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Welcome to the Fortitude Podcast. We are back with our regular superintendent update Dr. DuBray. We've passed the third quarter midpoint. Dare I say, well it's 60-ish today, so I'm just going to say that for today the year is just rolling right by. How are you? I'm good, you're right, hard to believe how fast it's going. You know we say that, and it gets to be a little redundant, but it really seems like it now. I mean just every minute just flies by. Hopefully the weather will stick with us. I think part of what makes it seem accelerated is that we have celebrations at almost every turn. We had nine students who were named National Merit finalists just this past week. We've got a cyber security team that went to a state competition. I gotta catch up with them and see how it turned out. So there's been a lot of celebrating going on too that always makes it a little more fun to watch. So one of the things that marks the time is our board meeting every month. The board was in session for their regular meeting the other night. It was kind of nice along with the celebrating theme we had some folks there who work for Fort Zumwalt, but they don't work for Fort Zumwalt and you want to talk about them a little yeah I mean we like to bring to the board's attention staff and students that have particularly good accomplishments. At the February uh 21st board meeting we celebrated ZumCare. ZumCare is the school district's private Clinic that's available for all staff members and their dependents that are on our insurance plan, and it's been open now for five years. We have Dr. Brown-Foote, our nurse practitioner Sue and three health technicians that they have over there. It's in a partnership with BJC, and we we have those technicians available to us. It's really been remarkable how successful it's been, because we survey staff just about every time they visit and our numbers are out of five are always 4.8 4.9 and it's because of the the caring nature of the of the doctor and the nurse practitioner and the fact that you know there's no no charge made when you go to ZumCare. Some generic prescriptions can be dispensed, x-rays are free, and blood work is free, so you know it saves the staff money, and in the long run saves the district money. It's been wildly successful. We've had five years of it, and I don't see any end in sight. I personally have taken advantage of ZumCare and I know how it saves the staff money because I've gone over there and used it. How does it save the taxpayers money? Well if it cuts down on the expenses of the school district that naturally is savings in the budget so it and it does cut down on that because it's would be cheaper to go to ZumCare than it would be to go to an urgent care or go to a emergency room or even your doctor where you have to pay a co-pay to go in there, but in this instance you don't. When you look at our expenses with ZumCare, they are much cheaper than they would be in the open market, so it does save money for the taxpayers that stays in the budget. I love a good win-win. I know you love a good win-win. I do, yeah. So, we had another win-win that the board approved last night if you want to talk a little bit about that. We sit down, the board sits down with teachers every year and talk about salaries and calendars and all various assortments of what it means to work here. How did that go this year, and what did the board approve? It went very well this year. We have six organized groups that are represented by a chief bargainer, and in this case all of the groups are represented by the Missouri National Education Association (MNEA) our local chapter is called (FZEA) Fort Zumwalt Education Association.

They represent several of our support staff members and our teachers. This year we were only looking at our teachers salary and calendar. The language in the agreement that's been bargained with the board of education has been set in a five-year agreement, and it's due to expire next year. We were discussing salary. Our budget has improved considerably with some of the good fortune we've had this year from the state level and the local level with assessed value growth, personal property receipts, things like that. It was a good year, so the public expects their teachers, the teachers that work with their children to be as happy as they can be, and one of the happiest things you can do is pay people well. We've been kind of on the lower end of starting salaries in St Charles County, and we were able to agree to a three-year agreement, and we're able to front load a pretty nice increase of 7.1% for our staff. We also made some improvements in the base salary. It went from 41,000 to 43,000 for a brand new beginning teacher. We also were able to negotiate an increase to the experience level. We've been limited to awarding only five years of experience for new staff members coming to us with experience, and many of them have a lot more than five years, and they get scared away when they know they're only going to be limited to five years. We were able to get that expanded to 10 years. Dr. Henry St Pierre, our Human Resources Assistant Superintendent, gives them some more tools so that he can not only recruit, but he can retain because we sweetened up the salary schedule in the middle part of the Master's Degree, we front loaded a 7.1% increase the first year, second year is 3.25 percent, and the third year is 3%. When I say percent, what I mean is more dollars than the year before, so we're putting 7.1% more dollars into teacher salaries than we did the year before, but it averages out to 7.1%. The same thing would hold true for the 3.25% and the 3%. The board approved that last night unanimously and the teachers approved it at a 94% approval rate, so it was a win-win for sure. We've gotten really good at bargaining in this interest-based bargaining atmosphere, and you know we trust the teachers and they trust us, and that carries through to the other organizations that we negotiate with. Well, I think like you said, in a climate where we know that there's not just a tight job market but that teachers are getting harder and harder to find, being able to give those we have better than bottom of the county pay and to bring in some folks who want to come here but might not have otherwise because of the experience issue, I think that helps us keep our classrooms filled with the people we want there. Over the three-year period our base salary will go from what it was this year 41,200 it will go all the way up to 45,120 by the end of the third year, so we've made some improvements. I know that our parents want their teachers happy because if they're happy, they're going to do a better job with their children, and the children will be happy. So we tried to do the best we can by at the same time keeping a solid handle on the budget so we know that for those three years we can handle what we agreed to. Jeff Orr, our Chief Financial Officer, does a wonderful job budgeting. I think we've kind of turned the corner with the days of our budget being at a precarious state, and well that's a good feeling isn't it? It is, it's a very good feeling. So with that, when we talk about it, we have a reputation as strong stewards and good protectors of the taxpayer dollar. That has taken a lot of effort and work on your part during your tenure as superintendent. How does that come about?

