

May 11, 2012

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

“It's not easy being a mother. If it were easy, fathers would do it.”

From the television show The Golden Girls

I saw this quote and had to chuckle. It struck me as both funny and true. On this Mother's Day weekend, I think a lot of us fathers are in awe and wonder as to how Mothers do it all—from rearing children, working in and outside the home, to being that one person who instinctively seems to know what everyone in the family needs, often at the selfless expense of denying herself. On Sunday, May 13, we send our best wishes to all of our mothers. If you will indulge me, I send my wishes to the mother of my two children, my wonderful wife, Therese, of 35 years on June 11th, and to a spry red head in Chicago, who along with my father raised me and my seven siblings. Our deepest love, admiration, and gratitude to all Moms this Sunday!

Strategic Planning (2013-2018): The leading factor that has helped Fort Atkinson become a beacon school district in the State of Wisconsin has been our ability to develop three consecutive five-year plans that have allowed us to remain focused in meeting our mission and serving the needs of our students. We have one year left on our 2008-2013 plan before it will be brought to its successful completion a year from this June. As a governance team, the Board of Education and the administration met on Friday, May 4, to review a revisioning timeline in developing a new five-year plan that would begin in the fall of 2013. To have this next five-year plan ready, much of the planning and engagement with all stakeholders must begin this upcoming school year. In upcoming communications, I will keep you informed of how we hope to seek your thoughts and feedback as we move forward as a learning community.

Teacher Appreciation Week – May 7-11 (this piece appeared in the Daily Union on May 4):

“Teaching is leaving a vestige of one's self in the development of another. And surely the student is a bank where you can deposit your most precious treasures.”

Eugene P. Bertin

We just completed our senior portfolio exit interviews with our graduating seniors on Wednesday, May 2. One of the benefits of this program is that it gives our seniors the opportunity to share with an interview team made up of school personnel and Chamber/business people an opportunity to reflect upon their learning.

When asked who had the greatest influence on them as they worked their way from kindergarten to graduation, many credited their parents. Now, a month away from graduating, their maturation and broader perspective helps them understand and see more clearly the sacrifices their parents and loved ones have made on their behalf.

Some of the stories revealed through essays or artifacts contained in the portfolios are just incredible. They shed light on how the eighteen-year-old sitting before you has evolved into a scholar or in some cases a magnificent survivor given obstacles many have overcome. Now, just weeks away from graduation, they ready themselves for their post-high school destinations.

Invariably, in my interviews, every student named a teacher somewhere in their K-12 experience who left an impression, gave encouragement, or had a life changing impact. The quote above states precisely how the great teachers view their life's work! They INVEST their heart and souls into their young charges as they teach their content and influence students by their actions.

Not long ago there was an IBM commercial ad that conveyed the following message I share with you as we celebrate Teacher Appreciation Week:

"Nothing can replace that special relationship that gifted educators develop with their students. Popular culture has long celebrated heroes—the athlete, the adventurer, the statesman—but except for the occasional tale of Mr. Chips, Annie Sullivan, or Jaime Escalante, teachers have not been celebrated in the same way. And classrooms have rarely been identified as the places where the greatest of human dramas unfold—the drama of igniting the human spirit, ennobling the human heart, and enriching the human experience."

Teaching is about the special relationships we develop with our students. And it is a magnificent drama and transformation to watch unfold from age four to eighteen.

In Fort Atkinson, we are blessed with great teachers and educators who approach their jobs with great devotion. They may never know the impact of their efforts but if their ears were ringing May 2, it was because a grateful member of the class of 2012 is deeply in their debt.

In this Teacher Appreciation Week May 7 through May 11, we have many great teachers and educators to celebrate not only this week but always!

Parents of Junior Students – May 20 from 2-3:30 PM...College Admissions Planning and Application Strategies: We will be hosting a meeting for juniors and their parents in our High School Library IMC on Sunday, May 20th from 2:00 to 3:30 PM. We sent a direct mailing to all junior households informing parents and students of this informative session that will enlighten parents and students on how to research schools, apply, seek financial aid including many local scholarships, and prepare for standardized entrance exams. Information will also be provided on how to write impressionable essays and eye catching resumes that admission officers in colleges find favorable. Tips on what to ask reference writers to submit in letters of recommendation, along with advice on interviews with college representatives will also be reviewed.

Mrs. Beth McLaughlin, a former School Board Member who served as president during her six year tenure, has done considerable research on how students can get into the post-secondary schools they desire. Mrs. McLaughlin will be our presenter for this workshop. A key aspect of her presentation includes debunking the myth that private colleges are just too expensive. She will share information about generous financial aid packages many private schools now provide so they remain affordable for families. Beth will also share with attendees, information about a "Summer Application Boot Camp" we will host for students who want to get a jump-start on their college applications and essays.

In summary, parents and juniors will not want to miss this opportunity. You will find the next fourteen months are going to fly by, and you do not want to miss important deadlines in planning your "next steps" beyond high school.

