

Traditions

District Publication of
Fort Thomas Independent Schools



SPECIAL FOCUS:
Portrait of a Graduate: Global Communicator

FALL/WINTER 2020

From the Superintendent

Communicating in a Global Pandemic

As I write to you, we are halfway through the fall semester with just over 90 percent of our students back in the physical classroom. I continue to marvel at how the skills identified four years ago—the five competencies we want every one of our graduates to possess—have enabled us, in the middle of a pandemic, to do what few other districts and industries have been able to do: adapt quickly to changing circumstances with courage, creativity and compassion.

Over the last several issues of *Traditions*, we have chosen one of the five Portrait of a Graduate (POG) competencies to highlight and demonstrate how Fort Thomas Independent Schools is equipping students with that particular competency, including:

- Courageous leader
- Creative problem solver
- Curious critical thinker
- Empathetic collaborator
- Global communicator

It has taken every single one of these skills to enable us to overcome the restrictions the pandemic has created and to continue to deliver to our students a world-class education. In this issue, we are focusing on the final competency, global communicator. It is timely, as the last nine months have required us to undertake the largest communications task we have perhaps ever faced. Throughout this pandemic, we have employed every characteristic of a global communicator:

- **Listen:** We have spent countless hours listening to students and their families, staff and faculty, and the community about how to best transform how we do school in a safe and effective way.
- **Write:** We have written numerous emails and letters, content for the website, video scripts, social media posts and news releases to explain and clarify our plans.
- **Converse:** We have sought feedback through surveys, emails, phone calls and Zoom meetings from all our constituents to find out what is working and where we need to make changes and improvements.
- **Present:** We created flowcharts, posters, dashboards, video messages from school administrators and one-stop documents that conveyed our detailed plans simply and clearly.
- **Global Significance:** The pandemic has underscored our global interdependence and demonstrated how important it is to understand and communicate with others across the world.

In the following pages, you will read about the variety of ways our students are acquiring these critical global communication skills. Thank you for making this work possible. We could not do it without your partnership. You have encouraged us, challenged us, informed us and supported us. Let's continue to press on together for the future of our children.

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



Superintendent **Karen Cheser** shows the Portrait of a Graduate artwork. The graphic displays the five competencies that comprise our Portrait of a Graduate and it is in each school.

Cover: Johnson kindergarten teacher **Katie Leftin** leads her students around the football field during recess.

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Calendar 2021

January

- 4 Return from Winter Break
- 8 Second Quarter Report Cards Sent Home
- 11 Board of Education Meeting
- 18 Martin Luther King Jr. Day (no school)
- 29 No School

February

- 8 Board of Education Meeting
- 12 Teacher Workday (no school)
- 15 Presidents Day (no school)

March

- 5 No School
- 8 Board of Education Meeting
- 15 No School
- 19 Third Quarter Report Cards Sent Home

April

- 2-9 Spring Break
- 19 Board of Education Meeting

May

- 10 Board of Education Meeting
- 27 Last Day for Students
- 31 Memorial Day

June

- 1 HHS Graduation (tentative)

Welcome New Faculty & Staff

Certified

Zachary Borgman, HHS Social Studies
Samuel Volpenhein, HHS Mathematics
Sara Caldwell, HMS Special Education
Kristen Gerrein, HMS Guidance Counselor
Scott Pahren, HMS Mathematics
Olivia Bryant, JES 4th Grade
Sarah Coffman, JES 3rd Grade
Kristina Sheehy, JES Assistant Principal
Hollie Fritz, MES 3rd Grade
Vera Schneider, MES 4th Grade

Classified

Sherry Bodner, HHS School Secretary
Wes Caldwell, HHS Athletic Director
Michael Emmerich, HHS Instructional Assistant—Music
Mitchell Jones, HHS Staff Assistant
Carrie Ziegler, HHS Principal's Secretary
Solomon Farris, HMS Instructional Assistant
Jill Frakes, HMS Instructional Assistant—Success Academy
David Kennett, HMS Staff Assistant
Jack Perkins, HMS Staff Assistant
Matthew Sebastian, HMS Custodian
Jill Taylor, JES Staff Assistant
Christine Biltz, MES Staff Assistant
Rebecca Neufarth, WES Instructional Assistant
Amanda Pfetzer, WES Staff Assistant
Janifer Roberts, WES Custodian
Stephanie Walsh, WES Instructional Assistant
Joseph Weyer, WES Building Supervisor

WELCOME



For Veterans Day, **Annie Goetz's** kindergarten students at Moyer talked to her brother **Nathan Goetz** who is in the Air Force and deployed in Qatar.



