

Friday, November 12, 2010

Dear Families and Friends of the School District of Fort Atkinson,

“Thanksgiving, after all, is a word of action.”

W. J. Cameron

Our beautiful fall season appears to be winding down. Temperatures are gradually cooling. Yet the beautiful sunshine still persists making walks, jogs, bike rides, and driving pleasurable and peaceful, as one observes the transformation after the fall harvest.

I like the quote above as we approach the Thanksgiving season. Especially after a contentious political period! I think a common ground of agreement for all of us, is that the campaign ads, telephone calls, and elections are finally over!

Now is a good time to be thankful for the things we have. Good health is always something to be thankful for and in these economic times, employment is another! I am sure all of us know of someone, a relative, neighbor, or friend, who during this terrible recession may have lost their job!

I think too, something I am thankful for are those people who for no other reason than the good will within them, give so generously and graciously of their time and their lives to help others less fortunate. Those who organize and lead food drives, food pantry volunteers, people who volunteer at health and dental clinics, build houses for others (Habitat), lead clothing drives so a child will have a warm coat when the frigid temperatures are upon us, or donate generous amounts of school supplies! These are society’s heroes who demonstrate the best there is about humanity, compassion and service to others.

I would like to think I have always been mindful of such selfless and giving people, but for some reason this Thanksgiving season, they are more in my thoughts than any other time. Maybe a note or phone call to someone you know who engages in such works might be a kind gesture of gratitude on our part.

Girls Swim Team, Sectional Champions at Cudahy – on to State this Weekend! Our Girls’ Swim Team were met by a Police and Fire Department escort this past Saturday after qualifying the *entire team* for the WIAA State Swimming meet to be held this weekend, November 12 and 13. This young and “up and coming” team has been getting stronger with each meet this fall breaking many school records. Last Saturday, they put it all together as they broke five team records and won four of the 11 events they competed in! Out of 30 swims, they had twenty-six best times (absolutely astonishing according to jubilant coaches Miles Allie and Tammy Forester). This Friday they will swim three relays and seven individual events. Go Blackhawks, well done!

GREASE...This weekend! This is the musical that took the country by storm in 1978! Good girl Sandy (Olivia Newton John) and greaser Danny (John Travolta) fell in love over the summer. Curtain time is 7:30 PM for the performances on Friday, and Saturday evening. The matinee performance on Sunday is at 2 PM. Come to the performance and have some fun, and see for yourself the great efforts of the cast, directing staff and crew in bringing an entertaining show to Fort Atkinson!

A Letter from Our Board of Education: I have enclosed an important communication from our Board of Education. Please take a couple of minutes to read it. I believe by doing so, you will be well briefed and caught up on major fiscal accomplishments impacting our learning community and some challenges and opportunities down the road.

Board Approves Recommendation of Task Force with Modification of Length: Given the economic times in our community, the Board supports the Task Force recommendation of asking the citizens to approve the *continuation of support at the same level as it approved in April of 2006*, which was \$694,000 above the revenue limit to maintain programs and services. While we will be asking for the same level of support from our citizens, it is important to understand that our revenue source from the state has decreased from \$280 per student to \$200, resulting in over \$220,000 less per year in revenue for the District. Thus we are looking at expenditure reductions to absorb this state imposed reduction in revenue while asking our local citizens to maintain their same level of support. The Board's only modification of the Task Force recommendation was to reduce the length of time from *five years to three years*, giving the Board and the administration an opportunity to see what the next Biennium Budget (2011-2013) will bring with a new governor and legislative body.

Fort Students Recognized as Advance Placement (AP) SCHOLARS! A couple of weeks ago there was an article in the *Daily Union* that highlighted 31 of our students from Fort Atkinson High School who earned the designation of Advanced Placement (AP) Scholar by the College Board in recognition of their exceptional achievement on the college-level AP Program exams. The article noted various degrees of distinctions, but to be named an AP scholar, one needed to score a 3 or higher (5 being top score) on three or more AP exams.

