

# Traditions

District Publication of  
Fort Thomas Independent Schools



SPECIAL FOCUS:  
**Our Tradition—Our Future**

**SPRING/SUMMER 2021**

# From the Superintendent

Spring is here, and with it our hope abounds for the future of Fort Thomas Independent Schools (FTIS). As the spread of the coronavirus slows and limitations lift, I've been reflecting on the past year and what it has revealed about who we are as a district and where we want to go.

At FTIS, the virus reminded us of what we value the most—the ability for every student to receive the education they need to be successful on their future path. It's shown us how resilient and resourceful we can be in the face of new challenges. Although we have continually modified how we deliver education over the last year, we have found new ways to achieve our mission. Additionally, our Portrait of a Graduate competencies (problem solving, thinking critically, collaborating, communicating and leading) have proven incredibly helpful as we've navigated the challenges of the last year.

In this issue of *Traditions*, you'll read about the variety of ways we're holding on to our traditions and preparing for our future. Even in the face of a pandemic, we've held tightly to the traditions that make us who we are: school spirit, rigorous classroom instruction, exceptional sports, focus on the arts, Friday night football, student leadership, the Kindergarten Circus, graduation events, high AP scores, service learning and so many more.

## Holding Fast and Moving Forward

Although we may modify these traditions or improve them, they will always remain because they have been formative to our success.

While we hold on to our traditions, we are also leaning into our future. We want to continue to apply the new ideas our community members, teachers, parents and students raise. Preparing students for the future requires us to continuously improve at providing students with the right tools for their futures. Not only do we want to continue to do well on standardized tests, but we also want to ensure that students are successful after they graduate, whether they choose college, a trade school or an entrepreneurial endeavor.

As we continue to hold on to rigorous classroom instruction and high expectations, we're also providing students with more career pathways. We're expanding work-based learning opportunities, extracurricular activities, technology training for teachers and internship opportunities.

We've just faced one of the most unpredictable years in our school history, and we've navigated it by holding fast to our traditions and applying our 21<sup>st</sup>-century competencies. We want our students to be able to do the same: to benefit from the deep well of FTIS traditions while also having the skills they need to find effective solutions in the face of future, unforeseen challenges..

— **Dr. Karen Cheser**, Superintendent, Fort Thomas Independent Schools



Dr. Karen Cheser with HHS students in her Superintendent's Student Advisory Council.

*Traditions* is published two times a year (fall and spring) by the Fort Thomas Independent Schools. *Traditions* is sent to all homes in the 41075 ZIP code, teachers and tuition students who do not live in the district, alumni and all Fort Thomas Education Foundation donors.

Cover: HHS students in the Health Innovations Flight Path learn and practice CPR skills.

## Calendar, 2021

### August

18 First Day for Students

### September

6 Labor Day – No School

15 Late Arrival Day

### October

7 No School

8 NKEA Day – No School

11 Professional Development – No School

20 Late Arrival Day

### November

24 Professional Development – No School

25–26 Thanksgiving Holiday – No School

### December

8 Late Arrival Day

17 Last School Day Before Winter Break

## 2021 Governor's Programs

### Governor's Scholar Program

- ▶ Macy Kocher
- ▶ Ethan Lawhorn
- ▶ Anne Perkins
- ▶ Elijah Smith
- ▶ Kylie Toole
- ▶ Will White
- ▶ Katherine Wilson

### GSP Alternates

- ▶ Josie Steppe
- ▶ Parker Cleveland

### Governor's School for the Arts

- ▶ Samuel Contreras – Creative Writing

### GSA Alternates

- ▶ Brynn Shannon – Visual Art
- ▶ Parker Cleveland – Film & Photography

### Governor's School for Entrepreneurs

- ▶ Nate Weidner
- ▶ Charlie Gorman
- ▶ Parker Cleveland
- ▶ Savannah King

## 2020–21 State Champions

### Individual Champions

- ▶ Abby Bach – Bowling
- ▶ Maggie Schroeder – Cross Country
- ▶ Mac Russell – Swimming, 50-yard freestyle; 100-yard freestyle

### Team Champions

- ▶ Boys Basketball Team
- ▶ We the People
- ▶ Odyssey of the Mind
  - HHS Technical Problem Team
  - HHS Vehicle Problem Team

## KMEA All-State

### Jazz Band

- ▶ Logan Holbrook – Piano

### Symphony Orchestra

- ▶ Harrison Pawsat – Cello

### Commonwealth Orchestra

- ▶ Isaac Bassett – Double Bass
- ▶ Max Birchfield – Double Bass
- ▶ David Dierig – Violin
- ▶ Cooper Gamble – Violin
- ▶ Mason Heithaus – Viola
- ▶ Bellamy Martin – Violin
- ▶ Mackenzie Opitz – Violin
- ▶ Caden Schroeder – Violin

## 2021 National Scholastic Awards

- ▶ Harrison Gamble – Gold Medal

## National Merit Finalists

- ▶ Julianna Russ
- ▶ Matthew Young

## FCCLA Star Event

- ▶ Kayleigh Nicolaus, Ava Torrano, Kate Carris – Chapter in Review
- ▶ Lainey Wagner – Level I Career Investigation

# Recognitions

## Moving from Either/Or *to* Yes/And

With a reputation for consistently graduating the brightest and the best, Fort Thomas Independent Schools (FTIS) is the leader that so many Kentucky school districts follow. It couldn't be truer now. FTIS has been paving the continuing education path through the COVID-19 crisis from the start. We were the first to have plans in place for online learning, and our resources were coveted by—and freely, willingly shared with—districts throughout the state.