Global Communication Bridges the Divide

When Fort Thomas Independent Schools surveyed alumni to identify the most useful skills they obtained as a student, there was a recurring answer: writing. Alumni reported being considerably ahead of their college classmates and/or work colleagues in their ability to write strong, persuasive papers, memos and reports that demonstrated their mastery of material.

FTIS saw an opportunity to build on the communication foundation that was supporting its alumni in their postgraduate pursuits. “It doesn’t matter what you know if you cannot communicate,” says Superintendent **Dr. Karen Cheser**. “No matter what career students select, they’ll have to write; they’ll have to present to others; they’ll have to have conversations where they listen, synthesize information and give feedback.”

Further, because students will be engaging with and working in a global economy, they will need to know how to effectively communicate with people around the world. Students may work at a U.S. banking firm but need to speak to employees in India, or be a software developer on the west coast who needs to communicate with hardware makers in China.

“This means students must be culturally fluent—to work without bias, value differing perspectives and approach conversations with a desire to understand and learn,” says Dr. Cheser. “Being able to effectively communicate will enable students to span cultural, social and geographical divides.”

At its highest application, students will exhibit the following global communication capabilities:

- Analyze and synthesize information in order to inform a course of action, reflect on their own mindset and recognize a diverse perspective
- Analyze their own writing, reflect on the effectiveness

of the message as received by the reader and take action to improve as needed

- While in a diverse setting, seek feedback to improve their message
- Accept, analyze and act on positive and negative feedback in order to grow as a communicator
- Understand the grandiosity of the world and its complexities and engage with diverse audiences to converse in inclusive, meaningful and transformative ways

The pandemic has only called greater attention to the need for these global communication skills and compelled FTIS teachers and students to test their communication skills in new ways. “We’ve been forced to communicate in ways we never considered before,” says Dr. Cheser. During Non-Traditional Instruction (NTI) days, teachers and students had to learn and use Microsoft Teams. Teachers also accessed resources from EdLeader21, a national professional learning community designed to resource 21st-century teachers. Teachers set up virtual office hours for students, and students learned how to facilitate small-group discussions over MS Teams chats.

Adjusting to NTI and now virtual learning or in-person learning with its numerous policies, procedures and restrictions has been difficult, says Dr. Cheser; but more than that, it has revealed why developing global communicators is essential. “Because students have learned the building blocks of strong communication,” she says, “they have been able to adapt to new ways of learning, creating and serving, which will only increase their abilities to navigate in a globalized world.”

“Students must be culturally fluent—to work without bias, value differing perspectives and approach conversations with a desire to understand and learn.”

John Baines: Global Communicator

By **Lexie Crawford**, Editor-in-Chief, and **Chelsie Cooley**, Staff Writer, HHS Journalism

A fluent Spanish-speaker dropped in the middle of Germany, **John Baines** started early as a global communicator. He worked hard to achieve his goals, using his experience and knowledge to his advantage. He believes in a sink-or-swim mentality and that hard work always has its reward. Now the founder of a consulting company, Insight Partners, and a Vistage chair (an executive leadership coach), Baines continues to exemplify a global communicator throughout his career and his life.



John Baines

Baines grew up in Middletown, Ohio. After graduation, he applied to be a foreign exchange student and was placed with a family in Bremerhaven, Germany. This pairing was unexpected and heavily impactful for Baines, who spoke fairly fluent Spanish at the time. Going away to Germany was very isolating for Baines, who had never traveled away from home alone before. Not knowing the language was a challenge, since not being able to understand people made him feel unintelligent.

Being fully immersed in a new language and culture proved difficult, but Baines recalls the first time he laughed at a German joke, actually able to understand what was being said. More aware of the world around him and with knowledge of another language, this experience helped him rise quickly in his first job out of college, opened the door to many career opportunities and is why he has the family he does. “Beyond the language and cultural experience I gained,” he says, “it helped me grow confidence and be more comfortable being uncomfortable.”

After spending a year in Germany, upon his return home Baines went to Northwestern University (NU). After graduating with a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering and a Bachelor of Arts in German Studies, Baines earned a Master of Automotive Engineering in 2015. While working toward his Master of Business Administration, Baines was also working full-time at HAHN Automation, a German custom machine builder. The founder of the company, **Tomas Hähn**, appointed Baines

president when he was only 29. “I didn’t have much experience leading or managing, but Hähn saw something in me and gave me the opportunity to prove myself.”

