

October 2016

We have now completed what I call the best high school homecoming festivities in our state. The Bluejay football team didn't disappoint with an exciting 23-20 victory over Lawton Eisenhower that kept many alumni at the stadium longer than they probably wanted. I met numerous alumni that are very proud of Guthrie High School and their hometown. Many of you know my two favorite events as superintendent (other than celebrating a successful bond election) are graduation and homecoming. This year was no different as the event reminds me of how special it is to be a Bluejay.

I was at a meeting last week where the topic of teacher recruitment and retention was discussed. A growing challenge all Oklahoma school districts are facing is a shrinking talent pool of quality applicants for teaching positions. Faculty from both the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University made presentations to a select group of legislators recently during an interim study. Members of the presentation team shared some of their alarming statistics with the people assembled at the meeting.

The team of faculty members from Oklahoma State University led by Drs. Robin Fuxa and Jennifer Sanders surveyed 223 Junior and Senior OSU students enrolled in the professional education programs. The group cited national statistical trends proving teachers tend to teach within 20 miles of their hometown. Despite this national trend, only 39% of the current teacher education students from Oklahoma plan to teach in our state. When asked what influenced the decision of where to teach, 83% indicated pay as being the greatest factor.

Recently, the National Center for Education Studies released the most recent per-pupil spending rates in public schools. Our state is still the lowest of all surrounding states in its commitment financially toward education and the gap has grown since the release of the same statistical report a year ago. In order to match the financial commitment Kansas provides its students, Oklahoma would be required to commit an additional \$2.2 billion annually to education.

Oklahoma ranked 48th out of 50 states last year in teacher salaries. The two below us (North Dakota and Mississippi) gave their teachers significant raises and we did not. Presumably, our state will now rank dead last in teacher pay. One reason many claim is causing the low teacher salaries is the pay superintendents receive. I've come to appreciate the diversionary tactics education opponents employ when it comes to funding. Last spring, the Oklahoma State School Boards Association conducted a study to determine where our state would rank if all salaries for superintendents were diverted to teaching salaries. Our state ranking didn't change by putting that money in teaching salaries.

So if you've read this far, congratulations and you may be thinking, those are informative statistics and data but so what! Here is why this matters; the teachers

that many of us grew up with were highly skilled professionals that answered a calling to be a teacher. Many of those were from the “baby boom” era of post WWII United States culture. The teachers of that era are retiring and we do not have enough students in teacher education programs who want to teach in our state. We are exporting our talent to Texas, Kansas, Arkansas and elsewhere.

We are fortunate that we have wonderful teachers in Guthrie for our children. Each year, we lose some to retirement. We have lost several to the private sector because of pay and/or current working conditions that exist statewide. Finding their replacement becomes more difficult with each widening gap in our state’s commitment to education when compared to surrounding states.

You will have a chance to cast your ballot in the general election on November 8th. I consider this one of the most patriotic things you can do as a citizen outside of serving in our armed forces. It will be a very long list of candidates and questions. Please study those issues carefully PRIOR to going to the polls.