School districts often buy into the myth that if their students are to find success in traditional academic measures, they must minimize their efforts around providing students with life-ready skills. Likewise, if students are to achieve high scores on standardized tests like the ACT or AP, then schools must forego expanding their career pathway programs, or project-based learning initiatives or student leadership opportunities.

"It's common for schools to believe that they can only pursue one kind of success—either on traditional assessments or with 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills," says **Superintendent Dr. Karen Cheser**. "But we've found that we can say 'yes, and.' We can say 'yes' to succeeding on traditional assessments, 'and' we can equip students with 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills."

Over the last three years, as FTIS has implemented its Portrait of a Graduate (POG) competencies, it has increased its dual-credit offerings, entrepreneurial opportunities, project-based learning experiences and student leadership roles. But rather than seeing a decline in standardized test scores, FTIS has seen a rise in scores and placements in traditional academic measurements. "Highlands High School jumped 120 slots in nationally ranked high schools, our ACT scores have gone up, and more students are passing AP exams and earning dual credits than ever before," reports Dr. Cheser.

Meanwhile, more students are choosing arts-focused careers, launching their own businesses and entering trade programs after graduation. As students are being adequately

equipped for future career options, they're also achieving record state assessment scores.

"Our focus on increasing students' opportunities to learn, practice and apply the POG competencies hasn't taken away our focus on being top performers on standardized tests. In fact, we found that by integrating the POG competencies into our teaching framework, we're actually increasing students' ability to succeed on standardized tests," says Dr. Cheser.

FTIS has proven that traditional success can still be achieved when giving students all the life-ready skills they need to succeed in their future. FTIS has:

- *An audio engineering program*
- *An award-winning drama program*
- *A top-notch athletics program*
- *Dual-credit options*
- *Project-based learning experiences*
- *Technology integration*
- *Social and emotional development and support initiatives*
- *Real-world application of content opportunities*

FTIS has seen a rise in scores and placements in traditional academic measurements.

"We have it all," says Dr. Cheser. "It's a yes to rigorous instruction and high test scores and a wide range of opportunities to build skills in problem-solving, collaboration, leadership, critical thinking and communication."

Not only is FTIS continuing to prioritize content mastery, it's also finding ways to improve. "We're adding on to content mastery, not shifting our focus," reiterates Cheser. "Yes, we will continue in the strong traditions that make us who we are and define what we stand for, and we will continuously improve and equip students with the skills that are vitally important for their success."

"I extend a special invitation to all of our alumni who understand our great traditions and are also knowledgeable about what the workplace requires," adds Dr. Cheser. "If you're willing to talk to students, offer a work-based learning opportunity or give us input on what you're seeing in the workplace, we'd love to hear from you. Please contact me at karen.cheser@fortthomas.kyschools.us. Help us continue in our rich traditions and focus on the future."

## Valuing Tradition, Working for the Future

By **Megan Benzing**, Hilltopper editor and **Ty Boler** and **William Todd**, staff writers, HHS Journalism

**Kimberly Halbauer** grew up on the west side of Cincinnati and attended Mother of Mercy High School. While attending this all-girls private school, she enjoyed playing soccer and performing in theater. Following graduation, Halbauer attended Thomas More University and majored in Business Administration and Finance. During that time, she began working as a teller at Fifth Third Bank. There, she found her love for banking, finance and management. Working with people and helping them solve their problems interested her the most.

Halbauer has moved up through the ranks, including as a managing director of Fifth Third Private Bank in Cincinnati, which helped wealthy families and businesses transition their wealth. Now she has become the first female president of the Kentucky region that manages all three divisions.

Halbauer reminisced that when she was an entry-level teller, she thought about how amazing it would be to do the job she is doing now. "Seeing a dream become reality is a pretty cool feeling," she says. Helping people achieve their dreams has become a strong mission for her as she volunteers as a valuable board member for several organizations, such as Tri-Ed, United Way, and as chairman of the board of the American Heart Association.

One of Halbauer's main opportunities throughout her career has been impacting younger generations, especially young women, to believe that dreams can become reality, just as hers did. She values the strong academic traditions of Fort Thomas Independent Schools, choosing to make this her home and where her children attend school; however, she is always looking forward to see how we might all better serve students. For example, others look to her, as a member of the Gateway Foundation Board, for innovative ideas.

Halbauer has been heavily involved with the Fort Thomas Education Foundation as a board member for three years and as a donor. She worked on the Finance Committee, co-chaired the masquerade ball gala celebration and lent her expertise to the Planned Giving Committee.

"I think Fort Thomas is a great district because everyone comes together—students, faculty and administration, parents, community leaders and more," she says. "Everyone works together to make Fort Thomas such a great district." This collaboration not only respects our time-honored traditions but also ensures that we focus on the future so all students can realize their dreams.