The College Board's Advanced Placement Program offers students the opportunity to take challenging college-level courses while still in high school, and to receive college credit, advanced placement, or both for successful performance on the AP exams. About 18 percent of the 1.8 million high school students worldwide who took AP Exams performed at a sufficiently high level to merit the recognition of AP Scholar. Fort Atkinson students took 254 AP exams in May 2010 after completing challenging college-level courses at the High School. The College Board recognizes several levels of achievement based on a student's performance on AP exams. The Board will be presented a report on our overall performance later this school year.

Fort Atkinson Seniors Named National Merit Semifinalists: Congratulations to three of our seniors at Fort High recently named National Merit Semifinalists in an announcement by the American College Testing Program. They are Taylor Brown, daughter of Nathan and Pamela Brown, Arjun Dhillon son of Satwant and Rubal Dhillon, and Ramsey Statz, son of Mark and Wendy Statz. They earned this honor by virtue of their high scores on the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT). We wish them well as the move on to hopefully finalists, and ultimately National Merit Scholarship Winners to be announced later this school year.

Parent-Teacher Conferences: Starting November 15, we are hosting parent-teacher conferences in all of our buildings. The dates for these conferences and appointments have been sent home to you by your building principals in communications. If you go to our website www.fortschools.org you will see the dates at each of the six district schools.

Early Release Days—Why Staff Development is so Important! I have written hundreds of communications to parents over the years. However one area I have not stressed nearly enough is the tremendous emphasis we place on providing our teachers and staff with quality staff development and in-service. This is high on our priority list in remaining a vibrant and progressive

learning community! We want our teachers and staff to continually grow in being exposed and trained in best teaching and educational practices that they can employ in our classrooms. Imagine a teacher coming out of college and never receiving any further training on pedagogy other than what they might pick up in required course work to maintain licensure? Or not having the opportunity to learn new methodology in collaboration with teaching peers? If there is one thing I have learned in 36 years in education it is – it is forever evolving!

This fall in August, September, and October our elementary teachers have been given in-service on new elementary report cards that truly reflect our curriculum and what is taught and assessed. They have also been trained in new instructional strategies and practices in reading. I would add the emphasis we place on reading has always been of the highest priority. It is the gateway to all further learning and right out of the “starting blocks,” we want to make sure our instruction and interventions are sound.

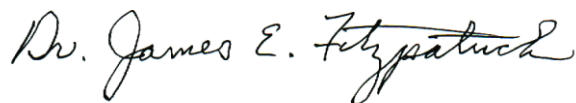
Our Middle and High School teachers have utilized our in-service time to finalize curriculum mapping. This allows us to *connect* the instruction or *articulate* it so we do not have any gaps between courses and grade levels in our teaching and learning. They have also been working hard in finalizing common assessments. This insures that two different teachers offering the same course (example English 9) at the end of a quarter will give an exam or an assessment as we call them now, that is uniform in assessing the same standards and expectations built into the course design. To teach in Fort, one must teach to the high expectations that have been established in concert with state, national, and local standards. In short, that is our game plan that has served us well!

Another area of in-service and staff development we have been finalizing this fall has been our *K-5 Science* programming. The Science Team finalized the program selection this fall and has received their first round of training on the selected units that are being piloted during this school year.

Needless to say, our early release time is very valuable to us. I also want to comment on instructional expectations on these days. Even though classes at the middle and high school will meet for an abbreviated amount of time each period, we expect there to be quality instruction.

In closing, my best wishes to you and your families as you gather this Thanksgiving season. We dismiss for Thanksgiving break after our school day on Tuesday, November 23. I look forward to seeing many of you at *Grease*, parent-teacher conferences, our Fall Sports Awards Night on November 22, and at winter sports events that are just around the corner! Happy Thanksgiving and Go Blackhawks!

With kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dr. James E. Fitzpatrick". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. James Fitzpatrick
Superintendent
School District of Fort Atkinson