



January 15, 2010

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

“Don’t knock the weather. If it didn’t change once in a while, nine of ten people could not start a conversation.” Kin Hubbard

As I begin writing this letter Sunday evening, I just shut off the TV after the heartbreaking PACKER game. As many of you know, I am a BEAR fan, but once my beloved heroes are out of things, I do root for the PACK. I cannot ever remember a game ending so abruptly horrible. I thought for sure the stars were aligning for the PACK, after the Phoenix kicker missed the “bunny” field goal at the end of regulation. I thought whoever won the coin toss would go right down the field and score in OT. When the PACK won the toss, I thought they would score right away and fly home victors! That loss indeed describes the *agony of defeat* most descriptively!

An Event that Melted Away Our Cold Winter Weather – The Second Annual Connor Bourke Invitational Relays Held January 9th: As many in the area know Connor Bourke is a 5th grader at St. John the Baptist Catholic School in Jefferson. In the summer of 2008, Connor was diagnosed with gliomatosis cerebri, a form of brain cancer. At this time, his treatment and therapies are quite aggressive as the cancer is inoperable. Connor loves the water and in January 2009, the Fort Relays for the first time were renamed after him. Coach Roger Rumppe learned of Connor’s love for the water and he and the boys on the Fort Atkinson Swim Team embraced this cause and dedicated this special invitational to honor Connor for his courage and inspiring example to our swimmers. From the invitational, the team also hoped to raise funds so that Connor could meet his hero, Olympian Michael Phelps. That happened last year!

This year marked the second year for the Connor Bourke Relays. Our Fort Team gave an inspiring winning performance. Proceeds from the invitational, shirt sales and a wonderful spaghetti lunch held the same day will allow the Bourke family to travel to North Carolina to see Michael Phelps compete in the North Carolina Grand Prix Swimming Competition that attracts some of the greatest collegiate swimmers in the country. Many parent supporters got behind this effort along with event sponsors. The beautiful program printed for the meet tells Connor’s story and has some great pictures from Connor’s time with Michael Phelps last year.

A great sidebar of this event is that you readily see the camaraderie among the competing boy’s swim teams. Squads from Milton, Jefferson, Delavan-Darien, Elkhorn, Oregon, Watertown, Whitewater and our Blackhawks have all been inspired by Connor. This is truly a special meet. The traditional handshakes at the end of the meet seem to carry more meaning on this day. Congratulations to Coach Rumppe, the Boys’ Swim Team, and all parents and supporters of this event. They did an incredible job!

The Board of Education – Looking for Assistance From a Citizens Taskforce: At a Special Meeting of the Board of Education held January 8, 2010, the Board directed me to put together a Citizens Taskforce to assist the District as it faces some serious fiscal challenges, 12 to 18 months from now when the April 2006 referendum expires. To prepare for these challenges, the Board would like this Taskforce to begin meeting in February with a report of its findings and recommendations to be given to the Board later this spring.

The charge by the Board of Education to the Taskforce would be to gain an understanding of our financial position, and address our projected operation fund shortfall challenges. These challenges became steeper in this past biennium budget where our state aid was reduced \$646,207 and our annual revenue cap increase was lowered from \$275 per student to \$200 per student in 2009-2010. Below are the areas the Board would like a Citizens Taskforce to study in reviewing ways to address our challenges:

1. Understand the District's fiscal condition.
2. Determine if and when a referendum ought to be held.
3. If a referendum is deemed necessary, determine how much the referendum should be.
4. Decide if the referendum should be recurring or have a sunset.

For the past four years, the School District of Fort Atkinson has been spared the reductions and cuts in programs and services that many area districts and schools throughout our state have gone through. We can attribute this to the kind support of our citizens, who in April of 2006, gave us permission to spend above the revenue caps by \$694,000 as a result of their desire to maintain the quality programs and services offered by the School District of Fort Atkinson. In addition, citizens approved the geothermal HVAC work at four of our buildings.

The third question approved by the citizens in the April 2006 referendum giving permission to spend above the revenue caps is to sunset at the end of the 2010-2011 school year. The Taskforce and the Board of Education understood back in 2006 that, unlike a recurring referendum, we would have to come back in five years or so and ask for more. In the meantime, the Taskforce also asked us to raise revenues and spend wisely. We have worked prudently to do this and I am confident in telling our story that we have lived up to this Taskforce recommendation.

The referendum of 2006 helped us immensely in maintaining quality programs and services. Taskforce members and then Director of Finance Ardell Wiederhoeft were aware, as I was, that when the referendum sunset, there would be a "huge cliff we would have to climb"—below is an excerpt from Mr. Wiederhoeft's comments to the Board on November 20, 2008:

"Based on the best information we have at this time, we will be able to comfortably get through one year beyond the sunset of the referendum with about \$405,000 to spare. The second year beyond the sunset is projected to have a shortfall of about \$1.1 million after consuming that \$405,000 reserve from the previous year. The third year beyond the sunset has no reserve to fall back on, so it is showing a deficit of a little over \$2 million. The deficit each year thereafter is likely to be about \$300,000 more than the year before.

The bottom line—if the State law, and the way public schools in Wisconsin are funded remain as they are today, Fort Atkinson, like most other school districts around the state, will again be faced with the need to make dramatic reductions in programs and services or secure approval from voters to exceed the State-imposed revenue limit. For Fort Atkinson that will likely occur in about 4 or 5 years, and a referendum to avoid those dramatic reductions will need to be equally, dramatically, large."

