

January 2015

Have you ever been to a restaurant and left talking about the bad service? The wait staff provides the greatest influence on your opinion of the restaurant by their delivery and attitude toward their customers. How they listen to what your appetite is craving shows if their goal is your satisfaction or to finish the shift. My friends in the restaurant business tell me the greatest food cannot overcome a poor delivery and excellent service will usually lead to a repeat customer even with an average product.

Considering these principles, I believe a direct relationship exists between our departing State Superintendent and a failed delivery. Let me say, not everything she did was bad...there I said it. Many of the reforms were in the best interests of students. I had multiple conversations with Dr. Barresi regarding our community and ways she could help. She listened when I proposed the solution of consolidating our A-F Report Card grade for our elementary sites into one single grade. That being said, seldom has an elected official in Oklahoma been defeated as soundly in a primary as what Dr. Barresi encountered on June 24, 2014.

I had the privilege to attend the first meeting of the State Board of Education that Dr. Barresi presided over. Students from the district I was working for at the time were to make a presentation to the board about what we were doing with technology in the classroom. Most of the board members at the time were appointed by then Governor Brad Henry. The meeting turned into a contentious fight between the board and Dr. Barresi over any issue on the agenda. During the meeting I turned to my colleague and said, "I'm thankful our students are not here yet. They don't need to see this." I've never thought students should see adults act like children. During the caustic dialogue, Dr. Barresi proclaimed a "mandate from the voters of Oklahoma" as she expected to name her staff (an act I fully supported on that day). Looking back on the acrimony of that day, I would have never expected it to continue like it has for the past four years. This was truly a lesson in government as the voters have the ultimate say in what they want and the message was delivered loudly in the primary, similar to a failed business that had a good product but a poor delivery.

Now we look to the future with a new Superintendent of Public Instruction, Joy Hofmeister. I've had the pleasure to visit with her many times during the campaign and I am encouraged by her desire to collaborate with parents, teachers and administrators about the needs of the school children in our state. It is unrealistic to believe everyone will be happy, but finding common ground will be a start. Consensus building is something that has been missing in Oklahoma education and I believe Superintendent Hofmeister's goal is to change that. Such a transformation will not happen overnight but I have already seen the climate altered among many educators. Teachers, administrators and most importantly, students deserve it. Here's to a better delivery while we are improving the product.

Finally, January is School Board Appreciation Month. I want to publicly thank our school board members for their dedication to our students and community. Service such as this is much more than “one evening a month.” Their commitment to this district has my sincere respect and appreciation.