**"The two most important letters in the alphabet are a and e, for attitude and effort. There are a lot of things in life you can't control, but you can always control your attitude and your effort."**  
~ **Kimberly Halbauer**



**Kimberly Halbauer**

J

# Johnson Elementary School

JOHNSON  
elementary

## 'Pillars and Pathways' Joins Project-Based Learning

Johnson Elementary School's (JES) new home during its renovation has been temporary mobiles located in "the Valley" on Highlands High School's (HHS) campus, and it hasn't been easy. (But perhaps it's made students and faculty more adaptable—and thankful for the space—after finding themselves teaching and learning from kitchens, bedrooms and basements!)

During the 2021–22 school year, Johnson Elementary will be rolling out a new program, Pillars and Pathways, to help students develop the skills and mindsets to be successful not just in school but in life. Pillars and Pathways is a combination of the Portrait of a Graduate competencies, workplace ethics standards (required by Kentucky legislation) and the Johnson Pillars (Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be Safe and Be a Learner).

"We wanted to intentionally integrate each of these elements into a new program that gives students the opportunity to grow through goal setting and deep reflection," says **Jennifer Flynn**. Flynn was joined by **Whitney McKay, Alyssa Vanderpool, Katie Huber** and **Katie Leftin** to create the new social and emotional learning program.

The Pillars and Pathways program provides students 12 pathways that will focus and enrich their learning:

- Compassion
- Curiosity
- Healthy choices
- Creativity
- Initiative and diligence
- Critical thinking
- Problem solving
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Global understanding
- Courage
- Leadership



Johnson students show the artwork they created honoring our veterans.

Each quarter, students will choose a pathway they want to focus on and identify a goal based on that pathway. They will also determine how they will accomplish the goal, why it's important to them and who will help them achieve it.

All 12 pathways will be highlighted through the school year, three each quarter. To understand each pathway, students will be given books to read, a video to watch, a song to learn (written by music teacher **Alyssa Vanderpool**), a classroom activity and ways parents can help their children apply the pathway at home.

"It's important that we teach children how to be truly successful in life, not just in school," says McKay. "Research shows that getting good grades doesn't always lead to happiness or long-term success. More than anything, we want Johnson students to find meaning in life through relationships with others and the work they choose to do."

Pillars and Pathways dovetails perfectly with one of Johnson's favorite traditions: project-based learning (PBL). "Students can deeply explore a problem from multiple points of view and develop more empathetic solutions," explains 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade teacher **Aimee Shadwell**. Fourth-grade teacher **Jillian Booth** adds, "PBL allows students to feel invested in the community and learn that, even at age 9 and 10, they can make a difference in their community."

The annual Johnson Veterans Day Program is driven by PBL, which allows students to lead the program's creation and implementation from start to finish. Students begin by answering, "How can we honor and share the stories of our veterans?" They then form groups to brainstorm, present their proposals to the class and organize their thoughts by using a digital interactive notebook. Students have come up with such plans as:

- Creating an iMovie of stories from interviews of students who are related to veterans
- Designing a memorial wreath and writing a poem dedicated to the veterans

This year, due to COVID-19, students came up with the idea to send letters and cards to veterans they knew. Not only does the Veterans Day project invoke in students a deep respect for veterans, says Vanderpool, but it also refines their collaboration, critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

# Moyer Elementary School

M

MOYER  
elementary

## On Stage: A New Parade and a Timeless Circus

On Nov. 11, 2020, Moyer Elementary School (MES) students collected their carefully constructed posters and headed outside to honor dozens of veterans who drove through their parade of cheers during Moyer's first ever Veterans Day parade.

"We always do a huge Veterans Day celebration at Moyer," says Principal **Dawn Laber**. "But due to COVID-19, our typical event wasn't permitted. Our teachers got together and brainstormed, and we all agreed on hosting a parade instead."

Students invited veterans in their families and the community to come to the celebration, and the VA Hospital and Carmel Manor joined also. Veterans drove along the parade route, making the loop as many times as they wanted. And many did in order to find the student who had encouraged them to come.

Fifth-grader **Charlotte** invited her "Grandpa Mike," who was in the Air Force. "I was so happy to see my grandpa out of the house and with a huge smile on his face as he waved to me. It made me proud of him and proud of our school."

As music filled the air, the students cheered and chanted "U-S-A." Many veterans decorated their vehicles to represent their military branch and slowed to get photos of the students cheering them on. At the end of the parade, veterans could pick up a bag with cards and donated items from the students. "I wish my grandpa could have been there," says 3<sup>rd</sup>-grader **Connor**. "He would've loved it. He lives too far away. I liked



Moyer students take their Veteran's Day banner outside for the drive through parade.

cheering for our veterans. It made me proud."

Laber says the parade was a huge success. "One family wrote to tell me that their great-grandpa, who served in World War II, was at the parade. He has trouble with his memory and rarely speaks due to age and health issues. But he was waving, smiling and even spoke briefly about his time in the war on the way home in the car. We were all so touched by his story, and I know our students enjoyed making our local heroes smile!"

Moyer plans to turn the Veterans Day parade into a tradition. "I've had multiple emails asking that we make this parade a new MES tradition," says Laber. "Our staff all agreed that this was a magical moment and one that should be repeated."

## Circus Tradition Revived

The Veterans Day parade will join one of Moyer's longest held traditions: the Kindergarten Circus. Every kindergartener takes part in an act and in the grand finale dance. Third-grader Addie remembers, "I really liked the grand finale because everyone got to come back on stage and do the dance."

