

FALL RIVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

"The Scholarship City"

417 Rock Street, Fall River, MA 02720

Matthew H. Malone, Ph.D., Superintendent

August 25, 2017

Dear Fall River Public Schools Faculty and Staff,

Welcome back! This is going to be an amazing school year for our students, the parents and guardians who entrust us with their children, and for every single one of you. Each of you bring 110% of yourself to this work of opening the doors of opportunity for all students, increasing student achievement, and nurturing among the best young people in the Commonwealth. I have enjoyed this summer, spending several weekends travelling all over New England with my wife and children, from the mountains to the beach and all points in between Vermont and Martha's Vineyard. My daughter, Ava, travelled to New Orleans for the Irish Step Dancing Championships and my son, Sal, was a defenseman on a championship winning lacrosse team. I, too, have excelled this summer - in a quest to eat myself across Fall River. There aren't too many restaurants left that I have not visited in the "*Spindle City*". I hope the summer break has been an excellent one for you and your loved ones, and that you are ready and recharged to take on the most important work in the world.

Our work, the inclusive work of service to all who show up at our doors, is challenging work for sure but we have the greatest team in the nation ready to win for children. Despite the challenges associated with the hands that some of our students have been dealt, our students are lucky, they have you - the amazing educators of Fall River - fighting for them. I have witnessed your talents first hand in our classrooms and within our schools, and I can attest to your tireless work ethic, your professionalism, your esprit de corps, and your thoughtfulness in the delivery of instruction. In ways beyond description, our school system is unbeatable and our spirit is indomitable. We are the Fall River Public Schools, driven by strong core values and sense of mission that runs deeply, always leading with our heads and our hearts to serve with honor, integrity, purpose, and compassion.

This summer has been one of reflection and introspection. Recent events across our nation have highlighted the importance of social-emotional learning. Test scores are certainly important, but developing kind and loving young people filled with empathy and hope, able to navigate a pluralistic society, working together to solve problems while respecting human differences is an equally important endeavor. In thinking about this, I was drawn to one of my heroes – a proud son of Fall River, Captain Thomas Hudner, Naval Aviator and recipient of the Medal of Honor.

In December 1950, while supporting the Marines on the ground at the Chosin Reservoir on the Korean Peninsula, Captain Hudner's wingman, Ensign Jesse Brown, the first African American Naval Aviator in U.S. History, was shot down by enemy gunfire, crashing his plane in a snowfield on the side of a mountain. Injured and unable to free himself from the damaged fuselage, Ensign Brown was in dire need of help. Captain Hudner called for a rescue helicopter, but the enemy was encroaching fast on the site of the downed airplane. Knowing his wingman, his buddy, was in need, Captain Hudner crash landed his own aircraft to save his shipmate. For more than an hour, he used his hands and an axe to attempt to free Ensign Brown whose legs were pinned under the fuselage. Despite Captain Hudner's efforts, Ensign Brown was never extracted from the crash site and he perished in the snow on the side of the hill, shortly after Captain Hudner was reluctantly pulled from the wreckage by a Navy helicopter in a last ditch effort to save the young pilot.

The story of Captain Hudner and Ensign Brown exemplifies the core values of our nation. It is a story of honor, courage, and commitment forged in fire on a cold and desolate hillside in Korea. It is also the story that reminds me most about the kind of people, the kind of selfless sacrifice and the kind of humanity, that we all need to work on and restore within ourselves and within the fabric of America.

In the Fall River Public Schools, we take care of each other and we take care of every single young person we serve. We do not tolerate hate, we do not accept bigotry, we do not participate in homophobia, and we do not condone xenophobia in any way. We are committed to equity, justice, tolerance, civility, and inclusion. We welcome everyone with an open mind while respecting and embracing diversity and human difference in all its unique forms. Our students will return to us in less than two weeks and they will rightfully have questions and concerns regarding recent events. We will be prepared to ensure that our schools are safe spaces, both physically and emotionally, and that our classrooms are open for honest discourse, discussion, and dissent as we strive to always model the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, "*we can disagree without becoming disagreeable*". Our work is larger than literacy and numeracy, we are building the core values and belief systems of current/future teammates who will have to set aside personal differences in order to collaborate, serve as beacons of acceptance, forge a sense of community, and propel our democracy forward for the greater good of all. Captain Hudner performed an incredibly heroic and noble act because of his love for his fellow wingman and friend and I know that each of us has a little bit of Captain Hudner in our hearts. This is the Fall River way, this is the American way.

Our annual **Convocation** will begin at **8:00 am** on **September 5, 2017**, in the **B.M.C. Durfee High School Auditorium**. From 8:00 am to 8:30 am we will mingle and network with friends and colleagues, and our program will commence promptly at 8:30 am. Please be seated and ready at that time. I promise to have everyone out of the Auditorium no later than 9:55 am so that with travel time, you can be back in your buildings by 10:30 am. Your school principal will send you the building-based agenda for the rest of the day. In the spirit of fellowship, I ask that each of you bring a non-perishable boxed or canned food item as we once again donate to the United Neighbors of Fall River Food Pantry. Last year's food drive was a huge success for our community and I would like to make this an annual tradition of giving. We will have collection receptacles in the lobby. On behalf of Mayor Jasiel Correia and our School Committee, I look forward to welcoming you and talking with you about the work we will do to make this an exceptional school year for every person in our school district. Let's do this!

Cordially,



Matthew H. Malone, Ph.D.
Superintendent of schools