During Baines’s 14 years as president of HAHN Automation, he grew the company to about eight times its size, a huge tipping point in his career and confidence. Baines now helps companies in transatlantic work. In this job, he brings together CEOs, makes them feel

comfortable sharing their challenges and encourages them to be creative in problem solving.

Baines is molding his children into global communicators as well. Baines and his wife from Germany, Tina, speak only German at home with their twins, who are in 3rd grade at Moyer Elementary School. Over the summer, they live with their grandparents in Germany, immersing themselves even more fully in the German language and culture.

Baines chooses not to dwell on his past mistakes. Even though he lives a life of no regrets, he still experiences challenges day to day. One of those is saying no and realizing he is not letting anyone down, especially when he knows someone else is better suited for the task.

Being a global communicator stretches far beyond a difference in language or culture for Baines; it’s making sure people are able to understand where you are coming from and what you mean, along with discussing what people are saying. A global communicator demonstrates the ability to communicate effectively in writing, verbally and interpersonally.

As a global communicator, Baines uses his life experiences from Germany and his career to help others. Baines continues to give back to his community, building global skills in current high school students through leading MyCareerE3 (an upcoming work-based, learning opportunities online platform). Baines provides a forum for students to experience an abundance of careers so that they have the world at their disposal.

J

Johnson Elementary School

JOHNSON
elementary

World Language Opens Doors



Johnson world language teacher **Julie Dashley** gets 2nd-grade students up and moving during their Spanish lesson.

watching videos, reading books, storytelling, playing games and listening to authentic music, students begin to acquire the vocabulary and language structures they need while also becoming comfortable with the language.

“We talk about sports, our pets, our wiggly teeth, our families, our likes and dislikes, our birthdays—all those things elementary students are naturally interested in knowing

about and sharing with one another,” says Dashley.

Elena Shadwell, 5th-grader, says, “I used to think that learning a new language was impossible, but Señora Dashley makes it fun and easy.”

Johnson students also engage in age-appropriate projects that help them increase their language proficiency while interacting with different cultures, perspectives and practices. First-graders discuss their families and then learn about families from Peru, locating Peru on the map and studying photographs of families in Peru, identifying family members in each picture. Fourth-graders research Día de los Muertos, a Mexican holiday, and compare and contrast it to Halloween in the United States. In 5th grade, students write short children’s books in Spanish, illustrate them in art class and then read them to kindergartners at the end of the year.

By the time students are ready to transition to the middle school, they’ve established a firm foundation in literacy and gained an appreciation for other cultures. “I want students to be able to successfully interact with others in diverse cultural contexts,” says Dashley.

Fifth-grader **Maggie Taft** already recognizes the benefits of becoming a global communicator. “I think Spanish will be helpful in future years because if you go somewhere, you can speak Spanish to the people speaking Spanish to you!”

While **Julie Dashley**, world language teacher at Johnson Elementary, was studying abroad for a semester in college, her life calling crystalized. “I realized that a language barrier would have prevented me from forming the new friendships I was making in other parts of the world,” she remembers. “At that moment, I knew I wanted to share the gift of another language with others.”

Because of her own cross-cultural experiences, Dashley believes language is a way to open doors to establish friendships, create new business ventures and solve global challenges. “To inspire students to become productive members of a global community, as our district’s mission statement directs, we’ve prioritized creating a meaningful and engaging world language program at Johnson,” explains Dashley.

Dashley teaches Spanish using the “Comprehensible Input” method, which helps students acquire the language by primarily reading it and listening to others speak it.

“I like Spanish because we get to learn stories in Spanish, and we can figure out how to say the words in English,” says 1st-grader **Louie White**.

Since listening and reading are the most valuable tools for learning a new language, Dashley focuses on those aspects before students begin to write and finally to speak Spanish. By

M

Moyer Elementary School

MOYER
elementary

Diversity Matters at Moyer

There are 20 different countries represented within Moyer Elementary School’s student body and at least 13 different languages spoken in students’ homes. At Moyer, inclusion and diversity are more than principles to inform programs and activities; they are central to its school culture.

Three years ago, to ensure that diversity awareness was part of the fabric of the school, Moyer formed a Diversity Committee to evaluate and make recommendations for lesson plans, curricula and events. Forming the committee are **Katie Belcher**, 3rd-grade teacher; **Shauna Luebbers**, school counselor; **Mary Kinsella**, EL teacher; and **Silvia McClamrock**, world language teacher. They’ve been collaborating with students and staff on how to embrace diversity and provide students with an education that addresses inequalities.

