

August 17, 2012

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

“Education is a better safeguard of liberty than a standing army.”

Edward Everett

The school bells will be ringing soon. We are looking forward to a great school year and getting off to a great start! Fall sports are underway with teams practicing in earnest for their upcoming seasons. In the event you have not registered your child(ren), please stop in the upcoming days so we can get off to a smooth start.

I like the quote above because I think it gives one a visual of the power of a strong educational system. When students leave our system, empowered by a good, sound, comprehensive education, their chances of being *college and career ready* are greatly enhanced. Our mission is to provide quality opportunities and services that each student needs to achieve his/her academic and personal potential. When a populace is well educated, they enjoy greater liberty—the world is full of examples that bare this out!

Speaking of getting off to a good start, I ran across some tips published by the National Association of School Psychologists I thought would be timely in passing on to you.

1. *Review all of the information.* Review the material sent by the school as soon as it arrives. These packets include important information about your child’s teacher, room number, school supply requirements, sign ups for after-school sports and activities, school calendar dates, bus transportation, health and emergency forms, and volunteer opportunities.
2. *Mark your calendar.* Make a note of important dates, especially back-to-school nights. This is especially important if you have children in more than one school and need to juggle obligations.
3. *Buy school supplies early.* Try to get the supplies as early as possible and fill the backpacks a week or two before school starts.
4. *Re-establish the bedtime and mealtime routines.* Prepare your child for this change by talking with your child about the benefits of school routines in terms of not becoming overtired or overwhelmed by schoolwork and activities. Include pre-bedtime reading!
5. *Turn off the TV.* Encourage your child to play quiet games, do puzzles, flash cards, color, or read as early morning activities instead of watching television. This will help ease your child into the learning process and school routine. If possible, maintain this practice throughout the school year. Television is distracting for many children, and your child will arrive at school better prepared to learn each morning if he or she has engaged in less passive activities.
6. *Visit school with your child.* If your child is young or in a new school, visit the school with your child. Locating their classroom, locker, lunchroom, etc., will help ease pre-school anxieties and also allow your child to ask questions about the new environment.

7. *Minimize clothes shopping woes.* Buy only the essentials. Summer clothes are usually fine during the early fall, but be sure to have at least one pair of sturdy shoes. Check with your school to confirm dress code guidelines. Common concerns include extremely short skirts and shorts, low rise pants, bare midriffs, spaghetti strap or halter tops, exposed undergarments, and clothing that have antisocial messages.
8. *Designate and clear a place to do homework.* Older children should have the option of studying in their room or a quiet area of the house. Younger children usually need an area set aside in the family room or kitchen to facilitate adult monitoring, supervision, and encouragement.
9. *Select a spot to keep backpacks.* Designate a spot for your children to place their school belongings as well as a place to put important notices and information sent home for you to see. Explain that emptying their backpack each evening is part of their responsibility, even for young children.
10. *Set alarm clocks.* Have school age children set their own alarm clocks to get up in the morning. Praise them for prompt response to morning schedules and bus pickups.
11. *Send a brief note to your child's teacher.* Let the teachers know that you are interested in getting regular feedback on how and what your child is doing in school. Be sure to attend back-to-school night and introduce yourself to the teachers. Find out how they like to communicate with parents (e.g., through notes, e-mail, or phone calls). Convey a sincere desire to be a partner with your children's teachers to enhance their learning experience.
12. *Familiarize yourself with the other school professionals.* Learn their roles and how best to access their help if you need them. This would include the principal and front office personnel; school psychologist, counselor, the reading specialist, speech therapist, and school nurse; and those directing after school activities.

Back-to-School Nights: As contained in the tips above, please be sure to attend Back-to-School nights. Our teachers and staff are eager to meet you. The dates for these events are as follows: Purdy, Rockwell, and Luther meet on August 28 and Barrie meets on August 30. These programs begin at 5:30 PM at all four elementary buildings. The Middle School Back-to-School Night is Tuesday, September 11, at 6:30 PM and the High School Back-to-School Night will be held on Monday September 10 at 6:30 PM.

Schedule of Attendance for 2012-2013 School Year: The first day of classes will be on Tuesday, September 4. However, on that day at the middle school and the high school respectively, only the 6th graders and the 9th graders are to report for a first day "run through/orientation" before the older students join them on Wednesday, September 5. Kindergarten classes (five-year-old) at our elementary schools: Parents will be notified of scheduling on the first and second days where we have traditionally invited half the class each day in transitioning the children so they are better acclimated when we begin our full day kindergarten schedule on September 6. Four-year-old kindergarten programming with our community partners begins on Tuesday, September 4. On Thursday, September 6, ALL students will report, as the school year will be officially underway.

