

March 9, 2012

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

*“Always be in the state of Becoming.”*  
*Walt Disney*

As I write this letter Sunday night, March 4<sup>th</sup>, I have just returned from our Rotary Academic Letter Program. What a nice program this is to honor high school students who have put forth great effort in the classroom! Earlier Sunday afternoon, I attended our Annual Orchestra Dessert Festival. There was a packed house in our auditorium as our string musicians in grades 5 through 12 performed along with APEX, a local rock band made up of four Fort alumni who during their schooling were a part of our strings and music program. It was such a fun concert! They had the auditorium rocking!

I mention the above because it gives you, the reader, an opportunity to reflect upon the balanced educational and co-curricular programs we are able to provide in our learning community thanks to you the parents, citizens, and taxpayers. Whether it be events, as I mention above, sports, drama, or the annual FFA Banquet held last Monday night, it is wonderful we can offer well-balanced activities that compliment our classroom instruction and academic programming. On a side note we have established *Green Teams* in our schools. Last week the *Purdy Green Team* stole the show at the Annual Wisconsin Building and Maintenance Directors Convention in the Dells. They presented on activities they have partaken in that include recycling efforts to monitoring the geothermal and wind turbine energy saving efforts of the District. So good things are happening in the learning community of Fort Atkinson on many fronts as we enter the spring months!

I like the quote above because it seems a good lead in to my next topic. It reminds us to strive for excellence and that we have to embrace change. Walt Disney, one of the most creative and innovative human beings to ever live, notes—“*we are always in a state of Becoming!*” I often wonder in twenty years what will we look like as a learning community. The pace of society is something we have to keep up with in our teaching and learning. This breeds both wonder and excitement as we transform ourselves, hanging on to storied traditions while venturing into new frontiers. A good time to be working with youth!

**The Wisconsin Waiver from NCLB:** On Thursday, March 1, I attended a meeting along with many other southeastern Wisconsin superintendents. At that meeting, representatives of the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) highlighted the plan the State of Wisconsin has submitted in seeking a waiver from the current NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND Elementary and Secondary Education Act. I learned it is almost a sure thing Wisconsin along with other states who are submitting, will be granted waivers.

This waiver will result in significant changes in how we evolve and do business. Some very good, some questionable (in my opinion) and some very expensive! It is not clear who will pick up the tab for some of the state-mandated assessments the DPI is seeking, but as presented, it was thought the State, rather than local districts, would bear the costs. Here are some of the highlights.

Schools will be evaluated on an accountability index that will take into consideration:

- Student achievement
- Student growth
- Closing gaps (at present in many districts with diverse populations there exists a gap most notably between the achievement levels of white students and students of color).
- Graduation rates and post secondary readiness.

We are very familiar in our State with the *Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam* (WKCE). This exam has been a high stakes snapshot that only reflected student achievement. Results of these exams gave educators and citizens a snapshot view of how well students at grade levels had *attained* per ratings of proficient, basic, and minimal achievement.

A big down side of this exam was that it ignored *student growth or how much a child might have improved from the beginning of a school year to the end of a school year*. If a school or district in any of its sub-groups (race, disabilities, or from poverty levels) where there were forty or more enrolled at a grade level, failed to reach *Annual Yearly Progress* (AYP) standards, they were identified and exposed in the press for failing to make AYP. Invariably over the past ten years, the schools and districts most frequently identified for not meeting AYP were communities where there were enrolled higher sub groups of minority children, English Second Language students, students with disabilities, and children of poverty. Schools and districts more homogeneous, not having subsets of forty in a grade level escaped closer scrutiny, while they still had an obligation to serve the subgroups noted above.

While the good part of NCLB was that it made schools focus more on helping these children, the drawback was that *student growth* of these sub groups was not considered prior to labeling a learning community for not meeting AYP despite some “Herculean efforts” on the part of educators with some very good interventions. If *growth* was considered, great individual student improvement from the beginning of the year to the end would have been evident in many AYP labeled schools. In many cases student growth in AYP identified schools may have exceeded those schools and districts acclaimed for high levels of proficiency attainment. So the DPI, in recognizing this has included student growth as an index factor to weigh per accountability measures.

Including graduation rates and even going further in evaluating post secondary readiness, I believe is a good thing and very much aligned with our Strategic Plan goal of school to college/careers planning. We recognize our students need more tools than just the high school diploma as they move on from our high school. As for examining gaps in learning and success, I think in Fort we are beyond the awareness stages of our growing diversity. Now it is indeed time to examine and monitor the progress and graduation rates of all of our children, making sure subsets are succeeding and not falling behind their peers.

Some of the plans proposed to get us ready for the implementation of Core Curriculum National Standards by 2014 include:

- Requiring three years of both math and science (an overwhelming majority of our students now meet or exceed this proposed requirement).
- Implement assessments such as the EXPLORE, PLAN, and ACT as a required programmatic initiative in all districts in efforts to address post high school readiness.
- By next fall, apply the National Assessment of Progress (NAEP) cut score criteria to the WKCE exams. NAEP cut scores are for more rigid for reaching *Proficiency*. So we and all districts in Wisconsin can expect a significant dip next spring in the number of students identified as proficient, when we receive our WKCE results. I support this as a good preliminary step as we prepare for the far more rigid Core Curriculum Standards. They are coming—and will be implemented by the fall of 2014.

