

July 2016

During the summer months, I often try to complete projects that I wanted to do during the school year but couldn't find the time necessary. I also use it as a time for reflection on the challenges and successes of the previous year. To say this was a challenging year financially for our state would be a huge understatement. Many of you know that I was fortunate enough to participate in Leadership Oklahoma during the past year. We met in many locations across our state to discuss the great qualities Oklahoma has to offer as well as ponder the challenges we face. The group of 49 people included executives from the business sector, legislators, physicians and educational and community leaders from all parts of Oklahoma. We lived in barracks at Ft. Sill (with drill sergeants yelling at us), walked on death row at McAlester and debated issues in the Senate Chamber at the Capitol. If you place the time frame of statewide cuts to public services and collapse of the energy sector with the group I've described, I'm sure you can imagine there was some lively debate about solutions. The group included some of the most incredible people I've had the pleasure to be around. When our opinions differed (and they did at times), we were respectful of the differences and also worked to appreciate the alternate view. What a shame we can't replicate that in national politics.

The diversity of this group provided me an amazing perspective on how differently people view the role of public education. Following each of our nine meetings, the group was asked what our "takeaways" were from the past 2 days. My ultimate takeaway from the experience was that cooperation can lead to success no matter the challenge. Our state is facing the largest challenge financially in many years and an absence of cooperation is not an option. When presented with a problem, I often ask our staff, "How did we get here?" Without an understanding of what led to the problem, a solution can be much more difficult to identify (I was a history teacher before entering administration). Some political leaders in our state have adopted an ideological view of what their vision of our state should be regardless of the surrounding conditions. I believe this lack of awareness has led us to our current position which provides us as Oklahomans with very little to be proud of outside of Saturday afternoons in the fall (college football).

When we talk about our community, I think of the many people I've come in contact with that are Guthrie's greatest cheerleaders. They are the catalyst for the cooperation I'm describing. They identify the surrounding conditions on a daily basis and adjust where we need to go as a community and take us there quickly. The cooperation I'm speaking of has led to a "life preserver" for the next school year at GPS. Some of those people I'm describing have led the charge to fund four teaching positions that were eliminated due to the state funding crisis. Twenty one individuals contributed collectively to fund an Agricultural Education teaching position at the high school. This was completed earlier this month and the teacher is now in place. Recently, the City of Guthrie agreed

to shoulder the entire cost of three school resource officers (previously the school district paid \$64,000 for the cost of two and the City of Guthrie funded the third). Additionally, Guthrie Public Schools has been granted a reduction in water expenses which will allow us to replace three elementary teaching positions that were also eliminated with the cuts. It is the hope of both GPS and the City of Guthrie that state funding will return to a previous level of support so we can provide the services necessary for our students. These two scenarios are amazing examples of cooperation between our community and school district but they are short-term solutions and a long-term solution must come from our state legislature.

Finally, I would be remiss if I didn't bid farewell to a one of the all-time greats from Guthrie, Willie Young. I first met Coach Young when I was a sophomore in high school. He always supplied his special barbecue ribs to those of us working at the Stillwater American Legion baseball tournament. When we moved to Guthrie, I re-connected with Coach Young at an NAACP "Taste and Tell." I once again enjoyed his barbecue and was able to share it with my daughter. Willie, you will be missed but NEVER forgotten. I hope each of you can make the most of your summer; school will be starting sooner than you think.