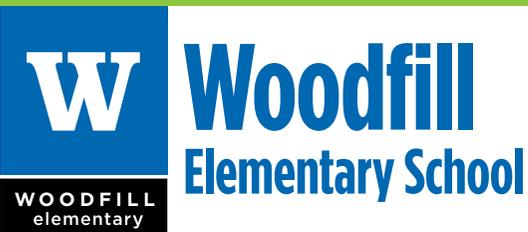
The original circus began in the 1930s but had long been discontinued until 1993 when then PE teacher **Bo McCord** suggested the circus performance for the kindergarten class. **Julie Steppe** and her partner teacher, **Jennie Kendall**, took him up on the idea and hosted their version of the circus that year. Later, Steppe would receive a donated picture from the circus at Ruth Moyer in 1934, and the school would discover old handwritten yearbooks with mention of the now annual Kindergarten Circus.

"Over the last couple of decades, we've added so much to the program, including costumes, music, props and commercially designed decorations," says Steppe. Now the program incorporates scooters, a balance beam, balloons and a professional face painter and is tied into physical education, social skills and student performance. Not even COVID-19 has stopped this long-standing tradition at MES.

Every year, the circus draws a huge audience. "It's become a treasured community event," says kindergarten teacher **Annie Goetz**. "We look forward to carrying on this tradition for decades to come!"



The Kindergarten Circus ringmaster is all smiles.



## Woodfill: Where Kindness and Inclusivity Abound

Every spring semester, Woodfill students participate in Everybody Counts, a Kentucky program used to teach students about disabilities. Created by a mother of a child with disabilities, Everybody Counts seeks to raise awareness and understanding. Students watch a video each day of the week that chronicles the stories of people with a disability. They engage in classroom lessons and simulations about how different disabilities impact people. Simulations include using a walker, communicating through a speech generating device, reading braille and experiencing hearing loss.

Fifth-grader **Roland Hensley** found the speech-generating device intriguing. "It helped me understand the struggles people deal with every day. It was cool to see some of the technology they use to help them say things."

### Unified Champion School

One of Woodfill's newest endeavors is to be one of Kentucky's first Unified Champion Schools, which promotes social inclusion through intentionally implemented programs that bring together students with and without intellectual disabilities with the goal to create system-wide change.

**Holly Solzmon**, special education teacher and a Unified Club sponsor, says the goal isn't about earning the distinction of becoming a Unified Champion School. "The real goal is to implement our Unified programs consistently over time and continue to spread the importance of inclusion."

Three components define a Unified Champion School: inclusive sports, inclusive youth leadership opportunities and whole-school engagement. Principal **Keith Faust** brought the idea to the staff in spring 2019. By fall 2019, Woodfill had created a Unified Bocce League, Unified Physical Education and a Unified Leadership Club.

Fourth-grader **Ray Turner**, who plays on the Unified Bocce League says, "I like playing bocce ball and being part of a team. I like getting to see my friends from different classes."

Third-grader **Parker Shipman** really appreciates the message the Unified program brings. "Everybody just wants to be themselves!" she says. "Everyone should be treated equally no matter what."

"Woodfill truly values the abilities every child brings to our school," says speech therapist **Megan Grainger**. "Everyone has something to offer our school community. This program helps students develop or strengthen empathy for people who may struggle while also celebrating individual successes."

Everybody Counts teaches students that everyone has different strengths and weaknesses, the value of supporting one another when tasks are difficult and the importance of celebrating one another when we master a skill. "Everybody Counts is a great tool at Woodfill to teach empathy," says kindergarten teacher **Rhonda Gardner**. "It helps us see the world through someone else's eyes."

Everybody Counts is a necessary, vital and meaningful tradition at Woodfill, important not only to our schools, but for our community as a whole.



Woodfill students enjoy the competition and friendship as they play Unified Sports bocce ball.

"We want Woodfill to be a place where social inclusion and equitable learning and sports opportunities are part of our foundation and ingrained into our school culture," says **Natalie Heidrich**, Title I teacher and Unified Club sponsor.

PE teacher **Matt Gessner** knows how important these principles and practices are. "If we want to make an impact on social inclusion," he says, "it must start with our youth."



## Service and Leadership

The 8<sup>th</sup>-grade Washington, D.C., trip has been a rite of passage for Highlands Middle School (HMS) students for nearly 20 years. The three-day trip not only celebrates the end of their middle school experience but also gives students a chance to see the lessons they've learned about history and government come to life.

Music teacher **Beth Rowland** reports that students come away from the trip inspired. "They have greater appreciation for American history and social studies," she says. "Based on enthusiasm and positive feedback from students and parents, the trip has become a prized tradition."

During the trip, students visit the Capitol Building, Ford's Theatre, Mount Vernon, Arlington Cemetery, the Smithsonian and the National Holocaust Memorial Museum. They also stop outside the White House and over the years have toured the Library of Congress, the Washington Monument, the Newseum, the Pentagon and Gettysburg, Pa.

The trip provides countless opportunities for students to witness leadership in a variety of ways. "The D.C. trip reinforces our Portrait of a Graduate competencies," says language arts teacher **Michele Beier**. "As they encounter new people, move through the museums and navigate travel without their parents, students are communicating, critically thinking, empathizing, leading and problem solving."

Additionally, the trip demonstrates to students the importance of service. By learning how past and present Americans served their country in so many different ways, students are prompted to consider how they too could serve.



HMS students stop for a photo op in front of the White House during the last 8<sup>th</sup>-grade Washington, D.C., trip.

