FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT’S OFFICE

"Striking a Balance"

The headline in the Pilot –Tribute read “Fort Calhoun option-enrollment numbers met with opposition,” have caused a bit of a stir in our school community. The term school community is an intentional phrase used to convey total inclusion of resident and option students and families alike into the environment we call the “FORT.” The District tries to strike a balance each year when setting option enrollment numbers. It is not an exact science to fill seats in each class with a combination of resident and option students while anticipating growth yet not filling classrooms. Our plan as a District is to reduce the amount of new option enrollment students as our resident student population grew, encouraging families to move into district instead of opting in, bringing a strong tax base with it.

Based on the numbers over the past 21 years our plan is working. Starting in the school year 1997-98 our resident student numbers started declining on a yearly basis with the high point at 586 and the low point 407 in the 2012-13 school year, a loss of 179 students. Without option enrollment, this loss of students would have been devastating for our district, requiring us to make district-wide cuts and resulting in possibly cutting staff and programs. What we lost with resident students we made up for with option students creating the ability to renovate buildings and add staff and programming. These renovations have fueled growth over the past five years growing our resident population from a low of 407 to our current resident population of 470. We are trending in the way we had hoped and will monitor the situation as we go forward. The balance we will continually strive for is to optimize student numbers for state aid purposes and keep the class-sizes in the ranges that optimize learning. Option enrollment has allowed our District to build the programming we have today, which is good for all students.

With “Striking the Balance” as a title I would like to once again appeal to all parents regarding their students’ involvement in extra-curricular activities. Studies have shown that students involved in sports, music, and the arts are more likely to succeed in their college or career aspirations. Extra-curricular activities tend to give a real balance to a student as they progress through school teaching them valuable lessons in teamwork as well as leadership. Involvement in school activities can also promote better health and reduce the chance of obesity, a growing problem in our society today.

Last but certainly not least, I would ask that you as parents take time to fill-out the AdvancED surveys linked to our district web site. These surveys fulfill our obligation to stay AdvancED accredited while giving us valuable feedback regarding our continuous school improvement efforts. Thanks for your support and as always feel free to give me a call if you have any question.

God Bless
Dr. Johnson
Spring Time, Busy Time

It is hard to believe but our Spring season and sports practices have already begun. Baseball, Track and Field, and Golf are already underway. Hope the weather warms up a bit more or even a lot more. Along with our sports season, students will also be gearing up for Prom/Post Prom, NeSA state accountability testing, ACT testing, Spring concerts, District Music, athletic banquet, honors night, graduation and a few other items I probably forgot. Many of our students are involved with activities outside of school as well. Spring is an exciting time for everyone as we welcome the warmer, longer and greener days.

Please make sure that we all appreciate how hard our students, teachers, coaches, sponsors and parents work as we watch our children grow up. Surround them with positive thoughts and actions; positive people and lessons that will help them develop into great young people. The world can be hard enough, we all have the ability to make it better by being positive and supportive of everything we are privileged to be a part of. Have a great Spring season.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION

Tis the season for Honor Bands and Choirs. UNO Honor Band-BOCH Festival - Dalton Ashby, Amanda Hansen, Keagan Hunter, Savannah Pace, Avery McKennan - 1st Chair, Ben Bonacci, Grant Hansen, Ben Johnson - Hastings Honor Band - Dalton, Amanda, Avery - 1st Chair, and Keagan; Wesleyan Honor Band - Dalton, Amanda, Avery, and Ben. Dani Dross was selected for Wesleyan Honor Choir.

Five of our Fort Calhoun Wrestlers qualified for State. They are Tyler Curtis, Jack Theisen, Jeff Heinz, Joe Twomey and Jake Hubschman. Tyler placed 6th and earned a medal, and Jeff placed 3rd and medaled. Congratulations.

Harrison Schmitt placed 1st in Audio for Grades 6-8 at the NETA Competition. His project was “The Creative Sounds of Harrison”.

Fort Calhoun Art Students submitted work to the School State Art Competition. Kloeey Apel and Hunter Thomas earned Silver Keys. Hanna Lazure, Avery McKennan, Diara Onigketti, Anna Polesky, Skylar Wear and Caitlin Weeks all earned Honorable Mention.

Eva Hansen, Regina Namuth, Madeline Hansen and Cameryn Lewis all advanced through the Local Spelling Bee to represent Fort Calhoun at the Washington County Bee.

Tessa Dethiefs, Mandy Hansen, Ellie Shaffer and Jessica Gravert are the final candidates for the Daly Award sponsored by Dan and Pam Daly and Anne Breitkreutz and Roger Nottleman.

Parents Encouraging Parents (PEP) Conference

March 16-18, 2017 Yornes Conference Center Kearney, Nebraska

Are you a parent of a child receiving special education services? Then this conference is for you! No registration fee! Two nights lodging and most meals furnished. Parents create guidelines, plan and run the PEP conference. PEP is unique in that it is a conference FOR parents BY parents. Sessions include: IFSP/IEP Process, Social Skills, Estate Planning, Positive Behavior Management, and more.

