

Dreaming the Dreams of Our Children
Understanding the Heart of an Educator
April 6, 2018 Written by Dr. Tom Deighan, LPS Superintendent

In my March 11, 2018 article in the *Lawton Constitution*, I used the following analogy to describe Oklahoma educators' growing frustration, but I never imagined how vividly it would unfold: *Anyone who pokes a bear can expect the bear's wrath, and Oklahoma educators are like bears guarding their young right now. If they ever feel so threatened that they need to step out of the den they will not return until their cubs are safe.*

Over the last week, we have seen our calm, nurturing educators move with an unprecedented determination, and true enough, once they decided to walk out, they also decided not to return until satisfied. Some were shocked that teachers did not return after the pay raise, but non-educators often misjudge what motivates people who dedicate their lives to serving children every day.

Jamie Polk, Assistant Superintendent of Lawton Public Schools, explains it this way, "Anyone who thought Lawton educators were just fighting for themselves, do not understand the heart of an educator." As a result, teachers immediately expressed appreciation for the pay increase, but classrooms and support staff still had needs, so they sought to ensure that the funding was truly in place. As Dr. Polk explains it, "Most teachers would have taken less of a raise to ensure that classrooms and support staff were taken care of first."

As our momma and poppa bears have stepped away from their classrooms temporarily, I have heard many of them express a deep appreciation for this community, especially the parents. I have seen visible tears as they talk about their conflicting emotions. They miss their classes, their kids, and their school families, and they pray nightly for all involved. The more it hurts them personally, the more they are determined to see this process to the end – so they do not have to ever step away from their cubs again.

Social media tends to highlight the handful of teachers who have acted out during this process, but I am always proud to report that the vast majority of educators have been models in word and deed for our children. LPS educators are quick to distance themselves from the handful of people who seem determined to be hurtful. Such people are rare, and they do not represent the fine educators I know. LPS educators are mindful that parents are watching, and that parents have been supportive so far. We all thank you for that.

We must also celebrate the strong, stable leadership of the LPS Board of Education on this matter. They committed to *respect and support* our local educators, and they have not wavered. They have also done everything possible to lessen the impact on families by serving meals, allowing as many activities as possible, and informing everyone through our website and daily updates. We are very mindful of testing, activities, and other issues that may be impacted if this work stoppage continues much longer. We will do everything possible to manage these issues effectively and to inform everyone involved. So far, we do not foresee significant impact to testing or any need to extend the school year beyond graduation. However, if the work stoppage extends much into this week, things will become more complicated.

No one wishes to see this process last any longer than necessary, least of all our LPS staff, but I believe they will see this through. Lawton Public Schools will continue to update parents and staff before each

school day regarding our ability to hold classes. Please visit our lawtonps.org website for all information pertaining to this work-stoppage. And please pray for our students' safety this second Sunday of the month . . . and that this crisis is resolved very soon. Our momma bears and poppa bears want to return to their dens, and their cubs truly need them.