"Students are able to explore with their groups, ask their own questions and develop their own conclusions from what they've experienced," says Rowland. "It's a delight to see how their thoughts and beliefs grow throughout the trip."

Senior **Peter Laskey** says the trip is an invaluable, enriching, memorable experience. He emphasizes, "The tradition must go on."

### Council's Ongoing Influence

Another tradition at HMS is Student Council. But recently, it has been growing in new ways. The council leads HMS service projects throughout the year and is taking a larger leadership role with projects, including fundraisers like the HMS Canned Food Drive, raising awareness around important issues like Red Ribbon Week and coordinating events like the Veterans Day assembly.

Any student may join Student Council, and the team averages 10–20 members. "As students volunteer, I hope they'll learn that we all can have a positive influence on our community while having fun too," says **Ryan Augustin**, Student Council adviser.

The council often acts as a spark for positive events in the school and creates opportunities for the student body to make a difference in the community. Eighth-grader and Student Council member **Lillian Hug** says, "I've learned to help other students by encouraging them to participate in school activities and how to organize various school events. It's teaching me to think outside the box."

Recently, Student Council has taken on organizing the Veterans Day assembly from start to finish, an event that used to be executed entirely by teachers and staff.

"I've learned so much in this group, including how to help people around me and encourage them to do good for the community," says **Natalie Hurles**, 8<sup>th</sup>-grade council member.



**Highlands**  
High School

HIGHLANDS  
HIGH

# Where Opportunity Meets Excellence

Highlands High School (HHS) is full of traditions: college-level classes, increased career exploratory experiences, exemplary extracurricular activities, social/emotional learning. But undergirding every single one is HHS's tradition of excellence.

In 2020, HHS was ranked second in Kentucky by *U.S. News & World Report*. It boasts a record high AP participation rate of 92 percent and ACT and SAT scores well above state and national averages. Nearly 90 percent of graduates go on to college, and HHS is consistently a leader in National Merit Finalists.

Further, HHS has a reputation for winning state championships, whether it be for "We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution" or in athletics. The Bluebirds football team set a record in 2012 for consecutive state football championships (six), and HHS has 51 state titles across all sports. The drama program received 18 Cappie nominations

in 2016 and the 2013 award for "Best Musical" in the greater Cincinnati area. The music program regularly qualifies students for All-State and scores at the distinguished level at contest.

HHS's awards, championships and rankings are the result of HHS's teacher, student and community efforts to achieve excellence. Principal **Matthew Bertasso** says his school's commitment to excellence knows no bounds. "This year, in the midst of a pandemic, we have not acquiesced to being 'good enough.' We worked hard to get students in school, in person, all together, every day so they could receive the best education possible."

Despite the obstacles of COVID-19, HHS has found ways to adapt and adjust to be able to continue to hold theatrical productions, band concerts and athletic events. "Excellence is the benchmark," says Bertasso, "so we work to achieve it, no matter the circumstances."

**"Excellence is the benchmark," says Bertasso, "so we work to achieve it, no matter the circumstances."**

As HSS continues to build on its tradition of excellence, it's also laying the groundwork for a new tradition. "Our future is in providing students with growth opportunities," says Bertasso. HHS is consistently looking to provide students with more opportunities to help ready them for their futures.

In recent years, students have gained more academic opportunities through dual-credit offerings and online courses. Students can now take advantage of Launch, the new collaboration space and idea incubator where students pursue different flight paths such as App Development, Health Innovations, Entrepreneurship, and Business Analytics. The Athletics Department has added esports (competitive video gaming) and wrestling, and student in the arts now have expanded, advanced performance opportunities.

HHS continues to innovate for success. Special education teacher **Sue Beiting** is leading a new initiative with Fort Thomas Coffee in which HHS students will provide coffee delivery services to each of the FTIS schools.

"Our teachers are always strategizing new ways to give students access to hands-on learning and to deepen their



*HHS students take a break at Fort Thomas Coffee before loading up for their next delivery.*

empathy, courage, creativity, curiosity and global mindset," says Bertasso. "The tradition of excellence continues to grow as we create new opportunities in every area and aspect of our school."



*The cast and crew of the high school's spring musical Young Frankenstein carry on the tradition of excellence in HHS Theatre.*

