WAURIKA — “You have to change with the world,” Roxie Terry said. “If you’re not running forward, you’re falling behind.”

Two short sentences, which Terry will tell you are not original thoughts. However, changing with the world and progressing forward are the concepts that have set the tempo in the four years Terry has been superintendent of Waurika Public Schools.

Those concepts became apparent recently, when Terry and Waurika High Principal Dale Spradlin spent some time reviewing the 2005-06 school year and looking ahead to the future.

Without doubt, the biggest change and step forward in the district this year was relocating sixth-grade students from Waurika Elementary to Waurika High. It created a middle school format of sixth- through eighth-graders and took the school system to new ground by bringing sixth-graders into the same building with students of high school age.

“The change in the sixth grade went OK, and we learned some things that will help us for (the 2006-07) school year,” said Spradlin. “Academically, the sixth-graders adapted just fine, and I think it was good for them socially. They learned that as you get older, there’s more responsibility.”

After nine months of the new format, Spradlin said a possible change in the future will be putting the sixth-grade students on the same type of teacher rotation used by the eighth- through 12-graders. That means different teachers instructing different subjects, instead of students remaining in one classroom to receive all their instruction from one teacher.

“We tried to keep the sixth-graders self-contained this first year, but looking back,” Spradlin said, “we probably need to get them to accept (teacher rotation) as part of middle school life.

“I think they can handle it, and it would help get them prepared for what they’ll experience for the rest of their school lives.”

Although format change introduced this past year that Terry felt will begin showing results as soon as the 2006-07 school year, was bumping up the prekindergarten program from a half-day to a full-day program.

“Prekindergarten becoming a full day was a good move,” he said. “I think our kindergarten teachers will start seeing the results of that in the next school year.

“With the kids learning socialization skills and some basics in pre-K, it means our kindergarten teachers can begin working on academic learning skills right away.”

Lower grades have been a focus area since Terry’s arrival, building on the theory that strong programs in the upper levels are the reflection of solid fundamentals and programs at the grade-school level.

He noted that in 2005-06, “our reading scores were up on the third-grade level, which is a result of us being in the third year of the ‘Reading First’ program. That’s a great program for kindergarten through third-graders, and I think we’re seeing some of the results from starting that program.”

Terry said the entire district will also benefit from expanding special education instruction, and by the district partnering with the Turning Point program that has been organized by the Jefferson County Health Department.
“We’ve added another special education teacher for next year, which means we’ll have three now, which will better serve the kids who need those programs,” he said. “Tara Gunter will be the special ed teacher for pre-K through third grade, Mary VanBeber will be handling fourth through eighth grades, and Michelle Terrell will continue to teach high school program.

“We’ll also be adding a counseling position at the elementary school, which is something that’s come out of the ‘Turning Point’ committee meetings the health department started. One of the keys to creating better emotional and physical health in the county is that it’s definitely got to start at the elementary school level.

“The new position at the elementary school will allow us to teach young kids about things like conflict resolution, self-esteem, bullying, handling family matters and those types of issues. It will be a big addition to our district.”

Reviewing the past year at the high school/junior high level, both administrators felt, as Spradlin said, “This was as good a year academically and athletically as we’ve had since I’ve been here.”

Going down the checklist of extracurricular programs, Terry noted, “We tasted success in athletics; our mock trial team almost took state; our academic team, which won state last year, almost went again.

“Our band went to three contests and scored very high in all of them, including winning our class in marching band competition [in the fall]. Our band booster club have been very active, and was able to raise $7,000 for new uniforms that are very pretty.

“Our drama and speech program did pretty well, and our FCCLA program achieved higher placings in contests than they have in many years.”

Spradlin added, “The FFA program had two students — Dell Farris and Clayton Sherrill — make State Degree status.

“And although we’re not directly connected with the scouting program, there were four of our high school students who made Eagle Scout this year, which is several for this size of community. That says a lot about the community’s involvement and, also, Drew Robertson deserves a lot of credit for that.”

Terry also had a collective pat on the back for the staff of instructors that have been put together in the district. He praised their willingness and desire to continue their own education and seek higher qualifications.

“We had one of the area’s ‘Teachers of the Year,’ Jeri McCauley, and Angela Rouse became the second one of our teachers to gain National Certification, and we have four others who are working on that program,” the fourth-year superintendent said.

“We’ve instituted a ‘distance learning program’ with Southwestern (State University), which has made us a field site that allows our teachers to do most of their work on earning a master’s (degree) from right here at school. Three teachers have gotten their master’s that way and four others are working on it.”

“A majority of our teachers and even our principals are getting ready to go to a ‘Great Expectations Workshop’ in Lawton, which is a program that’s pushed by the state department of education,” Terry continued. “Our teachers like to go to those, which focus on things like setting realistic goals, realistic discipline (techniques) and things like that, which allow kids to live up to your expectations.

“They are four-day workshops that allow our teachers and administrators to get rejuvenated.”

Terry noted that although overall enrollment in the district was down by 15 students in the 2005-06 school year, the percentage of average daily attendance rose.
In addition to better attendance, he also said strides were taking in the area of discipline, resulting in “suspensions being down by about two-thirds of what they were in the past.”

Terry praised the board of education for its support of existing and new programs, and said the district “is starting to reap benefits from how the board has handled the district’s finances, and the public school foundation is also continuing to make a big difference, and funded several scholarships again this year.”

Overall, Terry felt, 2005-06 was a year in which the district was “running forward.”

“But,” he added, “as good a year as this year’s been, I’m really looking forward to next year.”