

August 2018

In the summer of 2013, the Guthrie Public School's Long Range Planning Committee delivered a list of priorities to our Board of Education. The list was the culmination of nine months of meetings and study to ultimately improve our school district. Some of the priorities involved improving facilities which many of you have noticed. It also included acquiring property to construct an elementary school in the area of greatest growth for our school district, our southern portion. Upon completion of this capitol project, the recommendation also included a shift to elementary schools where students attend based on geography rather than the grade of their child (neighborhood schools). This concept is the predominant delivery method for school districts of our size and larger.

Soon, we will embark on the most sweeping changes that will fulfill the recommendations of that committee from 2013. In 27 years of being an educator, I've learned that change is difficult in education. Radical change can be very difficult. Many of you know that I am also a parent of two elementary students, so this affects my family as well. I have been amazed at how our staff has embraced the changes as we have presented data about how this is better for our students. Multiple studies have shown that reducing site transitions (attending classes at different schools) improves graduation rates and achievement.

One of the goals listed in the bond package our voters overwhelmingly approved in the Spring of 2015 was to reduce the amount of time our students ride on a bus before and after school. Some of our students rode on a bus for two hours before school and another two hours after school. Our preliminary estimates on ride times for this upcoming school year indicate an approximate average of 30% less time on a bus for our students. An amazing by-product of these changes are projections that include elimination of two bus routes and over 800 fewer miles our buses will travel EACH DAY. For several years, we have known that our transportation costs are much higher than our peers. Some of this increased cost is outside of our control since our district is fairly large geographically. We have almost twice as many square miles in our district as Deer Creek or Stillwater. Those savings can be diverted to the classroom where it will have a greater impact on our students. We began looking at how we could reduce ride times for students with the work of the Long Range Planning Committee and determined that building an elementary school closest to our area of greatest growth would provide our school district with the best opportunity to improve our overall educational environment.

There has been a lot of discussion on social media about our changes. Some of our patrons have voiced negative opinions about the upcoming changes. When your goal is transformation, not merely cursory changes, it requires evaluation and recalibration. With the volume of changes we are undertaking, there are surely items which will require fine tuning after school starts. While it is easy to become emotional based solely on how the changes will affect you, it is imperative that the GPS nation demonstrate patience and flexibility. I would ask everyone in our district to judge the changes after we have had the opportunity to recalibrate our efforts following the start of school.

The changes we are undergoing this year have been methodically studied and planned over several years. It is important to keep our eye on the ultimate goal of transforming education in our community. Let's move forward as we enter the 2018-19 school year with the enthusiasm that comes from looking into the eyes of a child knowing as a community we have provided the best possible future for them. Go Bluejays!