# Facilities Update (Johnson Elementary)



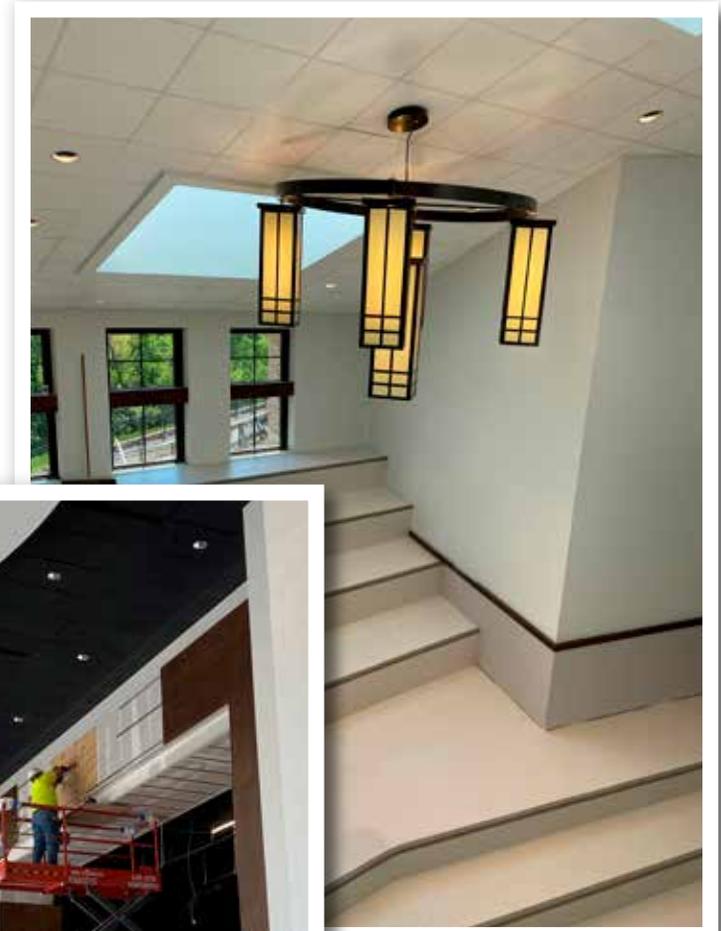
Main Entrance



Gymnasium Entrance



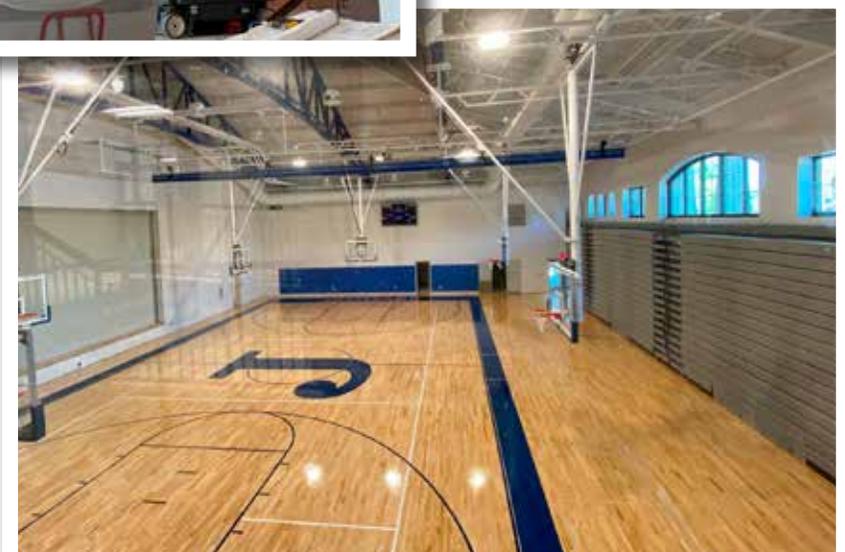
Cafeteria



Social Steps



Cafetorium Stage



Gymnasium

**SAVE THE DATE!**

Tour the new Johnson Elementary School.

**Open House —  
August 15<sup>th</sup>**

# Teachers Tend Traditions and Foster Futures

Perhaps the longest held tradition at Fort Thomas Independent Schools (FTIS) is academic excellence. FTIS teachers are masters at maximizing instructional time, maintaining high performance expectations and providing a fully immersive academic experience filled with enriching learning opportunities.

FTIS teachers are equally committed to integrating 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills into learning so students have the life skills they need for their future. The Portrait of a Graduate competencies are woven into educational frameworks, and teachers are ensuring that students are not just acquiring knowledge but understanding how to use it to effect change in the world.



New teachers attend an educational study seminar on high-quality classroom practices.

At the center of FTIS's successes are teachers who uphold the district's best traditions while creating new ones. Both veteran and newer teachers contribute in distinct and invaluable ways.

Because FTIS is a sought-after district by job-seeking teachers, we rarely hire more than 10–12 new teachers each year. "We're very particular about recruiting and retaining staff," says **Bill Bradford**, assistant superintendent for teaching and learning. "We onboard people who often stay here for their entire careers, and that gives our district tremendous advantages."

Veteran teachers understand our history, explains Bradford. They understand what programs and strategies have been in place over time that have maintained and improved academic success. "Veteran teachers are able to share that mindset with new teachers and show them how to replicate success," adds Bradford.

Further, veteran teachers have a wealth of experience and are masters in their academic disciplines. They know how to achieve desired educational outcomes, and they're experts at refining and improving their classroom instruction. For example:

- Veteran HHS teacher **Colleen Epperson** has been elevating the environmental science program during

her tenure. Epperson went to the Amazon Rainforest two summers ago and took part in an environmental science program for teachers that has enabled her to make global connections with her students.

- **Cora Dill**, a veteran 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade teacher at Moyer Elementary, is doing innovative work. This spring, Dill set up a live stream for hatching chickens so students could learn about the conditions for surviving in a habitat.
- Veteran Spanish teacher **Silvia McClamrock** has created numerous forward-thinking opportunities for students to be global communicators and is leading districtwide discussions about equity and inclusivity.

Just as veteran teachers are vital to the district's success, so are newer teachers. All new teachers go through an onboarding process. They are required to work through a series of educational study seminars that provide orientation on how things operate, expected procedures, and a whole host of other district-specific strategies and approaches.

