

Early in the summer, while spending some quality time with friends. I heard a nugget of wisdom one of my friends gleaned from his grandfather. It hit home with me about my career and how things have progressed over the past eleven years as the Superintendent of Guthrie Public Schools. The phrase was, "The days are long, but the years are short". That phrase is so true about the challenges we have faced in our school district and community over those eleven years. I recently pieced together a significant timeline for our students and how we educate them in our community. Consider that this year's fifth graders who have transitioned from their neighborhood school to Guthrie Upper Elementary are the first class who only knew of the neighborhood school concept as they were the kindergarten class of 2018-19. I wrote a column in this space at that time which was titled, "Radical Change Can Be Very Difficult". There were many vocal opponents of the change at the time. Numerous staff members who are products of GPS knew only of the grade center concept as they grew up with it and taught with it as well. It hasn't been without challenges but what we see five years later is far better parental involvement in their child's education. In discussions with our elementary principals, there is unanimous consensus for our current model as the advantages far outweigh the shortcomings when compared to the former grade center model.

Last week, some of our leadership team and board members attended the annual Oklahoma State School Board Association Conference. It is co-sponsored by the Cooperative Council for Oklahoma School Administration. Members from Boards of Education from across the state annually attend this event where they learn about best practices to lead a school district. The keynote speaker for the event was Dr. Adolph Brown. It was possibly the best message I've heard in years. He talked about leading with courage while ignoring the noise. It reminded me of the messages shared with our staff at the GPS convocation prior to the start of school. Representative John Talley and I both shared encouragement and spoke about ignoring the noise that doesn't matter as we educate our children. The noise I speak about is nothing more than political rhetoric that is designed to divide and scare teachers, parents and community members with often no basis. Dr. Brown also spoke on the value of servant leadership. I truly believe anyone in education is a servant leader. We all serve others! His comment was, "If serving is beneath you then leadership is above you."

As we started this year, I've never seen the enthusiasm as high as the energy I got from our staff at the convocation. Such energy will serve us well as others outside of our community have joined us in our momentum. There are currently over 900 homes slated to be built inside the city limits of Guthrie. People want to live here!!! This is a great sign of the energy we have collectively created as a community. I told the audience at the recent Guthrie Chamber of Commerce State of the Schools Address; our school district is a catalyst for the future of our community. We have made great strides but we have miles to go before we rest!

As I start year 33 in education and year 12 in Guthrie, I can attest to the validity of my good friend's wisdom from his grandfather, "The days are long, but the years are short."

Go Bluejays!!!