Due to changes made in the state biennium budget for 2009-2011 which Mr. Wiederhoeft could not have predicted in November of 2008, the impact changed the \$405,000 we thought we would have in reserve one year after the sunset in 2011-2012 to a deficit of \$811,941.

In short, like everyone in this economy, our school district has to bear some sacrifice and pain. Administrative salaries for 2010-11 have been frozen. Teacher salary steps have been frozen with a 0.94 % across the board salary increase. We expect our non-certified employees to follow suit in accepting less compensation in their upcoming contract talks. Like many parents and families in our learning community, we know that in tough times like a family, spending has to be reduced. We are positioned for that as we get ready for the 2010-2011 budget development process. Per a possible future referendum, a Taskforce recommendation to the Board of Education will hopefully give us some guidance so that our financial challenges can be addressed.

I would like to welcome any parent or citizen to please contact us if you would be interested in serving on the Citizen's Taskforce. Meetings would run no longer than ninety minutes, and we would have approximately two meetings a month from mid-February until the end of April or early May at the latest.

Foster Growth Capital Campaign – It's Been A Great Campaign...But we are not quite done! Last Tuesday, January 5th, was step one in a joyous but long journey. The City Council approved a resolution for city administrators to move forward in seeking bids for the expansion and remodeling of our Dwight Foster Public Library. The City Council felt it was appropriate at this time to seek bids given the success of the Foster Growth Capital Campaign that has now met the \$1.5 million match of the Fort Atkinson Community Foundation. The generosity of several local businesses and major contributors, and the donations made by hundreds of citizens, speaks to the spirit of this wonderful community, and their understanding of the importance of our library. As Del Wilson, Principal Architect for *Uihlein Wilson Architects*, remarked to City Council members in his presentation, "Fort Atkinson is unusual. You don't see this kind of community support often."

Plans call for breaking ground later this spring, remodeling the existing 21,000 square feet and adding on a 12,000 square foot addition to the south of the current structure. Uihlein Wilson Architects have worked with the library board, the building committee, and our outstanding library staff headed by Connie Meyer to create a beautiful building program that is sure to please the approximately 17,000 library cardholders who check out over 200,000 items per year! The remodeled, larger facility with upgraded technology will serve our community well in the years to come.

While the above addresses the good news to date, the rest of the story is that we are not quite finished. Our fundraising continues. We know we will need some gap financing as we await pledges coming forth. We hope and anticipate the bids will be favorable, but we are in need of additional contributions to assist with furnishings and shelving purchases if the bids come in higher and our budget becomes tighter. It will not be until February when the bids are opened that we will know the full cost of the project. While we have done well thus far, we still need more help from the citizenry before this project can be completed.

In summarizing the fundraising effort, it has been my pleasure to serve as the fundraising chair for Dwight Foster's *Foster Growth* capital campaign. I am most grateful to members of our committee who have been just outstanding in their efforts to solicit support. Anything I have asked, they have come through!

A special note of thanks to City Manager John Wilmet, Connie Meyer, and Vince Kent! These three individuals were so instrumental in securing large donations and gifts from donors and local businesses and industries. I also want to thank Maria Perez-Hametta who has been amazing serving as our marketing chair, and Pat Belt who has just been tireless in organizing fundraising

events throughout the campaign. Nancy Price has mobilized the efforts of our loyal “Friends of the Library” and my colleagues Dr. Rick Brietzke and Mrs. Vicki Wright, Principals of Purdy and Rockwell Schools respectively, have led the education division. Sue Hartwick, with her vast experience with the Museum project, has been invaluable in helping us record all donations received to date. She is anxious to record more! And Rita Gray has been my right hand serving as secretary for our monthly committee meetings. I also extend thanks to Councilman Mark Zastrow who has also served on our committee and extended support and expertise.

Yes, much has been accomplished as we enter the New Year. We need to keep the momentum moving forward so that upon completion, the new and improved Dwight Foster Library will be the grand project we all hoped for with everyone being able to say “I was a part of that effort!”

Open Enrollment Application Window is February 1 to February 19 at 4 p.m. I want to make sure families are aware of the open enrollment window. 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 School District, you may apply on line at <https://www2.dpi.state.wi.us/OpenEnrollApp> or paper applications are available at our office. 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 window. 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.

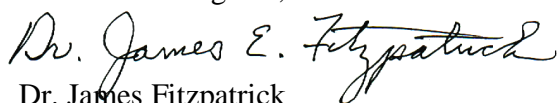
New District Website Unveiled: Helping students achieve academic and personal success is the mission of the District, and effective communication is an essential tool in that process. As such, the District has recently undergone a makeover to its website, improving access to information for students, their parents and the community at large. The site contains thousands of resources ranging from District policies and board meeting minutes to daily school lunch menus and urgent new items. Very soon, we will highlight some parent and student testimonials, which will be airing on the education channel and the homepage of the website. These testimonials were created in part by students in the High School TV Writing and Productions Class. We hope parents, students and citizens will find this website helpful.

We Have Four Board of Education Candidates for April 6, 2010 Election: We have four candidates running for a seat on the Board of Education this spring. Incumbents Bob Chady and Carrie Chisholm are running for a second term. In addition, Al Waldmann and Edwin K. Bos have also entered the race. We thank all four candidates for their interest in Board of Education service!

End of First Semester and Records Day: The first semester officially ends Friday, January 22nd with final exams at the High School being completed. There will be no school on Records Day, Monday, January 25th.

In closing, I hope this cold weather snap will break allowing us some relief. It was so nice to see many of you at Christmas concerts and athletic and school events. Stay warm!

With kindest regards,



Dr. James Fitzpatrick
Superintendent, School District of Fort Atkinson