"The content ranges from working with exceptional students to high-yield instructional strategies to instructional technology," says Bradford. Over the last few years, the seminars have been modified to include Portrait of a Graduate instructional frameworks; student digital portfolios; and inclusive excellence, which addresses diversity, equity and inclusion in education.

Most "new" teachers at FTIS are not new to the profession, so they come with ideas and strategies from past experiences. Not only do they share these with FTIS veteran teachers, but they also offer the district a fresh perspective. "New teachers often are more willing and ready to make changes," says Bradford. "They're often more comfortable trying a new idea, and their enthusiasm brings their colleagues along."

Woodfill Elementary librarian **Karrie Chajkowski** came to the district a few years ago and has built a robust makerspace program, allowing Woodfill students to engage in hands-on critical thinking skills and creative problem solving. **Katie Mills**, a kindergarten teacher at Johnson Elementary, came back to the district five years ago and rewrote for her students some of the history found in her father's (Bill Thomas) Fort Thomas books. Her students take walking tours through the city to find historical landmarks and meet local leaders.

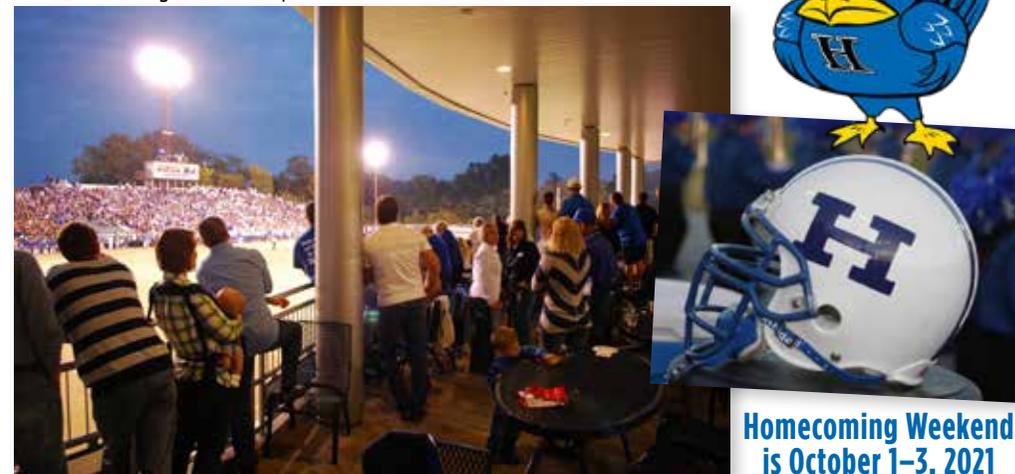
"It's because of our talented veteran and new teaching staff that FTIS can maximize our traditions and create and incorporate the Portrait of a Graduate competencies," says Bradford. "The success of our students after graduation is in large part due to our teaching staff, which not only embodies our best traditions, but are some of the best critical thinkers, problem solvers, courageous leaders, global communicators and empathetic collaborators in the nation."

## Bluebird Nation! Join the Foundation Club to get a front row seat!

### FOUNDATION CLUB

Join us under the lights and help our schools while cheering from the best seat in the house. Foundation Club membership includes reserved parking, private entry with no lines, a catered pregame dinner and more.

If you join the Foundation Club or renew your membership by **June 13, 2021**, you will be entered to win a Highlands Team Spirit Gift Basket.



Homecoming Weekend  
is October 1–3, 2021

Memberships are LIMITED! Join the Foundation Club today at [ftef.org](http://ftef.org).

## LEGACY LOCKERS

MAKES THE PERFECT GIFT FOR YOUR  
HIGHLANDS ATHLETE



Looking for the perfect gift for your graduate? A Legacy Locker is a unique opportunity to ensure that your graduate's personal legacy is permanently associated with Highlands athletic excellence. Legacy Lockers are available for \$1,000 for the following teams: men's varsity football, men's varsity basketball, women's varsity basketball and women's varsity volleyball.

To purchase your Legacy Locker, visit [ftef.org](http://ftef.org).

We welcome the following classes  
back to the Nest this fall:

- 1980 – August 20–22
- 2000 – August 27–29
- 1995 – September 24–26
- 1991 – October 1–3
- 1970 – October 8–10
- 1981 – October 15–17
- 1990 – October 22–24

Planning a Reunion?  
Let us help!

- Reunion Resource Kit
- Tour Coordination
- Alumni Contact Information

859.815.2004 • [ftef@ftef.org](mailto:ftef@ftef.org)



# FTEF Teacher Grant Program

*Preparing Kids for the Future*

This spring, the 2021 Grant Patrol was happy to get back into classrooms to surprise teachers with their "big checks." Thanks to your generous donations and support of the FTEF during the year, we were able to award more than \$25,000 in teacher grants. Ten teachers were surprised over the course of three days this spring by the FTEF Grant Patrol. We are excited to see these #teachergrantsinaction next school year.

