

Great Teachers...We must Affirm their efforts!

Dr. James Fitzpatrick, Superintendent.

"The dream begins with a teacher who believes in you, who tugs and pushes and leads you to the next plateau, sometimes poking you with a sharp stick called "truth."

Dan Rather

Last week we celebrated Teacher Appreciation Week. Annually, the first week of May, is set aside to honor those who have chosen the vocation that makes all other professions possible. Before you read on with this message, think of the two or three teachers who you credit the most for having a great influence on you!

If you are like me then you can relate with the quote above from journalist Dan Rather, the retired, long time anchor for CBS Evening News. I had teachers like he described and to this day I still remember how they painstakingly made you understand that they knew better than you what you were capable of, and moreover, anything less than an honorable effort was unacceptable. But the biggest thing Rather points out is that *they believed in you—and you knew it!*

Rather's message, despite the strife of the last several months with the Governor's proposed budget, should not be lost. While one expects fallout and critical arguments to be made when it comes to balancing budgets, bargaining, and enduring difficult economic times, most would agree the last few months have been some of the most polarizing times anyone has ever lived through in this state and in the nation. Even my mother, eighty six years young, with eight adult kids who work in both the public and private sector, insisted at Easter there be no discussion about politics or religion at least until dessert was served. I think her logic was that the cake and pastries might soften everyone up. It helped a little!

There has been a schism or divide between public and private sector employees that this budget bill has really brought to the surface. I think both sides are guilty of cherry picking. Public employees complain they don't receive the salaries of private employees with comparable educational training and credentials, and the private sector resents that public employees have traditionally enjoyed better fringe benefits without having the great risks that exist in the business world. You have heard the comparisons!

While many may think the discord since the February Budget Repair Bill was introduced and passed is mostly about money, I think it is about something far greater. All of us want to be *affirmed* in what we do. Nobody likes to feel unappreciated or taken for granted. I believe that is how teachers and many public workers felt they were treated. Of course if there is silver lining in any cloud, perhaps it makes all of us in the public sector understand what private sector people suffered when they literally lost jobs or had to downsize businesses as the economy tanked. None of this is pleasant and hopefully for everyone better times are ahead of us. I think everyone is yearning for civility and an opportunity to get on with more happy times. After all life is short and bitterness does not serve anyone well.

We have *great* educators in the learning community of Fort Atkinson. They inspire me every day by the things they do for students. They deserve great affirmation, respect, and honor for what they do not only as great educators, but many are greatly involved in our community, as leaders, helping causes dear to all of us in making Fort Atkinson such a great place to live.

On the heels of our Senior portfolio exit interviews it is apparent that many of our 2011 graduates will leave here with fond memories of an educator, director, or coach who left a footprint on their heart. They willingly shared stories about some of the great teachers who have made a difference in their lives. As Dan Rather says, *the dream begins with a teacher*, and for that we are deeply in their debt!