The Wisconsin Waiver is an extensive document with many more details than shared above. This at least gives you some initial insight. As more information becomes available I will share it with you.

**A Nice Compliment to Our Learning Community:** You may have seen this Letter to the Editor from Dr. Tad Wehner, an Elementary Principal in the Edgerton School District; if you missed it, I have reprinted it below

*“Be Proud Fort Atkinson. Celebrate Your Schools:*

*I believe strong schools are a reflection of a strong community. Your schools are recognized for their advancement in a research-based reading development model called The Comprehensive Literacy Model which includes Reader’s Workshop. In Edgerton, we are embracing this model as we embark on a process to focus our reading instruction Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. A few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to take nearly a dozen staff members to Purdy and Luther Elementary. Our visit focused on the Reading Workshop Model, which promotes and develops student reading achievement. As a principal in a nearby elementary school, I was impressed by the work that your district has done to create and sustain a model to enhance student reading achievement in your school district. Your teachers, Para-professionals, principals, and district leadership have created a culture of professional collaboration to provide an opportunity for all learners to improve their reading proficiency. The access that the Fort Atkinson School District provided my staff, has served as a springboard for our implementation of the Reading Workshop instructional model in our setting.*

*We are one of many schools who have taken a day to tour your facilities, watch your staff implement the model through sound instruction, and access district leadership to learn and discover the path to implementation. I would like to specifically thank Amy Oakley, Rick Brietzke, David Geiger, and Candice Johnson for their leadership, open dialogue, and welcoming admission to their setting. Be proud Fort Atkinson, the opportunity for kids in your community to access a great school is evident by the practices in motion to increase student reading achievement.”*

*-Dr. Tad Wehner, Principal - Edgerton School District*

**Sponsorships:** In April of 2008, our School Board, like many in our State, approved a policy to accept sponsorships that would benefit the district, its schools, or students by accepting money, goods and/or services in exchange for the District acknowledging the sponsor’s contribution.

The impetus for approving such a policy came on the heels of the *2006 District Task Force Study* that recommended the District seek creative ways to raise revenues. Admittedly, we have been a little slow out of the starting blocks in getting this policy off the ground. Partly because we are novices in the marketing field, we have wanted to be cautious in doing this right and never wanting to jeopardize the wonderful relationships we have always had with our local business community.

At the March 15 Board Meeting, we plan to roll out our plan to solicit partnerships. While most associate such ventures with athletics and gyms, fields, and scoreboards – in addition, we also want to offer what we would consider *Academic Sponsorships* that may include music, the arts, and even classrooms. Examples might be an Early Childhood wing, school libraries, auditoriums, computer labs, science wings, playgrounds, multi-purpose rooms and cafeterias.

If you visit our beautifully remodeled Dwight Foster Library, you see evidence of sponsorships and naming rights that were secured to make the project possible. Sponsorships could help us significantly in relieving us of expensive upgrades or replacements of scoreboards, computer labs, auditorium sound and lighting panels, gym floors, and any number of examples, where one time non-recurring expenses hit us hard with an already strapped operating budget.

In April, we hope to roll out a more extensive communication plan on how businesses or citizens may wish to become a sponsor. We plan to have meetings with the Chamber Board of Directors, our business community, and our local media partners to communicate the sponsorship opportunities that will be available.

We are in the process of developing a guide, in packet form, of sponsorships. The purpose of this guide is to provide information regarding the sponsorship opportunities within the School District of Fort Atkinson and the process by which those opportunities can be taken advantage of by interested parties. These sponsorships are a way for businesses to gain exposure in the community, for individuals to dedicate a specific facility that holds a special place for them, or even for an organization to assist the district in achieving its academic goals! There will be many varied and valuable opportunities contained within this guide. However, these are not the only opportunities available. If you have a sponsorship idea outside of those contained within this guide, you may propose such in an application thus making the proposal your own. In the guide, we will have all application forms and information related to the process of applying and being selected.

**Open Enrollment Application Window Now Open until April 30 at 4 p.m.:** I want to make sure families are aware of the open enrollment window and the *later date* just signed into law by the Governor. For families now living in our District who may be considering moving out of our District but wish for their children to remain in the Fort Schools or for parents from other districts wanting to enroll their students in our District, you may apply on-line at <http://dpi.wi.gov/sms/psctoc.html> until April 30. We also have hard copy applications available in our office at 201 Park Street.

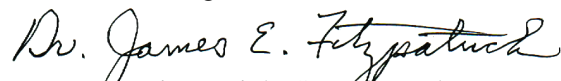
Please contact my assistant, Debbie Kopps, at 563-7807, for information on open enrollment. The process is very simple and painless; it is just a matter of doing it within the timeline noted above. Any applications coming in after the deadline cannot be accepted per the open enrollment laws. So please mark your calendars and let us help you if you need our assistance.

**2012-2013 Calendar Enclosed:** I hope this will help you with your planning for next year.

**In closing,** the snow on the ground today will be gone tomorrow with temperatures expected to reach the sixties! That means spring is on its way and with it the fast paced end-of-the-year activities that come with it. I hope to see you at a lot of spring events. I am getting a fair share of good ribbing about how the Brewers are going to pound my Cubbies this year and win the division. On paper I must admit, it does look like that might happen, BUT that is why they play the games!

Have a nice spring!

With kindest regards,

  
Dr. James Fitzpatrick, Superintendent