Moyer has a variety of initiatives that focus on inclusion and diversity. Students in the 4th and 5th grades can join the International Club. McClamrock, Kinsella and Luebbers lead the weekly club that focuses on cultural awareness

and education. **Xander**, a 5th-grader, says he’s enjoyed meeting students from different grades and countries, observing, “We’re still all Moyer Mustangs. Learning about different cultures helps us respect those cultures.”

Guest speakers are invited to group meetings to share their unique perspectives and backgrounds as well as their experiences living in and traveling to different countries.

Fifth-grader **David** wanted to learn about different countries and cultures, so he joined the group. “We get to interact with people who come from places with different languages, foods and traditions,” he says. “This is important because the more we know about one another, the more we can understand what they are feeling.”

The group has developed and organized numerous schoolwide educational experiences for the entire student body, including Taste of Moyer, a Diwali celebration and a poster campaign highlighting prominent Latino and Black figures.

The Moyer teaching staff has been equally committed to growing in its cultural awareness. The 5th-Grade Team redesigned their social studies curriculum to include primary resources that focus on telling the comprehensive story of America’s history. The team has reworked lesson plans, sought professional development input and devoted more time for class discussion. Additionally, media specialist **Laura Robinson** has created a collection of books intentionally focused on highlighting the countries represented at Moyer. Art teacher **Nikki Everett** also weaves different cultures into her art curriculum, including a unit on traditional masks that creates instructive conversations around diversity.

This summer, McClamrock led a large group of Fort Thomas educators in a virtual book study on *How to Be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi. The club members met weekly over Microsoft Teams, and McClamrock reports that the reading impacted the way teachers wanted to engage students and adjust their lesson plans to confront racial injustices.

“The club found the study to be thought-provoking, eye-opening, controversial, challenging, rewarding and enlightening,” says McClamrock. “Because of the discussions, teachers made plans to change their lesson plans and delivery to reflect more diverse views and perspectives.”

Moyer’s EL Program also provides support for students whose primary language is not English. The program helps students acquire English proficiency in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Kinsella works with classroom teachers, special area teachers, staff and administration, and students’ families to ensure that language barriers don’t prevent students from being successful at school.

“We want diversity and inclusion to be a lens through which we examine everything we do at Moyer,” says Assistant Principal **Peter Winkler**. “We want all students to feel valued and celebrated, and we want to pay particular attention to those who have been marginalized and face unique challenges because of race, class and gender inequalities.”



Moyer 4th-graders learn about cultural diversity in their community.

W

WOODFILL
elementary

Woodfill Elementary School

The Power of Language

During Spanish class at Woodfill Elementary, you'll hear students learning vocabulary words, practicing verb tenses, exploring unique foods and celebrating new holiday traditions. The Spanish program immerses students in lessons, activities and experiences that foster curiosity about understanding, respecting and interacting with people with different worldviews and values.

"I want Spanish class to be a place where students listen with the intent to understand a new language and feel safe to speak it," says **Heather Turner**, Woodfill's Spanish teacher. But more than that, Turner wants her class to inspire students to be better citizens and global leaders. "I try to cultivate in them a desire to learn more about the world, to see how diversity makes our nation beautiful and to know how we can honor each other in our differences," says Turner.

Chloe Berg, a 2nd-grader, says Spanish is her favorite subject. "I've always wanted to learn a new language. I learned how to say, 'How are you?' and 'How are you feeling?'" she proudly reports. But even as a young student, Chloe is beginning to grasp how valuable global communication is. "I think that learning Spanish is helping me, because if I run into anybody that speaks Spanish and I want to be their friend, I can just talk to them."

At each grade level, Turner uses a variety of projects to increase students' global communication skills. Students perform small skits, organize puppet shows, create Picasso-inspired works, establish pen pals, take merengue lessons (virtually this year!), celebrate Día de los Muertos and more. All this is not only to understand a different language and culture but, says Turner, "to gain respect for individuals who are different from us."

Second-grade students build relationships with students in Mexico each year through a symbolic monarch migration project. In the fall, students send a paper butterfly to schools in Mexico to mimic the true migration of the monarchs.

Students become ambassadors by writing notes to students in Mexico and telling them about Kentucky. In the spring, as the monarchs would migrate north, the Mexican students send the Woodfill students a different paper butterfly and write letters in return, teaching students about their country.

