

Chalkboard

By

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This is the third article in a series dealing with staff roles, mission statements, and core beliefs. The second piece ended with four core beliefs of the Gentry School Board and administrative staff and a promise to elaborate on each. I have noted also that a book by Jim Collins, Good to Great, that I was exposed to this summer at a leadership conference hosted by the Arkansas Leadership Academy has been helping to shape my thinking. I also 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.

The four core belief statements 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.”** Since the statements are not listed in priority order, I will explain them in no particular order.

I will begin with the last statement- **A safe and healthy learning environment is conducive to learning.** On the surface there may not appear an immediate connection between health and safety and student learning. A little more thought easily makes the link.

If you followed any of the discussions of the 2005 Legislative Session regarding school facilities, you remember that “Safe, Dry, and Healthy” were high priorities listed in the state report on facilities, *Arkansas Statewide Educational Facilities Assessment-2004 Final Report to the Joint Committee On Educational Facilities*.

The Gentry School Board had already made major efforts in that area by the time of that report. Since 1995 the district has invested several million dollars in the construction of a middle school, an addition to it, a cafeteria building, a new VoAg building, an addition to the high school, a new Primary school, and currently is in the process of completing an addition to the Primary school. A major part of the earlier construction was based on need for additional space based on growth. The last two projects listed, where growth continued to be a factor, also were about maintaining a safe and healthy environment. Ample consideration was given to the need for our very youngest students to move out of the 1960's “wing buildings”

and into a modern facility where they would attend classes under “one roof”. In fact, the new Primary school actually started on paper and early conversations as first being a new Intermediate school. Later discussions factored in the age level of the Primary students and the greater need based on the age-levels.

Changing focus, the district saw a need for better security for all students and entered into an agreement, a partnership, three years ago with the City of Gentry to have a School Resource Officer on board. This position has proved valuable to student safety on more than one occasion.

In the same vein, prior to it being a common practice, the district has had two-way radios and cameras installed on its route buses. Recent additions to the fleet have been cameras installed on the outside of the buses as a detriment to vehicles dangerously passing buses at loading points.

The district has also complied with all state regulations regarding physical activity for its students, healthier menus within its food service program, and the removal of vending and snack machines from the schools.

Continuing to exceed state requirements, the district has on staff a licensed nurse at each of its four campuses. The district also for several years has had portable auto defibrators at each site.

This listing of items could continue with discussions of safety and first aide training for staff, crisis plans, money spent of modern alarm systems and communication devices and so forth. The bottom line is that while none of the four core beliefs is more important than the other three, a simple fact remains that unless this core belief dealing with safety and a healthy environment is internalized and practiced, the other three which deal more directly with learning cannot occur. Or put in terms of some first aide training I have had, a stopped heart always takes precedent over a broken leg.