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I don't know about all of you, but I always look forward to the "Progress Edition" of the Imperial Republican.

I think it's amazing to see how far our community has come each year. When other small, rural communities are struggling to keep their main street business occupied, Imperial seems to be flourishing with new businesses, new families and various improvements. We are indeed a progressive community.

But in order to progress, we must allow and accept change.

How many of us can honestly admit that we embrace change and are comfortable with it? Change means we may have to leave our comfort zone, think outside the box or modify our standard way of thinking. Easier said than done for most of us.

As in the rest of the world, changes in education are never ending. Trends, technology and resources require educators to think outside the box much of the time.

An excellent example of this is the new 5th Year Program (Career Academy) being implemented at Chase County Schools for the 2008-2009 school year. By teaming up with Mid Plains Community College, we are able to offer students dual credit courses while in high school so they have the opportunity to stay at CCS an additional year, and graduate with not only a high school diploma, but also an associate's degree from MPCC. This way of thinking is a considerable change, one that will take time and trust to develop, but CCS is proud to be one of the first schools in the state to be able to offer such a program.

A significant change that the school is forced to deal with on an ongoing basis deals with the safety of our students. Gone are the days where all the doors to the school were open and unlocked throughout the day. But the world has changed and schools have been the target of much violence.

The members of the Board of Education at CCS have spent a lot of time discussing safety issues at the school. We feel it's important to keep our school open to the public, yet make it a safe place for students to learn during the day. Along with locking all but the main doors, we've implemented the visitor sign in program, allocated more funds for security cameras and continue to work with fire and law enforcement officials on precautionary measures.

We also hope to have the reverse 911 system in place shortly after the first of the year in order to notify parents and caretakers of emergencies or schedule changes happening at the school as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Another change that patrons will notice shortly after the first of the year is the implementation of a school bus picking up children in Imperial in the mornings before school.

In many families both parents have to be to work earlier than the children are monitored on the playground at school. By offering bus service before school, we hope to ease that dilemma, as well as alleviate some of the congestion on 9th Street in front of the school in the mornings. Safety of the students is paramount. I would again remind all parents to respect the crosswalk areas at the school and ask that you not park, pick up or drop off your children in those areas.

Technology is an area where it's difficult to keep current with all the changes. As you know, cell phones, computers and electronics seem outdated before you even figure out how to use the model you just purchased.

The one- to- one laptop computer program was put in place nearly three years ago at CCS in order to give our students access to information world wide, as well as to sharpen their skills

working with computers. Board members, administrators and teachers spent countless hours researching the one-to-one initiative, but what we could not foresee was the problems with connectivity to the web.

While we have made much progress, the time will soon be coming when we have to decide whether or not to continue with the program. We feel the laptops were a step forward and have given our students an advantage. It will be disappointing if we have to take a step backwards, but no one ever guaranteed change would be easy or always successful.

Whether the changes are in technology, transportation, safety, curriculum, athletics or extracurricular activities, I would encourage you as patrons and taxpayers of Chase County Schools to get involved and educate yourselves. Ask questions, visit the school, get involved.

So many times we assume that what we hear on the street or in the coffee shop is gospel, when much of the time the facts have gotten twisted, bent or broken. I challenge you to make a change.

Find out what is really going on at your school. Visit with a teacher. Eat lunch with your student. Attend a band concert, basketball game or board meeting. Volunteer to read to students.

Make a difference in a child’s life in 2009.