"It's incredible to see the connection we build through our love of the monarchs, a species that unites all of North America," explains Turner.

Lavin Stepner, 4th-grader, remembers learning about the monarch butterflies in Spanish class and how much more she's learned since then. "I definitely like how we learn more than just the words in Spanish, like the actual traditions," says Lavin. "I've learned all about the monarch butterflies



Woodfill 2nd-grade students are focused on Spanish teacher **Heather Turner** as she brings the language to life in the classroom.

and, of course, how to say all the colors. When I first came here, I didn't know anything. Also, I learned to express my feelings." She's also expanding her confidence to travel. "If I ever want to travel somewhere, like Puerto Rico, or anywhere, I won't have to learn all the vocabulary since I already know it," she says.

Not only are Woodfill students gaining fluency in Spanish, but they're also understanding the value of being able to communicate with others around the world. It's exactly what Turner hopes her students will learn. "More than anything, I hope they gain respect for individuals different from themselves and understand the power of language."

H

HIGHLANDS
MIDDLE

Highlands Middle School

Building a Communications Toolbox

At Highlands Middle School (HMS), students' communication skills are being honed for the complexities and diversity of the 21st-century global marketplace. "Part of becoming global communicators is learning to use appropriate oral, written and interpersonal communication skills to maximize your message to various audiences," says HMS Principal **Michael Howton**.

HMS 6th-graders can take a 21st Century Skills class, and 7th-graders can take a Media Presentations class, each designed to teach students the skills they need to communicate effectively to a diverse audience.

Amy Klepeisz, who teaches 21st Century Skills, uses the "4C's" as a skill guide: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity and innovation. "Students need to be creative, critical thinkers because the jobs they are preparing for may not yet exist, and they also need to know how to present information effectively and confidently in an increasingly global economy," says Klepeisz. Students focus on developing oral and written communication skills including:

- Presentation skills
- Audience awareness
- Thought development

"I've learned a lot about public speaking," says 6th-grader **Brett Sower**. "I feel very confident speaking in front of other people."

Classmate **Luke Louder** agrees. "I've become a better public speaker. When I have to present at my workplace someday, I'll make a clearer presentation."

Sixth-grader **Adalyn Armstrong Cattani** also has gained competency using various presentation programs and applications. "I've learned how to make a website on Google

Slides and how to use iMovie on a MacBook. In the future I'll know how to make good videos and a website so I can share information with people."

Melinda Greenwood, who teaches the Media Presentations class, explores a variety of media platforms, including PowerPoint, Canva, Adobe Spark and more, with students as mediums for presenting and sharing information. Students are also introduced to digital citizenship including fair use, discerning accurate information from misinformation and representing oneself online.

"While students are learning how to appropriately use and share media in this class through different platforms," says Greenwood, "they're also learning effective ways to present themselves and their opinions to an audience."

Students often practice debate strategies through games to help them become comfortable with public speaking and allow them to share their opinions on current events in a safe space.

Kara Uhl, parent to 6th-grader **Sophie Uhl**, says her daughter has not only been using the presentation skills she's learned in Greenwood's class in other classes but has also gained important experience practicing how to express her opinions clearly.

"I'm so impressed you're allowing students the opportunity to choose political topics for class presentation," Uhl wrote in an email to Greenwood. "We need our kids to be able to debate passionately, intelligently and effectively. It would probably be easier for you to insist it not be political, and yet you chose the more difficult, important route during this most difficult year. We're so glad to have you in Sophie's life, and I'm thankful for the impact you're having on FTIS students this year."



HMS 6th-grade students learn about multimedia credibility in **Melinda Greenwood's** Media Presentations class.

The Universal Language of Art

Each year, Highlands High School (HHS) art students participate in the national Memory Project, which promotes intercultural understanding by connecting students with other children from around the world through art. Visual Arts teachers **Andy Eckerle** and **Kristine Donnelly** use the Memory Project to give students an opportunity to express their creativity, develop empathy and give back to the global community.

The Memory Project, a nonprofit, invites art students to create portraits as gifts for children around the world who have faced war, poverty, violence or other hardships. To promote peace, the organization prioritizes portraits of children in countries that have a strained relationship with the United States.

The recipients of the portraits may live in refugee camps or may

have lost their families. So the project seeks to encourage these children and recognize and support their courage and resilience. "The project is about breaking cultural barriers and building a kinder world," says Eckerle, and it encapsulates HHS's efforts to equip students to be global communicators. Here's the process behind the project:

- The Memory Project assigns a particular country to the HHS art class.
- Digital photos of the children's faces are emailed to the class along with a video highlighting the lives of the children where they live.
- Following a specific set of guidelines set out by the project, HHS art students study the photos and create individual portraits of the children.