Is that naturally who you were, or was that a goal of yours all along as you led the district? Wel, you know, starting out in 1985 as Superintendent, we always seemed to struggle with money because we were growing so fast during the 80s and the 90s. In the first part of the new century we were growing 650 to 800 kids a year we were termed to be the fastest growing district in the state, and it's hard to keep up with that growth with all the additional staff Members and additional textbooks, so we had to be frugal in order to have a a good balanced budget at the same time to bring all these teachers and all this equipment that was necessary for these kids. I mean we went from 8,200 students in 1985 to up upwards of 19,000 in 2009. We now are hovering at about 17,000 with our pre-K through 12, so we've kind of regressed a little bit and that's not all bad because you're not having to spend all your money on new staff and new materials. It's just kind of the nature of the beast. Prior to beginning as Superintendent, I was the Assistant Superintendent for Administrative Services, and that was my job, to budget, and in those days we had a budget of about 17 million dollars. Today our budget is 260 million, a function of how big we have become but I think I learned as as that budget person being responsible I learned to be able to deal with frugal times and at the same time be able to provide for our students what they needed. I think for the most part if you ask our teachers, they'll tell you that I watch the budget pretty carefully. Here we are today all these years later, and we've really made some nice strides with our teaching staff and our budget still within reasonable balances. You just have to be careful how you budget, know what you've got available, and try to staff accordingly. You touched on making sure that the students have what they need, and we've had three, maybe four focusing on what students need. I'm going to tick them off, and you can let me know where we are with each, how's that sound? The first one you've had a big role in, and that's the courtesy and respect committee which is actually many small committees, right? Each School building out of our 27 school buildings has their own courtesy and respect committee, and they have an assistant principal that's chairing that committee. They meet at least monthly and develop activities that teach better courtesy and respect. We meet twice a year with all those chairs coming together and talking about what they're doing in the buildings. I mean it's something very near and dear to my heart, and it was near and dear to John Christopher, one of our school board members, who had been part of those committees when he was an employee, but we got away from it with the Covid years. There are some neat things going on where kids are learning courtesy and respect and how to demonstrate it, and you know the way the best way to do that is do it at the youngest levels and teach kids courtesy and respect and how to use manners and things like that. So yes we're moving in the right direction. We're going to have another meeting of all the groups coming up in March, I think it's March 28th, and we'll see where we are now and what activities have been developed this past year. Another committee that has been working that you've had some help with I think we have an Assistant Superintendent and some coordinators guiding their work is our diversity and awareness committee where they are in their process for their year's work. I believe they've had three meetings. I just saw an email from Juan Wilson, our Coordinator of Diversity and Awareness, today where he is starting to put out recommendations for the committee members to review.

Juan Wilson and Melissa Tichy, who's coordinating our social emotional skills, those two are co-chairing that committee and they're at a point of sharing possible recommendations with the committee members before we bring it to the school board in the spring. Moving right along also is our bullying prevention committee. How's that going with them? They have developed some recommendations. John Schulte, our Assistant Superintendent for Student Personnel Services, is working with Laura Smith, Assistant Superintendent for Special Services, and they have a list of recommendations that they have sent out to committee members. I believe they'll be ready this spring also to share those with the Board of Education, so some good work going on well. As always, thanks for stopping by boss, and to our listeners thanks of course for tuning in. Tell a friend that we're on YouTube or on your favorite podcast app and tell a friend who might know someone who's going to be five on or before July 31st of this year kindergarten registration in Fort Zumwalt opens on March 1st. They can learn everything they need to know about that at go.fzd.us forward slash kindergarten. This has been the Fortitude podcast. Thanks for listening.

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