May 17 Board Meeting—Presentation of Budget for 2012-2013 School Year: Our most important business agenda item on May 17 will be the presentation of our budget (a first reading)

by Director of Business Services Mr. Jason Demerath. In June, the Board gives approval of our proposed budget to take to the Annual Meeting scheduled for Monday, July 23. We are pleased to report that we have held the line on spending with a zero increase in our staffing, despite increased enrollment, in trying to be sensitive to the economic times, yet we will still be able to support our district mission of providing students with programs and opportunities in helping them realize their academic and personal potential. Unlike many districts in this area and throughout the state, we are not reducing staff or programs this upcoming year that impact teaching and learning for our students. We will also introduce the new *employee handbook* that has been developed this year in advance of labor contracts with teachers and support staff expiring June 30, 2012. We thank our citizens for their support of education in our community.

Special Meeting of the Board of Education on May 24: On Thursday, May 24, the Board of Education will hold a special meeting to provide public engagement and feedback regarding the *employee handbook* that will be implemented in the 2012-2013 school year. The anticipated approval of the handbook is scheduled to be at the regular meeting of the Board of Education on June 21.

Retirees: After many dedicated years of service to the School District of Fort Atkinson, Those retiring this year will be recognized and thanked for their many years of service at our Retirement Reception on May 24:

- Karen Crosby, Barrie and Rockwell Art Teacher, 34 years of service;
- Mary Pat Cook, Barrie and Rockwell Music Teacher, 18 years of service;
- Sue Fraiser, Middle School Attendance Secretary, 21 years of service;
- Denice Jones, Occupational Therapist, 18 years of service;
- Bruce Meyer, Rockwell 5th Grade Teacher, 22 years of service;
- Sandra Nelson, Rockwell 3rd Grade Teacher, 26 years of service;
- Karen Phelps, Middle School English/Language Arts Teacher, 21 years of service;
- Mary Strohmusch, Rockwell Cook Helper, 6½ years of service; and
- Jane Van De Hey, Middle School English/Language Arts Teacher, 18 years of service.

School Nutrition Employee Week, May 7-11: A special kudos to Mrs. Barb Waara, our Director of Nutrition, and her staff who work very hard each day to serve appetizing and nutritious meals, not an easy task given all of our different preferences and taste in the foods we eat. Our cooks, cook helpers, and all associated with serving both lunch and breakfast each day, deserve our acknowledgement for their great efforts. As I like to say, we are the biggest restaurant in Jefferson County serving more people on any given day we have school!

Board of Education News: Our Board of Education recently held its annual reorganization meeting on April 23. For the 2012-2013 school year, Rodger Thomann will serve another year as President, Carrie Chisholm, Vice-President; Kristin Wallace, Treasurer; Scott Johnson, Clerk, and, Bob Chady, Member. We thank these Board Members for their dedication to our school district. They devote many hours to meetings and attending school events and activities.

Dates For Your Calendar: The next couple of weeks will seem like a whirlwind. I strongly suggest you visit our website www.fortschools.org for daily and nightly activities affecting your children at our schools. As sports wind down, WIAA tournaments are noted on the district calendar. Below are a few big dates you will want to have on your calendar:

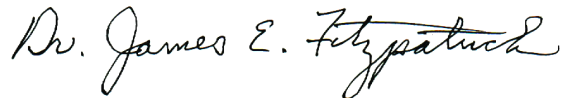
- Thursday, May 17 – School Board Meeting at 7 PM

- Thursday, May 17 – High School Band Clinic/Concert 7:30 at PM
- Monday, May 21 – Middle School Band Concert, High School, at 7:00 PM
- Tuesday, May 22 – 5th Grade band and orchestra concert, High School, at 6:00 PM
- Thursday, May 24 – Board of Education holds hearing on Employee Handbook at 7 PM
- Friday, May 25 – Rock Day at the High School at 9:30 AM
- Wednesday, May 23 – School Senior Academic Awards Night Program at 6:30 PM
- Monday, May 28 – Memorial Day Parade with Fort High Band at 10:30 AM
- Thursday, May 31 – Middle School Orchestra Concert at 7 PM
- Saturday, June 2 – Jazz Di Pasta, High School, at 5:30 PM
- Sunday, June 3 – Jazz Di Zert, High School, at 1:00 PM
- Monday, June 4 – High School Spring Athletic Awards Ceremony at 6:30 PM
- Thursday, June 7 – Middle School 8th Grade Promotion Ceremony at 7:00 PM
- Friday, June 8 – Last day of school, dismissal at noon
- Sunday, June 10 – High School Graduation at 1 PM
- Monday, June 18 – Summer School begins!

Memorial Day – May 25: I close this letter reminding all parents and community members we celebrate Memorial Day on May 25. On that day, there will be the Legion Breakfast at the Dugout beginning at 6:30 AM. The parade in which our High School Marching Band will participate begins at 10:30 AM beginning at S. Water Street proceeding down Main Street to the Evergreen Cemetery where our veterans will be remembered in a closing ceremony.

In closing, we are winding down what has been a GREAT school year with many wonderful developments throughout the year, but none more important than the teaching and learning that has taken place. I look forward to seeing you at many of the events that will be held these last few weeks.

With kindest regards,



Dr. James Fitzpatrick
Superintendent