Register by February 20, 2017. For more information visit www.education.ne.gov/sped/index.html or call 402-471-2471

Option Enrollment applications for 2017-18 are being taken. The state deadline is March 15, 2017. Applications are verified and families are notified by April 1st of their status. Students are accepted on a first-come, first-serve basis within the parameters set by the Board of Education for program and class sizes. Students who already attend Fort Calhoun Schools under the Option Enrollment program do not need to reapply.

Mr. Jerry Green
Secondary Principal

Mr. Nick Wemhoff
Assistant Principal/AD

Effective studying habits are critical among students who are balancing a busy schedule. Involvement in school sports and activities; having a job after school, or even taking care of siblings may be one of the many things that can cut into the time students spend studying or working on homework for school. In this crazy world that we call life, it isn’t necessarily about how well you cram for tests or spending more hours studying, its about studying smarter. In short, study smarter, not harder! I came across a great article with ideas on how to study more effectively. As we are in the heat of winter sports season, I thought these 10 strategies might be a great way to help our students improve studying habits.

1) How you approach studying matters. Sit down with the right mindset. Ever hear us talk about being positive in our building? That applies to studying too! Don’t gripe about it, change your attitude and change your results.

2) Where you study is important. You can’t study with the TV on! You might think you can, but studies have proven that our minds can only do one thing at a time. People who say they can multi task really only are able to shift from one thing to the next quickly. Help your brain out, get rid of the outside noise so you can be 100% engaged in your studying.

3) Bring everything you need and nothing you don’t. Do you really need your phone in order to read your assigned chapter? “News Flash” you will survive if you don’t see the text from your friends for 1 hour. By the way, you just put yourself in a place where studying can happen and then you bring the distraction with you… try studying without the distraction. You will see instant results.

4) Outline and rewrite your notes. Did you know that writing things down helps you retain information? It is one thing to take a picture of the notes up on the board, but what good did that do if you can’t put those same ideas and thoughts into your own words. Keep it simple! Get out a pen and paper and you will find that writing things down helps the brain lock in the information.

5) Use Memory games. Mental Models are critical to the learning process. Just remember, a picture is worth a thousand words. Find a way to bridge the gap between what you are trying to remember and a quick way to review. Believe it or not, they may have another way of looking at something that will help you retain that information.

6) Practice by yourself or with friends. Practice makes perfect. Flash cards are an easy and quick way to review. Believe it or not, they may have another way of looking at something that will help you retain that information.

7) Make a schedule you can stick to. You will learn more if you study 15 minutes a night for a week than you will if you try to cram all the studying in 1 hour before the test. The ability to review the information several times over a course of time will increase the ability to better retain the information rather than just 1 cram session.

8) Take breaks. Divide the time and allowing your brain to rest has its rewards. If you have a lot of studying, don’t sit and push through 2 hours of homework just to get it done. Stop for 10 minutes after an hour, get a snack, and let the brain refocus.

9) Keep healthy and balanced. You have to balance work and fun. If you spend all your time working and have no time for fun, you can easily get overwhelmed. On the flipside, all play and no work leaves you behind. Exercise is also critical to the learning process. Increasing blood flow can help clear the mind and get your brain ready for the learning process.

10) Know what the expectations are for the class. Your teacher expects you to engage in the learning process. Help your brain out, get rid of the outside noise so you can be 100% engaged in your studying.

They know enough who know how to learn. - Henry Adams

COMMUNITY WEIGHT ROOM USE

Information and the application form for community use of the High School Weight Room is available at the high school office. If you have any questions contact Mr. Nick Wemhoff at 402-468-5591.
Engaging + Learning + Achieving = Productive PIONEERS!

This message is to provide information regarding our upcoming building construction project. The remodel and addition include: stairwell going from upstairs to downstairs with addition of an elevator, renovation of the northwest entrance, renovation of the old locker rooms off the gym, addition of space off 2nd grade classroom and the addition/renovation of the southeast entrance with the cafeteria and kitchen included.

As the weather gets nice, the fencing will be the first item going up. In the next few weeks there will be fencing going up on the northwest (gym entrance will be CLOSED) of the building. The fencing will start on the corner of the exterior of the 2nd grade classroom, go toward the playground, then wrap around the bus stop, and end along the preschool playground. The playgrounds will remain open during this construction. On the southeast entrance (loading and docking entrance will be CLOSED), the fencing will start behind the preschool entrance, then run along Monroe onto 10th street around the 6th grade entrance. The preschool entrance and 6th grade entrance will remain open for use.

The anticipated date construction will start is late February or early March depending on weather of course. Most of the construction while students are in session will happen outside and not interrupt the learning environment. As soon as the students are out for the summer, construction will begin inside the school. The main goal, at this time, will be to start school according to the master calendar in mid-end of August for the next school year.

If you have any questions please contact Dr. Johnson, the office or myself. Thank you for your patience, flexibility and positive mindset as we go through this building project together.

Be thankful, stay positive, and encourage a growth mindset. Take care! Go PIONEERS!

