

To: Fox Chapel Area School District Parents/Guardians
From: Dr. Anne Stephens, Superintendent
Date: June, 2009

Improving the quality of educational technology throughout the Fox Chapel Area School District is an ongoing challenge and opportunity. As we have seen, particularly throughout the elementary schools and high school, technology has been embraced by our superior faculty and is enhancing and deepening student learning on a daily basis. And yet, we are facing a technology gap within our district.

Today I am writing to you to explain why our best efforts are falling short, where they are falling short, and what we – collectively – can and must do. I personally ask that you read this letter carefully and at the end consider becoming involved. To move forward, we will need your time, energy, and commitment.

The Fox Chapel Area School District has a strong budget for computers, software, printers, servers, infrastructure, staffing, and peripherals. In fact, over the past two academic years, we have invested a total of \$4 million to improve and maintain our current technology throughout the district. Yet, even with such a robust budget, we have been unable to meet the growing demands to provide educational technologies in every classroom. As you are probably already aware, to supplement school district funds, our PTO's/PTA's have taken on the responsibility of raising funds to purchase Smartboards, LCD projectors, and digital cameras for elementary classrooms. To date, these initiatives have been successful resulting in thousands of additional dollars being raised to provide access to 21st century technology. A Classrooms of the Future Grant written by the central office administration and high school staff has resulted in nearly \$800,000 in revenue to purchase technology for Fox Chapel Area High School. To date, the only level where district funding for technology has not been supplemented through grants or fundraising is the middle school. Although the PTO at Dorseyville works very hard to provide additional support to the school, most of the dollars raised go toward providing programs and materials that help children of this age group adjust socially and emotionally as they develop into young adults.

Every child in the Fox Chapel Area School District has the opportunity to attend Dorseyville Middle School, an excellent school with a strong reputation where each student acquires the foundation for further learning. Yet, improving educational technology at this level has proven to be a more serious challenge than we have faced at the elementary and high school levels.

Improving technology at Dorseyville Middle School requires our collective effort. Understanding the challenge is critical – the problem is complex:

- Students feel the gap. Students reach the middle school having come from elementary schools with state of the art technology experiences and move into classrooms void of this technology – this is a step backward in the learning process.
- There is a substantial need to provide the over one thousand students who attend school at Dorseyville Middle School with access to the latest technology. Although students have access to computers, the most current technology, including interactive whiteboards and LCD projectors is absent from most classrooms.
- Some individuals may feel that this should be taken care of through the annual school budget. It is important to note that revenue in the Fox Chapel Area School District is relatively flat. The tax base of the Fox Chapel Area School District is not increasing as it is in many surrounding areas. The governor’s budget over the next five years is projected to include a zero percent increase in subsidy for our school district. The Board of School Directors is striving to keep the millage rate as low as possible while continuing to attract the best and the brightest teachers and provide a curriculum that meets the needs of each student. This is becoming more difficult each year as costs increase, but revenue remains the same.
- Many of the top school districts in the county are building new schools which are equipped with 21st century technology in each classroom. This places our middle school students at a disadvantage. Dorseyville Middle School has 107 teachers. These teachers are sharing access to three Smartboards and 7 Mimios purchased through district funds. Without additional revenue from outside the district budget, it would take years to outfit all of the core subject area classrooms with this technology.
- Thus, the idea of the Dorseyville Challenge to raise money to fill the technology gap between the elementary and high school levels has become an important initiative. To make this a challenge, the Board of School Directors has protected \$100,000 within the budget for the purchase of 21st century technology for Dorseyville Middle School if that amount can be matched through fundraising and/or grant writing. The \$200,000 would provide the students with access to state of the art technology in 50 classrooms throughout the school.

It is important that we continue to maintain our programs and practices without having large tax increases. Working together on projects such as the “Dorseyville Challenge” will allow that to happen.

It is also important that stakeholders look beyond the current program for each child. One building is a snapshot in time – the picture album is about that total education each child will receive in K-5, 6-8, and 9-12. Dorseyville is every student’s school.

We are asking you to “take the challenge.” You can help with this initiative in the following ways:

- Making a donation to the Pittsburgh Foundation (The check should have FCASD Children’s First Fund (Challenge) in the memo. Send the check directly to the Pittsburgh Foundation in care of Kelly Uranker –Five PPG Place, Suite 250, Pittsburgh, PA 15222-5414. Please include a letter indicating that the donation is to be used for the purchase of technology for Dorseyville Middle School.
- Contact your elementary, middle school, or high school PTA/PTO to volunteer to serve on a committee involving the Dorseyville Challenge.
- Talk with others about this initiative and the importance of providing additional technology experiences to students at the middle school level.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continuous support of our children, our schools, and our district.