

August 2019 Dispatch Article

Throughout the summer, I have had many opportunities to be thankful and proud as the Superintendent of Thomasville City Schools. We have celebrated the return of teachers this week with recognitions of their commitment throughout the summer to pursue professional development and continue to educate our students in multiple programs and camps. Our maintenance and custodial crews have prepared our buildings and made them shine, while our technology staff has updated and imaged thousands of devices that will enhance teaching and learning. Hundreds of students have been fed through our summer feeding program led by our child nutrition staff and year-round employees at the central office and schools have done the thoughtful and important work of hiring personnel, reviewing data, setting goals, and planning for the year to come. I am truly humbled and grateful for the efforts and willingness to do the work for our kids at all levels and in all areas of the district.

I am less proud, however, of the lack of willingness to do the work for our kids and for the citizens of North Carolina that elected officials in Raleigh have demonstrated. Simply put, we still do not have a budget. As we look toward the first day of school for most districts in the state, the lack of a budget continues to tie our hands as we try to plan and make due with last year's budget funding. Our kids and our teachers deserve better and all of us as citizens deserve an elected body that meets its annual deadlines while not leaving all of us, schools and citizens, waiting in the wings.

Over 30 years, from 1989 to 2019, nine budgets have been passed in August or later, including the 1998 budget that was not passed until the end of October. In a recent article in The Charlotte Observer, NC General Assembly Controller Wesley Taylor noted an estimated \$42,000 a day is the cost for operating when the General Assembly is in session. As we approach the 40-day mark of the new fiscal year with no compromise in sight and continued sessions assured, that accounts for \$1,680,000. Just think of the good that could be done with that amount, whether in schools or in other areas of state funded projects and services from which we all benefit.

For me, this is not just a partisan matter. Frankly, both sides have agenda issues they are fighting for that could benefit the schools and the state in general. It is also not just a General Assembly issue. At the Department of Public Instruction, elected leadership continues a dispute over the state reading assessment tool. The companies involved and the state procurement office are filing injunctions and stays over contracts and what product and program to use. These continued actions drain state resources and put our students and teachers at additional disadvantage just days before the start of the school year.

The innovative state which led the region and the country in education has disappeared in the last 25 years since I left Clemson University and ventured to North Carolina to begin my career. At the state level, we are left with an issue of failing to meet expectations, failing to do the job, and failing to do the work of governing. Our city and county governments have submitted budgets and are waiting. Our three school districts have submitted budgets and are waiting. We would not stand for these local entities to fail in their duties, yet those elected to do the work in Raleigh continue to let us down by failing to make the important decisions and compromises needed to move forward at this time. Is getting your way, either way, really more important than getting the work done for the people who elected you?

My 6th grade teacher Mrs. Hoffman was pretty strict about sharing, teamwork, collaboration and working out our differences. We were a pretty headstrong group of 11 and 12 year olds, but she knew we were better when we worked together. Maybe those in Raleigh could use some of Mrs. Hoffman's influence. Let's tell those elected by us and for us to get this done – for our kids, teachers, schools, and communities. I have got a great list of things to be thankful and proud of in Thomasville, and I'd love to add a passed budget to the list.

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