

Chalkboard

By

Larry Cozens-Middle School Principal

For those who have not heard the good news, let me be the first to tell you that Gentry Middle School has been removed from the Arkansas Department of Education's list of schools needing improvement. This has not been an easy task. We were one of only two schools that were removed this year from the northwest Arkansas area, the other being Hartford. There were seven schools in Northwest Arkansas that were added to the list. Students, teachers, and parents have worked hard to see that our students are being provided every opportunity to do their best.

The teachers have set higher expectations for themselves. They know that what they were doing was not working and that they needed to learn as well as the students. The teachers are starting into their second year of working with the Leadership Academy in developing a program that will meet the needs of our students. We felt that there was not a single program that would meet the needs of all the students in Gentry. So we are looking at collecting information that we can use to build a program that will reach all of our students, even when students change from year to year. Data shows that when adult learning increases, student learning also increases. So as our teachers learn more, our students will learn more. To help teachers learn they become part of two different groups, a grade level team and a content team. Each team meets at least once a week and talks about issues that need to be addressed. They take minutes of each meeting to have documentation of areas where they are looking for improvement and the changes that they have made.

We have also provided ways for parents to stay informed of what is going on with their children at school by using student agendas. The student agenda has proven to be a very useful tool. Teachers can write notes about behavior, class assignment, and other activities that are going on at school. These agendas are sent home every week for parents to sign and return. This is one way that parents can keep up with what is going on with their children.

Our students are growing up in a world that is much different than what their parents grew up in. In just the last 10-15 years the increase in knowledge has doubled. I can remember putting aluminum foil on the rabbit-ear antenna to get better reception on our black and white TV. Today they can hold a device that can take a picture and send it around the world

by going on-line or they can e-mail it to anyone in just a matter of a few seconds. They can use this same instrument to call or send a text message without wires attached. What a change! They can get a link to a satellite and type in an address and look at a picture of their home. What is the world going to be in another 10 years when these students are getting ready to go out into the world?

This is the challenge that we as teachers are facing as we are preparing these students. We do not know what it is that we must prepare them to be able to do. So just teaching them facts and figures is not enough anymore. We must prepare them to think and be able to solve problems. The staff has the data to know what we need to do to make sure that we are reaching our goals. Those goals keep moving higher and higher as we are learning more and more. We as educators must continue to learn. We cannot be satisfied with the way things were in the past. You, as parents and community members, can be very proud of what the students and teacher at Gentry Middle School have accomplished the last two years in being removed from the improvement list. Come by and see what is going on with the students at Gentry Middle School and then come again to see what part you can play in developing these students. We are working to see that we are all doing our part so the students at the Gentry Middle School have an opportunity to receive the best education possible- so they will be ready to meet the challenges that are ahead of them.