### Highlands High School

- Social Studies Holocaust Suitcases
- Journalism Camera Lenses
- Bluebird Brew Café TV Menu
- Science Dept Outdoor Classroom
- Band Drumline

### Johnson Elementary

- Sewing Machines

### Moyer Elementary

- Library Hat Loom
- Instrument Repair Tools

### Woodfill Elementary

- New Library Books
- Beetles



**Bethany Howard** accepting her grant for musical instrument repair.



**Casey Gesenhues** accepting her grant for beetles.



**Lori Duncan** accepting check for over \$10,000 for a drumline.



**Beth Brubaker** accepting her grant for new camera lenses.

# 2021 Teachers of the Year



**Emily Haffey**  
High School Teacher of the Year



**Kathy Donelan**  
Middle School Teacher of the Year



**Kim Schnier**  
Elementary School Teacher of the Year (Johnson)

Each year the FTEF and Highlands High School (HHS) Alumni Association honor our teachers at the Teacher of the Year dinner. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, instead of our annual event, the FTEF surprised teachers in their classrooms and honored them with gifts, including flowers and a superhero cape to honor their superhero efforts this past year.

Because of COVID-19 we did not get a chance to celebrate our 2020 Teachers of the Year. Watch the videos celebrating our 2020 Teachers of the Year on our website [ftef.org](http://ftef.org).

## HELP US CELEBRATE THE 2021 HONOREES!

Consider a contribution to the FTEF as a tribute to one/all of our honorees. It's a great way to say congratulations since we can't gather to celebrate them as planned.



## Tradition Never Graduates

# 2021 HHS Alumnus of the Year: Fred W. "Fritz" Erschell ('48)

The Fort Thomas Education Foundation and Highlands High School Alumni Association are proud and humbled to recognize **Fritz Erschell**, Highlands Class of 1948, as the 2021 Alumnus of the Year.

Fritz has spent more than half of his life in service to Fort Thomas and our schools with a combined 24 years on City Council and mayor for the city he calls "the best place in the world." In addition, he has advocated for more than 30 years for the Fort Thomas schools. Fritz's impact on our community is an indelible part of our tradition.

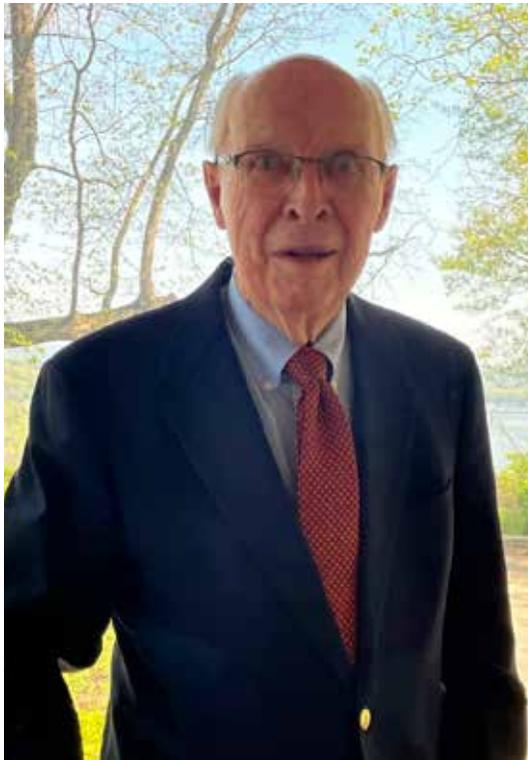
In 1990, Fritz, along with several other interested volunteers, started an organization to support the schools of Fort Thomas. Known as The Fort Thomas Foundation for Excellence in Public Education, Inc., this group met regularly with the district leadership to provide help and support as needed. "We had wonderful schools. We just wanted to help take them from good to outstanding," Fritz says.

In 2000, this group recognized that it was time to expand, and the Fort Thomas Education Foundation was formally registered. The goal of the Foundation was simple: support the academic programs and projects that could not be financed through the district's general budget in order to enhance the tradition of academic excellence.

To this day, Fritz remains active in the FTEF as an Advisory Board member. He also recently retired from his active Board of Directors role that he held for nearly 20 years.

"We are humbled to honor Fritz's accomplishments and his support of our community and schools," say FTEF Chair **Megan deSola**. "His respect for the traditions of our schools and vision for making sure all students are prepared for their futures is inspiring."

To learn more about Fritz, scan the QR code to hear his entire interview.



**Fred W. "Fritz" Erschell** (HHS Class of '48)



# Celebrating 20 Years

**C**an you believe that we have been enhancing educational excellence together for 20 years?! We seriously couldn't have done it without your support. Your contributions to the FTEF over the last two decades are the ONLY reason we were able to do all the things we did.



## FTEF 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Donor — \$2,021

- 2 tickets to the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala
- Membership into the Blue Feather Society
  - Special recognition as a 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Donor at the Gala
  - Special recognition in the 2021 Annual Report



For Event Sponsorships or to become a 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Donor, visit [ftef.org/20-in-21](http://ftef.org/20-in-21).

# FORT THOMAS

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

H

H

J

M

W

HIGHLANDS HIGH

HIGHLANDS MIDDLE

JOHNSON elementary

MOYER elementary

WOODFILL elementary



HHS seniors proudly display their choice of college on "College T-shirt Day."

### You're Invited!

The Board of Education of Fort Thomas Independent Schools meetings take place the second Monday of each month at 6:30pm at Launch located at 20 N. Grand Ave. Visit our website to confirm the time and place.

### Board of Education

- Ann Meyer, Chairperson
- Lisa Duckworth, Vice-Chairperson
- Jeff Beach
- Brad Fennell
- Julie Kuhnhein

### Central Office Administrators

- Karen Cheser, Superintendent
- Jamee Flaherty, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services
- Bill Bradford, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning

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GLOBAL COMMUNICATOR

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