2012-2013 Calendar Highlights: Here are some 2012-13 calendar highlights:

September 28 – Early dismissal
October 25 and 26 – No School
November 2 – Early dismissal
November 21-23 – Thanksgiving Break, no classes
December 7 – Early dismissal
December 22-January 1 – Winter Break, no classes

January 2 – Classes resume
January 25 – Records Day, no classes
February 21 – Early dismissal
February 22 – SWEIO, no classes
March 29- April 5 Spring Break, no classes
April 8 – Classes resume
May 10 – Early dismissal
May 27 – Memorial Day, no classes
June 9 – Graduation 1:00 PM
June 11 – Last day of classes, early dismissal

Class Sizes: As in the past, we are doing our best to keep class sizes as desirable as possible. With ACT 10 and revenue limits imposed, this has become more challenging each year. Typically, we have had class sizes for K-2 at or less than 22 pupils per class. This year that will creep up to 23 in a class. In grades 3-5, we have worked hard to keep class sizes at 25 or less. In most classrooms, we will have succeeded at this; however, there are a couple of classes at the 5th grade level that may swell up to 27. Where student needs are greatest we will evaluate the need for an educational aide in the classroom. Our plight is not different than other districts our size. Middle and High School classes should be similar to last year with class sizes ranging from 23 to 29 depending upon the course.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in our Elementary Schools: Over the course of the 2011-2012 school year, a group of educators from Barrie, Luther, Purdy, and Rockwell Elementary Schools met to discuss how we can get the most out of our instructional day and how to make all learners feel welcome, safe, and connected to our learning community. All educators within this group noted we are very fortunate to work with outstanding students and families. We also noted, even though we have supportive families and enjoyable students, we often face common challenges in each of our four elementary schools.

A desired outcome we have for all four of our elementary buildings is to have common behavioral expectations for all of our students using a common language to describe these expectations. While we have always taken pride in the respectful behavior expectations established in all four of our elementary schools, there existed some differences. As students matriculate to sixth grade, we want them to arrive there with a common culture of behavioral expectations.

Teachers and administrators made site visits to other schools in the state who were implementing behavioral and social expectations programs. It was clear from our site visits and follow-up discussions that the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) system was the best fit for our learning community.

Starting this fall, our four elementary schools will be rolling out PBIS for students in grades kindergarten through fifth. To assist in this rollout process, our PBIS Committee has met extensively in the spring and summer, attended required trainings to become a state-approved PBIS school, and planned curriculum that corresponds with this system.

Here are some changes you and your child can expect in their classroom and school starting in September:

- All students will be taught common social and behavioral expectations for all areas of the building and playground.
- All staff will use common language in teaching and reinforcing these expectations throughout the school year.
- All students will participate in a positive behavior reinforcement system known as the “clip system” where they will move up or down a behavior chart dependent on how they are following the classroom and school expectations.

- All staff will use a common “Office Referral Form” which will assist in the behavioral data collection process.
- A group of educators in each building will review and analyze behavioral data on a regular basis to make data-informed decisions.
- Parents and guardians will be updated on a regular basis on how their child is doing in following the school expectations.
- Students will be recognized for demonstrating respect, responsibility, and safety that is above and beyond what is expected of them.
- Students who still struggle behaviorally will be provided with re-teaching opportunities.
- Students who engage in significant and/or ongoing behavioral challenges will receive an Office Referral and have a consequence determined by the Building Principal.
- Parents will be notified if their child receives an Office Referral.

Ultimately, we are hopeful the positive and consistent aspects of PBIS will promote a culture of respect, responsibility, and safety and make your child’s experience in our learning community an enjoyable one. If you have questions regarding PBIS, feel free to contact John Peterson, Director of Pupil Services, at 563-7804 or your Building Principal.

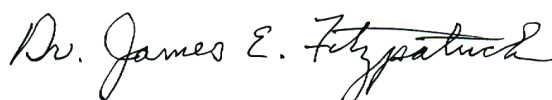
Farm to School: In an effort to work in collaboration with FORT HEALTH CARE in their mission to make Fort Atkinson the healthiest community in Wisconsin, we will be participating in a program entitled *Harvest of the Month*. Juicy, locally grown watermelon will be our inaugural item in our Harvest of the Month program for the upcoming school year. Locally grown produce tastes better, is easier on the environment, supports the local economy and is more fun. Last year Wisconsin grown apples were served. This year each month, we will feature a locally produced food item along with taste tests and glimpses into local agriculture, both of which have been shown to increase children's consumption of fresh vegetables and fruits. We will share more with you about this program during the school year.

Our New Web Page: I hope you will have a chance to check out our new web page www.fortschools.org. We hope to list timely news and videos that highlight information and events in our learning community. One of our goals this year is to utilize this media outlet in such a way that our students, parents, and citizens will go to it quite often for timely news and information.

Strategic planning for 2013-2018: In my next newsletter, I will send you a document that reflects the work of the Board and educators in developing the district’s mission, philosophy, and beliefs that will guide all district goals and initiatives for the next five years. We will make available a survey monkey for you to give feedback (very easy to access), thus giving you a feedback opportunity that can be done at your leisure.

In closing, I look forward to meeting new families and renewing old acquaintances as we get into fall activities that will bring students, parents, and families into our learning community. As I begin my fourteenth year as superintendent, I am looking forward to a great school year. Thank you for the honor and privilege of educating your children, and the great support from you, our parents and citizens. You make finer education a reality in this community—see you around!

With kindest regards,



Dr. James Fitzpatrick
Superintendent
School District of Fort Atkinson