

September 2019

This column is a bit overdue. Despite some challenges that always seem to surface, we have had the smoothest start of the school year in my eight years in Guthrie. Due to the changes which were implemented last year, the number of students attending school in a new building was greatly reduced. This made it much more familiar for students and parents. We always have some rough spots with regard to transportation. One of the challenges that we encountered this year was a large number of students (over 60) who signed up for transportation over the weekend before our first day of school. This caused previously arranged routes to be over capacity and provided a ripple effect across the district. We have mostly smoothed out those rough spots and continue to fine tune our routes.

We have grown by over 100 students as a district when comparing our student counts with last year. Our effort to reduce class size was accomplished in many instances but we still have some pockets of classes that are larger than we would like. Our numbers in pre-k and kindergarten were much higher than previous years and there is no realistic way to predict or prepare for those increased enrollments. Fortunately, we have been able to hire additional staff to reduce the class sizes and in other cases we are seeking para-professionals to serve as teaching assistants in our largest classes. With the number of new houses under construction in our school district, I would expect this upward trend to continue.

Now to the reason (excuse) for the column being overdue. This column was mostly written in my head a week ago and Monday happened. Readers who have children in our district may have heard there were network outages over the last week. Our district was actually hit with a cyberattack. We have been in contact with officials from the Oklahoma Office of Management and Enterprise Services as well as the Department of Homeland Security. Thankfully, no sensitive information was compromised. It showed that safeguards we have in place for such information was effective and modifications have been made to avoid a similar occurrence in the future. Our technology staff have been working to gradually restore services fully and progress is being made. This is a reminder that bad people exist on the internet and the world we live in today requires constant vigilance with regard to security.

Last spring, we began phasing in some security upgrades to each building. Those upgrades take on multiple forms. We have installed security badge kiosks for visitors to our buildings. Visitors will be required to scan their driver's license or state issued identification card in order to obtain a visitors badge to enter a building. That information will be compared to a national sex offender registry and a picture of the visitor will be taken. The picture will be printed on the badge as well as the time of entry and where they are permitted to visit. The visitor will then check out and return the badge. Visitors may also choose to have a badge pass sent to their mobile phone so that they can scan the pass each time they enter the building. Another layer of security involves an increased presence of local law enforcement in each of our buildings. We have 4 dedicated school resource officers for our district. Additionally, we utilize off-duty members of the Guthrie Police Department or the Logan County Sheriff's Office with the goal of having a law enforcement officer in every school building while school is in session.

Despite a few bumps in the road, the 2019-20 school year is off to a great start. Get out and support our students in the many competitions and performances. They will make you proud to be a Bluejay!