September, 2016

The start of the school year is filled with excitement and enthusiasm. Students and staff arrive on campus with energy high and outlooks positive. The key to maintaining a positive, enthusiastic and energetic school year is pace and wellness. The school year is like a long distance race that requires each of us to be aware of our pace. While there may be periods of sprinting, overall it is best to set a productive pace that can be maintained. Pace during the school year also involves making certain that we take care of ourselves and establish productive routines. Eating, sleeping and exercising are important part of the routine; in addition, for students and staff, it is critical for us to manage our time to be certain we are prepared for each school day. I wish everyone a positive and productive school year.

During our first September board, I shared three important updates as part of superintendent’s forum:

First, I shared that our enrollment is steady. We begin the school year with approximately 1100 students participating in programs from UPK through grade 12. The Class of 2017 currently includes 75 members and we seek to support and encourage them in their final school year at Mount Markham. The Class of 2030 began their school career with 73 members and we look forward to supporting their development.

Second, I shared an outline of a plan to research the addition of new Career Technical Education (CTE) courses at our high school. I shared that when I was going through the interview process for superintendent, the student groups consistently encouraged the addition of an agriculture science program at Mount Markham. Actually, Mount Markham once had a strong agriculture science program; in fact, the coordinator of one of the state’s strongest programs located at Vernon-Verona-Sherrill (VVS) is a Mount Markham graduate (Keith Schiebel). In addition to agriculture science, our team of staff, students, and community members will also look at the feasibility of adding courses in information science and/or engineering science. We will study our options by visiting existing programs and doing research regarding labor and occupation trends. We will also survey students and staff. We hope to make a recommendation to the board of education as part of the 17/18 school budget development process.

Finally, I shared some challenging news that we received from the state education department recently. They shared that we would be receiving $1.2 million less in building aid and that this aid will be deducted from current building aid estimates this year and perhaps, next year. The reduction is occurring, in part, because of the way that the state funded capital projects for schools prior to the tax cap legislation passed in 2011. Prior to 2011, state building aid would flow based upon submission of the scope of work included in a capital project. In some cases, bids for the construction related work would come in “under bid” or some of the work was selected to be completed in separate phases of the project. In our case, each of these circumstances has applied.

In 2008, the school community voted in favor of a $21 million dollar project that would complete work at each of the school buildings. The scope of work for this project was very diverse, from replacing roofs to replacing boilers, HVAC units, electrical, plumbing and site work at each building. The bids for the project provided an initial savings and the size of the project suggested that it best be completed over multiple years and phases. When final cost reports for the project were submitted and reviewed by the state education department, they suggested that $1.2 million in state building aid had been paid for work not included in the cost reports. Since all phases of the project have not yet resulted in final cost reports, we estimate that approximately $900,000 of the aid retained this year and perhaps next, will flow to the district once these reports are submitted and approved. Despite that bit of good news, it will still be a challenge for the district to use allocated and unallocated fund balance to respond to the shortfall in revenue. Now that the tax cap law has been passed, no building aid is released until final cost reports are submitted and reviewed; therefore, we do not expect to hear news of this sort from the state again.

Let me close by sharing how proud I am of our students. Our students are good citizens; they are hardworking and they care deeply about one another, their community, their state and their country. We have over 200 students participating on an athletic team this fall; recently, the varsity cross country team was competing at a meet in Cooperstown and did something exceptional that caught the attention of social media. As the team completed the
race, they discovered that one of their teammates was still on the course. As a team, they returned to the course to support and encourage their teammate to the finish line. This type of character, sportsmanship, and teamwork makes me and I hope our community, gush with pride. A photo of the event was shared on the school’s Twitter feed @MountMarkhamCSD. We are Mount Markham! We are a proud rural community that seeks to support the development of lifelong learners. We invite you to join us, support us, and help us do the best for our students and our community.