"Art can be a universal language that communicates hope and kindness."



A few of the portraits HHS art students created for the Memory Project.

- HHS art students mail the finished artwork to Memory Project along with a small financial contribution to support the coordination of the project and the delivery of the portraits.

"This project is a hallmark of our art program," says Donnelly. "It gives students the opportunity to take their art skills outside the classroom and share them with the community. I want students to understand and experience the power art can have when it is shared with others."

When Donnelly's Art II classes participated in the Memory Project last winter, they created portraits for child refugees in Malaysia. After submitting their artwork to the Memory Project, they later received a video from the project showing the delivery of the portraits and the joy the children expressed when receiving them. "Art can be a universal language that communicates hope and kindness," says Donnelly, "and our students were able to witness that."

"It felt really great to give my art to someone else," confirms junior **Madeline Buecker**. "I'm used to doing it only for myself, so giving it to someone who would really appreciate it was truly rewarding."

Junior **Arin Reedy** felt the same satisfaction. "Being part of this project made me think about the child whose portrait I painted," shares Arin. "The most beneficial thing about the project was that we used art to bring joy and give a small gift to these children and show them someone was thinking about them."

Through the Memory Project, HHS art students are witnessing the vast complexity of the world. "We want students to connect, relate, share and mobilize their ideas across geographic, political, economic, social and cultural divides," says Eckerle. "This project gives students a chance to express support in the face of these divides and to see the value of being active and empathetic global citizens who can offer hope and create change."

Watch the Memory Project

In March before widespread quarantines, Memory Project distributed over 5,000 portraits to refugee and underprivileged children. This promotion of intercultural kindness creates unique childhood memories, showing children around the world they are valued. Scan this QR code to watch the video highlighting the children's reactions to receiving their portraits.



Scan the QR code to watch the video:



Staying Safe and Being Well

Back in March, when COVID-19 grew into a pandemic and school campuses were shut down, the Commonwealth of Kentucky responded rapidly, forming a task force to determine how school districts could reopen safely amid the coronavirus. The Kentucky Department of Education, in conjunction with the Governor's Office, created the Education Continuation Task Force, and in August they released research, instructional resources and guidelines for resuming in-person instruction.

FTIS is following the established "Healthy at School" guidelines provided by the task force, including:

- **Social distancing:** Maintain a space of six feet or greater between individuals.
- **Face coverings and personal protection equipment (PPE):** Masks should be worn at all times except during lunch and aerobic activity in a well-ventilated space.
- **Screening and school exclusion:** All individuals are screened as they enter the buildings each day. Temperatures are taken either by a thermal scanner or a handheld device. If any symptoms occur, the student is sent to the nurse's office to be considered for exclusion.
- **Cleaning and sanitation:** Specific and specialized protocols are in place for cleaning spaces. All common spaces are being treated frequently throughout the day. The district also has several hand-sanitizing stations around each building and in each classroom to promote frequent use.
- **Contact tracing:** After a positive case has been determined, the school identifies anyone who has been in contact with the infected person, including those who have been in contact with the infected person 48 hours prior to symptom onset. Following school contact tracing, the Northern Kentucky Health Department receives this information to continue the investigation. They will also contact the household of the positive case to gather additional facts.

FTIS remains in constant contact with its local health department, and the department collaborates with FTIS on

any decisions made regarding COVID procedures to ensure the campus is safe. "We recognize how important it is for students to be on campus, learning together with their classmates and being engaged in the interactive, hands-on education our faculty provide," says **Jamee Flaherty**, assistant superintendent for student services. "Our administrators, faculty and staff are rigorously following all proper protocols to ensure that the safety expectations are met."

Even though the additional safety protocols have required more work, FTIS students have faced the new challenges with optimism and are diligently complying with the guidelines with grace. "They truly are doing an amazing job being mindful of social distancing and wearing a mask," observes Flaherty, "and their adherence to the safety measures allows us to mitigate the risks of an outbreak and keep the school doors open."

Not only is FTIS focused on keeping students physically healthy, but it is also addressing mental health needs. In preparation for reopening school campuses this fall, the FTIS staff received additional training to support student learning needs concerning suicide prevention, trauma-informed teaching and mental health issues. Counselors are also supporting both in-person and remote learners by coaching teachers, directly delivering curricula and individually supporting students. Additionally, in November, students in grades 3-12 took a survey to help identify any student who may be at risk.