Respectfully,
Drew R. Wagner

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Summer Kids Club/Farm Camps

Please be looking for information on our new summer school program at the elementary. At this time we are planning on continuing our camp style format with some blended tutoring. Ms. Christina Bowser, our Kids Club Director, will continue to run these programs. Please keep in mind if you sign up for the Kids Club program for the summer then you will have access to all the programs available. Please keep in mind to communicate this information appropriately when signing up. If you have questions or comments on this particular topic please feel free to stop by, e-mail or give Ms. Christina Bowser or myself a call. We will be sharing more information soon. Thank you!

See below for parent and student testimonials of the program last summer. We look forward to working with you!

Parent Testimonials:
“Signing my daughter up for the Summer Kids Club Program at Fort Calhoun Community Schools was a great decision! Not only did she learn something new every day but I feel that it has helped her to develop new friendships and stronger social skills. I really enjoyed how she woke up and was excited to go to camp every day. Additionally, the staff maintains regular communication about their plans for upcoming events, which makes it very easy to plan ahead. I stopped around before making the decision to enroll my daughter through this program and it is a very affordable compared to the other programs that are out there - especially considering how interactive and fun it is for the kids.”

“I really loved all the aspects of the Summer Kids Club! It was a great balance between fun art projects, physical activities, exploration, relaxation while still allowing for a little structure and learning along the way. My son truly did look forward to coming everyday! I couldn’t be happier with our summer!”

“OMG it was AMAZING! My daughter was engaged, educated and entertained all summer. The staff went above and beyond the expectations I had. They did NOT warehouse these kids - they learned, they had the best time. There is not enough room to write how much I value this experience for my kid this summer. As a family we loved it. Dedicated staff, focus on learning and wonderful camps. Please, keep it up!”

Student Testimonials:
“I loved the fun games we played. Dodgeball was my favorite! I loved hitting the ‘jailbreak’ and getting my team out of jail. We had a great time at the Bellvue Berry and Pumpkin Farm. The raspberries we picked were delicious and we got to go for ice cream after!”

“The Summer Bridge Books were so fun! They will help me be ready for school. Summer Olympics days were the best!”

“Playing all of the games during Kid’s Choice time was my favorite! The camps were really fun and I liked learning about new things and doing all of the activities. The field trips were great!”

Kindergarten Round Up Information

Kindergarten Roundup is on Friday March 24 and 31 from 8:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. We are excited to try something new this school year! We are asking for students to come two days. This provides essential time with our staff and is important on setting up the direction we go for each student. We feel this new plan will fit our culture here at Fort Calhoun Elementary and enhance the learning environment. We are thankful for this opportunity and are excited to add your family to the Fort!

The following will explain what the two days will entail. We will divide the upcoming kindergarteners in half randomly. Half of the students will go with Mrs. Glassen and the other half will be with Ms. Hall. Then we will swap the group of students the following Friday. During the day, the schedule will be set up like a regular day in Kindergarten. Students will be engaged in multiple academic activities. They will also go to recess and eat lunch at school.

This brings decisions for your child’s lunch: a packed lunch from home or a hot lunch served at school. If you want your child to eat hot lunch at school please bring $2.25 per Friday.

On March 31, at 12:20 p.m. we will have a parent meeting in the gym. In this meeting, there will be more information shared by: the principal, Kindergarten teachers, school nurse and other staff members accordingly. The day will begin at 8:30 a.m. and end approximately at 1:00 p.m. both days. There will be NO SCHOOL for current kindergarten students on Friday March 24 and 31.

The state requires your child to be 5 years old by July 31, 2017 to qualify for Kindergarten. We look forward to seeing you soon! If you have questions please contact the elementary office. Thank you!

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Preschool Enrollment Information

Registrations are being accepted for admittance into the 2017-2018 Fort Calhoun Preschool beginning March 20, 2017. No applications will be accepted before that date. Registration forms will be available on our school’s website or in the elementary office. We look forward to working with you!

During the school year, preschool meets:
•Monday through Thursday Morning session meets from 8:00-11:15 a.m. and afternoon session meets from 11:50-3:05 p.m. Preschool consists of 3, 4 and 5 year olds.
•Resident students requiring special education services will have priority admission.
•Non-resident resident peer models have second priority.
•Non-resident peer models will be admitted if space is available following resident registration.
•If necessary, a lottery system will be utilized to determine peer model placement in the program
***Tuition for resident and non-resident peer models is $130 per month unless qualification for a reduced price.

Upcoming events for the 2016-17 school year:
February 27-March 3: Book Fair in the library
March 1: Donut with Dad
March 1: Preschool Advisory Meeting
March 6-8: Dr. Seuss Week
March 9 and 10: No School
March 17: Little Pioneers Playgroup (intended for eligible district preschool students for 2017-18 school year); If you would like to receive more information on this please contact the elementary office
March 20: Preschool Enrollment opens for 2017-18 school year
March 24 and 31: Kindergarten Roundup
March 31: School Carwash

*All dates are subject to change.
**All Fridays during the year are early outs. The Elementary will dismiss students at 1:15pm.