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~A Word from Superintendent Douglas Burton: In June, state leaders passed a property tax levy cap that places new restrictions on how school districts and municipalities may increase their tax levies. Although the media usually refers to the law as a "2 percent tax cap," that phrase is a misnomer. Still, the law will affect Fort Plain and districts around the state as they develop their budgets for 2012-2013. Like many laws, the terminology can be complicated and sometimes difficult to understand. Knowing all the facts is important when you vote on the school district budget on Tuesday, May 15. The "2 percent tax cap" does not actually limit a tax levy increase to 2 percent. It does mean, however, that any increase above a certain amount requires 60 percent of voters to approve the school budget. That certain amount is called the "tax levy limit" and will vary by school district. Each district, including Fort Plain, will determine its "tax levy limit" by using a complex eight-step formula that includes factors such as the growth in the local tax base (if there is any), the previous year's tax levy, and the current and future years' payments in lieu of taxes. The rate of inflation or 2 percent (whichever is lower) is just one part of the "tax levy limit" calculation. That is where the phrase "2 percent tax cap" comes from. After a school district calculates its "tax levy limit," it then adds exemptions into that amount. These exemptions allow the district to propose a tax levy greater than the amount set by the "limit" without requiring 60 percent of the voters to pass the budget. If Fort Plain's proposed budget meets or stays below the "tax levy limit" (before exemptions), only 50 percent of voters (a simple majority) need to vote "yes." If Fort Plain proposes a budget that includes a tax levy above its "tax levy limit," you will see a statement on the ballot because that is the law. For further details on the tax cap, please visit the Fort Plain CSD website.

~State Legislators Tour Fort Plain Schools: State Senator Hugh T. Farley and Assemblyman George Amedore toured Fort Plain CSD's buildings on Monday, November 14th, and talked about education issues such as equitable state aid distribution. The group, which also included Superintendent Burton, Board of Education member Jeff Jones, and Harry Hoag School Principal Cathy Brucker, toured both schools and the bus garage to see the improvements made during the recent \$17 million capital project. "We first wanted to thank them and recognize the hard work they've done in maintaining capital project building aid, which enabled us to upgrade, modernize, and provide additional opportunities to our students at no cost to the taxpayers," Superintendent Burton said. "If we are going to prepare our students during the 21st century, we need to maintain those efforts and preserve our state aid. I think they understand our plight and are willing to fight for us. And that's what we need."

~Junior High Students Turn Their "Minds On": Ten seventh grade students, and their social studies teacher Katie Sacco, recently participated in a day long "journey" on the Underground Railroad with international educators and entertainers Reggie and Kim Harris. During the workshop, students mapped an escape route on the Underground Railroad, learned "code" songs, composed abolitionist speeches, and wrote stories. Each student was given a community role, such as preacher or butcher, and they worked together as a team to plot an escape from Lake George to the Canadian border. The students were among 160 middle school students who attended three days of workshops designed by "Minds On," an educational initiative of The Rensselaerville Institute. The workshops give students the chance to work with mentors in history, science, math, and writing. Other themes this year include: DNA Gathering, Forensic Crime Solving, Gear Trains, Modern Forms of Slavery, Frightening Fiction, Biography-Real and Imagined, and Mathematical Manipulations. Jr/Sr High School English teacher Tracy Yurkewicz took eight grade students to a workshop called "Writing Your Life Story." The presenter trained the students to write by using a "show don't tell technique." Said Mrs. Sacco, "The best part is that I can bring those lessons they learned back into our classroom."

~Students of the Month: The Harry Hoag Elementary School has announced the October Students of the Month. They are: Sophia-Lily Bates, Jacob Sweet, Estee Smith, Grace Hoffman, Jayla Smallwood, Jeremy Blowers, Rhyonn Ford, and Jacob Thomas. The Jr/Sr High School has also announced their October Students of the Month. The honored students are: Julia Stockwell, Emily Potter, Cody Burkhart, Ryan Potter, Jacob Sardina, and Brandon Trumbull.

~December Dates: The half-way mark of the second quarter (15 weeks) is December 9th. Interim reports will be mailed on Friday, December 16th. There is a Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, December 13th at 6:00 p.m. in the district office conference room. The PTA will host its annual "Elves Night" on Tuesday, December 13th from 6:00-8:00 p.m. in the HHS gym & cafeteria. The PTA Secret Santa Sale will run from December 13th through December 20th and will be open after morning program.