"Our schools have always been rich in tradition and focused on the future," says Superintendent **Dr. Karen Cheser**. "While we never know what the future holds, we are constantly pushing ourselves to ensure we're providing the best for our students. We could not do this without your support, questions, ideas and participation in our plans."

For detailed information on safety guidelines, COVID-19 case reporting, symptom listings, contact tracing, mental health and much more, visit the FTIS Healthy at School website.



We Are Better Together

Part of the mission of Fort Thomas Independent Schools (FTIS) is to "inspire all students to become productive members of the global community." One of the central ways FTIS is working toward that goal is through its Inclusive Excellence initiative.

Inclusive Excellence encompasses the district's strategic planning and steps toward promoting diversity, equity and inclusion. "In a nutshell," says **Bill Bradford**, assistant superintendent for teaching and learning, "we're striving to include all students in the educational experience we provide—no matter the characteristics that may set them apart from one another. And we want to do it with excellence."

FTIS has conceptualized and implemented a three-year Inclusive Excellence Strategic Plan that aims to:

- Develop culturally competent and racially sensitive students, faculty and staff
- Promote equity and inclusion in schools and throughout the FTIS community
- Increase the racial and ethnic diversity of faculty and staff

Jamee Flaherty, assistant superintendent for student services, knows how important the work of equity and inclusivity is and has already seen the Inclusive Excellence Strategic Plan effecting change. "Through learning experiences, we want all students to have the same opportunities and be treated with respect and kindness," says Flaherty. "All students should be supported and feel as if they belong in our schools."

To meet the goals of this plan, FTIS has convened an Inclusive Excellence Guiding Coalition, which is a working task group comprising teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, students and community members. One of the subcommittees of this coalition is currently researching and developing an Educational Equity Policy, to be adopted by the

Board of Education, that would address diversity in curriculum, instruction and assessment; school culture and climate; programmatic access; staffing and classroom diversity; and district commitment to educational equity.

The strategic plan further institutes a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Advisory Council. This council will provide monitoring of FTIS's systemwide plan and provide technical support for the development and facilitation of improvement strategies. The district's DEI Advisory Council will include teachers, a school administrator, a classified staff member, a school counselor, parents, students, community members, a Board of Education member, and a superintendent and/or designee.

In addition, the Inclusive Excellence Strategic Plan outlines very specific administrator and teacher training in the areas of diversity, equity and inclusion, such as book studies, implicit bias workshops, professional development opportunities and LGBTQ+ training. It also puts programmatic changes into place across the district, including:

- Adjustments to training and reference curricula
- Character education in schools
- Youth mental health
- Student behavior and discipline
- Family and community engagement
- Student voice
- Curriculum adjustments
- Human resources
- Public relations

Bradford believes that the district's efforts to promote Inclusive Excellence will provide students with significant benefits. "Not only will students be better empathetic collaborators and global communicators," he says, "but they'll also have more social and emotional learning opportunities, ways to discover their strengths and avenues to build cultural intelligence."

Spring/Summer 2019–20 Recognitions

2019–20 KMEA All-State

All-State Choir – Elementary

Adalyn Armstrong-Cattani
Lela Bach
Christian Bedinghaus
Aubree Colston
Elliot Martin
Eliana Niese
Chaney Russell
Lorenza Schweitzer
Philomena Sieverding
Caroline Weber

All-State Choir – High

Ella Exterkamp
Jennifer Harrah
Hank Slaby
Matthew Grimme

All-State Choir – Middle

Jake Hagerty
Zoe Hyden
Florence Landon
Addie Littner
Ben Pfetzer

All-State Orchestra

Keely Reitman – Violin
Erin Scott – Viola
Will Russell – Cello
Hudson Armstrong – Cello
Isaac Bassett – Double Bass
Max Birchfield – Double Bass

2019–20 Cappies (Critics and Awards Program)

Best Play

The Diary of Anne Frank

Lead Actress in a Play

Katie Buschle

Lead Actor in a Play

Braxton Broering

Featured Actor in a Play

Logan Holbrook

Supporting Actor in a Play

Liam Pergem

Sound

Liam Morris, Mason Stull and crew

Lighting

Miles Sower, Molly Bucher, Charlie Kreyling and crew

Sets

Mattie Melson, Syd Bredwell, Maddi McIntosh and crew

National Merit Scholarship Program

Semifinalists

Julianna Russ
Matthew Young

Commended Students

Kayla Bolling
Cassandra Erickson

FTEF to Campaign for Johnson



The Final Piece of the Puzzle

We are getting close! If you've driven down North Fort Thomas Avenue recently, you've seen the progress being made by the dedicated construction crew on our new Johnson Elementary. Next fall, students and staff will enter the new building with all of the "extras" made possible by YOUR support!

