

May 2014

Last Friday we celebrated the hard work of 213 very special people. The Guthrie High School Class of 2014 was front and center at "The Rock" where many have gone before them. This Friday, they will walk (or run) out of Guthrie High School and into the world. I must admit, this time is always bittersweet for me personally. Fortunately, I have the honor on graduation night of looking into the eyes of each graduate as I congratulate them. Most students have the nervous energy of jubilation upon knowing they have truly reached a milestone in their lives. I'm sure one emotion I share with them is fear of the unknown and the most pertinent question, "Are they ready for tomorrow?" I will always wonder if we as a community have done all we can to prepare them for the future.

You may have heard about the dreaded third grade reading test. All third grade students in Oklahoma were tested this spring to determine their reading level. If their results are not considered acceptable by the State Department of Education, they have several options including re-testing and attending summer school. If those updated results do not identify appropriate improvement, the student will be retained in third grade. In Guthrie, we had 51 students that will have to remediate with the steps explained. We are working closely with the students and their parents toward appropriate resolutions.

Preparing our students for the future is not just a school responsibility. Any community has an obligation to provide support for its young people. As a district, we owe thanks to the many volunteers from the Guthrie YMCA who worked with third graders we identified as being "at risk" of failing the reading test. These tutoring sessions took place after school and provided many students the assistance needed to pass the test.

Regardless of your opinions on high stakes testing for third grade students, the challenge we now face is improving reading and not making this merely a third grade endeavor. I believe we must begin in the first grade with a goal of making sure all kids can read. Studies have consistently held that students must first learn to read (Grades 1-3), so they can then read to learn. In fact, students who can't read by the end of third grade are four times more likely to become a high school dropout. The responsibility goes beyond the school to parents, grandparents and other community members. The old adage, "It takes a village to raise a child," is very appropriate in this situation.

If you are the parent or grandparent of a first or second grader at home this summer, **THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW**. Consider getting them involved in some of the many reading programs offered by the Guthrie Public Library. These programs are designed in concert with our curriculum so students do not experience the "summer slide" academically.

While many people this spring have voiced strong opinions on the value of high stakes testing for third graders, I've not heard anyone express disapproval with the concept of all children being proficient readers by the time they finish third grade. Remember the question for our senior class, "Are they ready for tomorrow?" Congratulations to the Class of 2014 and to the Class of 2023 (this year's third graders), know your community is behind you as your bright future becomes a reality.