

Welcome

Good morning and welcome to the start of the 2015-16 school year. As I was preparing for today, I was reminded that this year's convocation is my fifth as Superintendent here in Frederick County. I'm proud of the work we've accomplished together over the past four years and the direction in which we're heading as a school division. Frederick County Public Schools continues to be an outstanding school system that is striving to become a premiere school division- one of the best not only in Virginia, but in the nation. As we work to continually improve, we remain committed to our mission of ensuring all students an excellent education, working collaboratively, and doing what is best for our students and their futures. Thank you for the role you play in our students' success and the success of our school division.

Over the past four years, I've spoken at convocation about the value of time and making the most of every minute we have with our students. I've also discussed the importance of building positive, professional relationships with our students, their families, and each other. Two years ago, I focused on helping our students grow and being committed to our own personal growth so that we can be our best each day. Last year, I highlighted what learning today looks like and the importance of engaging our students in the learning process, integrating technology into our work, and developing partnerships.

Today's message will include some familiar themes as I speak about the importance of being innovative, engaging students in their own learning and focusing on the individual needs of our students. Please join me now for a moment of silence as we reflect on the important work we will be doing with students this year and the need for us all to Innovate, Engage, and Focus.

Keynote

I want to again congratulate each of our Teacher of the Year nominees as well as our Teacher of the Year Betsy Packard. Each of you serves as an outstanding representative of public educators who make sacrifices personally and professionally each day in order to serve our students. Thanks again for all that you do. You are making an impact and positive difference in the lives of our students.

As I stated earlier, my message today will center on three things that can greatly impact our students, our schools and our community-- Innovate, Engage, Focus.

Over the past year, our instructional team has been highlighting the work of respected professor of education and researcher John Hattie during instructional focus meetings and professional development activities. Hattie completed the largest-ever study on the different factors that impact student achievement. In his book *Visible Learning for Teachers*, Hattie highlights the findings of his study and details the most important factors that impact student achievement. Although Hattie's research is primarily directed toward teachers, it's important for all of us to understand his findings because everyone who is part of the Frederick County Public Schools' team plays a role in helping our students achieve at high levels.

In order to connect with today's students and accomplish the many jobs that have to be completed each day across the school division, we have to be willing to innovate. Webster's Dictionary defines innovate as "to do something in a new way; to have new ideas about how something can be done". Innovation should be part of our daily work as we seek to incrementally improve each day no matter what our role. Innovation is particularly important when it comes to teaching and learning and we have a number of initiatives underway that

demonstrate our willingness to try things that research has shown yield positive results for students. Last year, we launched our one-to-one Chromebook initiative and every sixth grade student across the school division was given their own Chromebook to use throughout the school year. The results have been fantastic. Teachers have discovered ways to use the devices to be more efficient in their work and differentiate instruction. Students love their Chromebooks and find them to be useful tools that not only get them excited about learning, but offer a variety of online learning tools. The devices also help students learn the value of teamwork as they utilize Google Docs to collaborate on a variety of projects. This year, the one-to-one Chromebook initiative will expand and we anticipate hearing more success stories as the year progresses.

The Chromebook initiative and some of the other innovative projects taking place in all of our schools speak to one of Hattie's Eight Mind Frames for Teachers- "talk more about learning than teaching." When reflecting on this Mind Frame, you recognize that the task of providing our students with an excellent education goes far beyond single lessons, math and science concepts, and SOL tests. We are responsible for igniting a love of learning within each of our students that leads to them becoming life-long learners. Not only should our students become life-long learners, we should all be life-long learners.

We can help spark that love of learning within our students by being innovative and displaying a willingness to learn new things ourselves by engaging in professional development, being open to trying new ways of doing things and most importantly, listening to our students and discovering what they need to engage in school, remain excited about learning and become successful. Without being given the chance to innovate and explore on their own, our students will find it difficult to develop a love of learning.

Over the past several years, we've started a number of innovative programs in order to positively impact our students. Last year at Bass-Hoover Elementary School, we launched a pilot program in which kindergarten students were provided a tablet computer.....

<http://bit.ly/2dfqGd1>

Last year marked the start of our full-day kindergarten program. Many years of work went into launching the full-day program and our students reaped the benefits. In the first semester alone, our kindergarteners received more instruction than they had during the entire 2013-14 school year. That additional instructional time made a difference as we saw a decrease in the number of students testing below grade level in a number of assessments. The Chromebook initiative, putting tablets into the hands of kindergarten students and providing opportunities for students to engage in hands-on learning opportunities are just a few examples of the important innovations occurring across our school division.

