

Chalkboard

By

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This is the next installment in a series dealing with staff roles, mission statements, and core beliefs. Next week I will attempt to conclude wrap up this theme. If you have been reading you know the series has dealt primarily with four core beliefs of the Gentry School Board and administrative staff. I have previously noted that the school board is partnering with the Arkansas Leadership Academy to accomplish this task. I also had promised to end the series with suggestions on how you, a stakeholder in our school district, might become involved in the updating of our district's mission statement.

Okay, careful reader, last week I got the cart before the horse. (Regenia and I made some 180°'s in the Jeep last weekend on the ice out on the backside of Falling Springs Road too. Those were planned; skipping the discussion of the last core belief was an oversight.)

In last week's article I explained the school board's plan to hold a series of meetings in January to garner your input in shaping the district's mission statement. In a perfect world, today's article would have preceded that piece.

To refresh your memory, the four core belief statements, not listed in priority order, were as follow. **Opportunities must be provided for all teachers and all students to excel by maximizing their respective abilities. All stakeholders are responsible for student success. All student success must be objectively and quantifiably measured. A safe and healthy learning environment is conducive to learning."**

The final belief to discuss is *Opportunities must be provided for all teachers and all students to excel by maximizing their respective abilities*. If you do remember the previous articles, you will recall that I used the Merriam-Webster online dictionary at <http://www.m-w.com/> to define key terms in the definitions. It is important, in seeking to understand the meaning of a concept, for all who are seeking to understand to share the same meaning of various descriptors.

In the present core belief, the words *opportunity*, *maximize*, *excel*, and *abilities* require attention. The second definition found for "*opportunity*" fits our present use, with that meaning being "a good chance for advancement or progress". The second definition of "*maximize*" was given to be "to make the most of". One meaning of "*excel*" is defined there was

“surpass in accomplishment or achievement.” Finally, the second definition listed of “*ability*” is defined as “natural aptitude or acquired proficiency” Looking up “*aptitude*” results in finding the definition- “capacity for learning.” Looking up “*acquire*” yields “to come to have as a new or added characteristic, trait, or ability”.

With all those clarifications in hand, the core belief can then be reworded to “*A good chance for advancement or progress must be provided for all teachers and all students to surpass their previous accomplishments or achievements by making the most of their respective capacity for learning and by adding new characteristics, traits, or proficiencies.*”

That is simple enough to grasp. The school board believes that it has the responsibility to provide resources and situations so that both teachers and students can become better at what they do and know.

Have you heard the saying, “You can drive a horse to the water, but you can’t make it drink”? In this last core belief, that idea is inherent. The school board cannot guarantee that a student gets a drink (good education) but it can work to guarantee that the water (opportunity to get a drink) is there.

Equally important in this belief is that the school board recognizes that learning for staff must also be ongoing and continuous. Things change. When I taught seventh grade science in 1976, Pluto was still a planet not just a Disney cartoon. The Berlin Wall still stood. The USSR still existed in that form. AIDS was not an epidemic. Richard Nixon was president. Heart transplants were only a decade old. The Internet was only a government experiment. While those examples only scratch the surface, you get the idea. Things that once were facts have been replaced by new facts that will be replaced by new facts....

In education, as with other professions, a continual search for ways to do things more effectively and efficiently continues. The school board believes its staff needs to be involved in that process.

(To be continued.....)