The second thing I want to talk about today is the importance of engaging our students in their own learning. Webster's defines engage as "to get and keep someone's attention or interest". Although it's been a number of years since I was teaching students each day, I know that without capturing the attention, interest and imagination of our students, it's nearly impossible for learning to occur. Another of John Hattie's Eight Mind Frames for Teachers is "teach through dialogue, not monologue." Conversing with students, providing them with unique learning opportunities, and allowing them to participate in hands-on activities are all part of engaged learning. This past year, James Wood High School's librarians launched a Maker Space that exemplifies what it means to engage students in their own learning.

<http://bit.ly/2dfzeAV>

As I visit schools throughout the year, I'm pleased when I see hands-on, engaging lessons being taught by our teachers. I can assure you that your efforts aren't going unnoticed by our students. In working with my Student Leadership Council over the past several years, it's become clear that our students appreciate the time and extra effort it takes to provide them with classroom activities that extend well beyond a traditional lecture, worksheet or reading assignment. Hands-on, engaging activities such as project-based learning, collaborative problem-solving and a technology tool such as Google Apps for Education make a difference for our students and help to create that love of learning I mentioned earlier.

I've already spoken about innovation and engagement and now I want to take a few minutes to talk about focus....focusing on our students and their individual needs. Webster's Dictionary defines focus as "directed attention" and that's what we all need to provide to the students we encounter each day regardless of whether you're a teacher, administrator or support staff member. Each of the 13,000-plus students who will attend our schools this year brings with them a unique set of circumstances and experiences. As a result, they all have individual needs that we need to help address in order for them to be successful. The only way to learn about these needs is to invest time getting to know and understand our students. This speaks to another of John Hattie's Eight Mind Frames for Teachers- "develop positive relationships in class and staffrooms."

When you get to know our students and develop relationships with them, you quickly see that many of our students face challenges that extend far beyond the walls of our schools such as broken homes, poverty, and a need for positive mentors. You will also discover that other students don't face those types of challenges, but could benefit from being offered additional opportunities to push themselves, explore possible career fields or engage in community service activities or internships. There is no one-size-fits-all curriculum or educational program. By developing relationships with our students and learning what they need individually to succeed, we can make an even greater impact on their lives.

Last year, Stonewall Elementary School utilized resources developed with the help of Bright Futures-Frederick County to begin a backpack food program called PAWS Packs. At James Wood Middle School a mentoring program for sixth graders called Bulldog Buddies was launched with help from Bright Futures.

<http://bit.ly/2cWo4yV>

I want to take a moment to thank our staff members and members of the community who have formed partnerships through Bright Futures to create these two programs. There are many other examples from across the school division of members of the community giving of their time, talent and treasure to benefit our students through Bright Futures. Bright Futures-Frederick County will be marking its second anniversary in March and I'm excited about the needs that are being met through the partnerships that have been created between our schools, businesses, human service agencies, faith-based organizations, parent groups and others.

As I conclude my comments, I want to remind you of the goals that I have for our school division. I shared these with you last year and we are making progress, but our work is not done. Those goals include: having all schools fully accredited, having no schools in school improvement, focusing on continuous improvement and finally, stretching ourselves to be the best. How do we work together to achieve these goals? We need to innovate, engage and focus.

Innovate by trying something new in the classroom or in your daily work. Seek ways to incrementally improve, become more efficient and more impactful. Talk more about learning and less about teaching.

Engage our students by capturing their attention and interest. Take time to listen to them, learn about their interests, seek and consider their ideas. Teach through dialogue, not monologue.

Focus on our students. Direct your attention toward them. Consider what resources and partnerships can be utilized to meet the individual needs of each student whether they have basic needs that are not being met or could benefit from additional teaching and learning opportunities. Develop positive relationships in class and staffrooms.

I've spent some time today referencing a few of John Hattie's Eight Mind Frames for Teachers and have identified a few areas of focus for each of us as we enter the new school year. I want to conclude by referencing Hattie's Golden Rule which is "Know Thy Impact". I think it's important for you to know that you're making a positive difference in the lives of our students, their families, our community and the world through the work that you do each day. The true value of your impact can't be measured by standardized tests, school accountability formulas or simple grades some want to assign to teachers and schools. The value of the impact you have each day is best measured by those that we serve...our students.

<http://bit.ly/2cCM3Hs>

Thanks to Mr. Kelly and Millbrook High School's Route 7 for that wonderful performance and for reminding us of the magnitude of our work. Each of our students is counting on us to teach them and care for them so they may reach new heights and achieve their goals.

As we welcome students back to school on Monday, I encourage you to reflect on how you can Innovate, Engage and Focus so that we can help each of our students reach their full potential. We will have successes to celebrate and challenges to contemplate over the upcoming year, but each of you will positively impact the lives of thousands of students and their families. Innovate, Engage, Focus and..... Know Thy Impact. Thank you and have a great year.