We hope that you will consider a gift to the *Campaign for Johnson—The Final Piece of the Puzzle* and finish this last school with the same level of excellence as the others across our district. Call **Amy Shaffer** at 859.446.5200.

Amount Needed	\$	527,000.00
Total Raised to Date	\$	(488,733.30)
Still Left to Raise	\$	38,266.70

**Includes contributions and pledged funds*



Looking into the new cafeteria (photo credit: **Emma Claire Shaffer**, JES Class of 2022, taken on 11/7)



View looking North (photo credit: **Moira Plybon**, JES Class of 2026)



Addison Shulkers with "Flat Mrs. Ogle" paper doll at Johnson site during spring 2020 NTI (photo credit: **Addison Shulkers**, JES Class of 2025)



The Front Door (Photo credit: **Quinn Fuehner**, JES Class of 2023, taken on 11/25)



Classroom wing (photo credit: **Kayden Massie**, JES Class of 2022, taken on 11/7)

FTEF Grants in Action



Julianna Russ is a senior at Highlands High School. She is deeply involved in the film and broadcasting program, serving as football broadcast director for the past two years. She is also a staff writer for The Hilltopper. Julianna plans to pursue media production in college, though she is currently undecided about where she will attend. She extends her gratitude to Bill Poff, head of video production classes, for helping her grow as a storyteller and as a person the past four years.

How FTEF Grants Helped Me Become a Global Communicator

By Julianna Russ—HHS Class of 2021

I've grown up in the Fort Thomas Independent Schools district, and the exceptional resources available at every level never cease to amaze me. From my time as editor-in-chief of the Moyer Elementary newspaper, *The Horse's Mouth*, to my tenure in the Highlands football broadcasting program, I've been given every opportunity to grow as both a leader and a global communicator. Thanks to the generosity of the community through contributions to the Fort Thomas Education Foundation, student-led media programs continue to thrive.

One such program is the video productions class at Highlands, headed by **Bill Poff**. This class emphasizes direct, client-based work, enabling students to gain professional experience while also improving their skill sets. When I took the class as a junior, the highlight of my year was creating a one-minute commercial for the Highland Heights branch of Raising Cane's. My partner and I were fully in charge of producing the video, from coordinating interview dates to editing the footage. Almost no adults were involved on our end, and I was

proud to independently deliver such a polished product. I see this as a testament to the agency and trust students are able to earn here, treasures impossible to find in other districts. The ability to work with adults on a professional level is just one application of the global communicator competencies I've gained during my time in the program.

Cultivation of these competencies would not be possible without the support of the Fort Thomas community. The FTEF has invested more than \$60,000 toward the film and broadcasting program over the past decade, providing access to the best cameras, live stream software, and editing programs money can buy. Last year, many of my classmates and I passed the test to become Adobe Certified Associates in Premiere Pro. This video-editing software is industry standard, so Highlands students have a distinct advantage upon entering the workforce.

The smartest investments are those in growth, and Highlands media programs emphasize growth in every



The FTEF turns 20 in '21



As we look forward to the FTEF turning 20 in '21 we wanted to say THANK YOU. Your contributions to the FTEF over the last two decades are the *only* reason we were able to do all we did.

This year, more than any, we want to impress the importance of our Annual Appeal. Please consider a generous gift to the FTEF so we can continue our tradition of educational excellence.

With your help since 2001, together we have:

- Raised \$853,791.26 toward Teacher Grants.
- Raised \$10 million for HHS renovations.
- Raised \$427,000 (and counting!) for Johnson Elementary – Grand Opening August 2021!
- Provided local support for renovations to Moyer Elementary School.
- Helped raise \$894,838.49 for the FTEF Endowment Fund to ensure we can continue supporting educational excellence for future generations.

**Help Us
CELEBRATE
20 in '21
GIVE TODAY!
www.ftef.org
859.815.2004**



FTEF 20th Anniversary Donor—\$2,021

- Two tickets to the 20th Anniversary Gala
- Membership into the Blue Feather Society
- Special recognition as a 20th Anniversary Donor at the Gala
- Special recognition in the 2021 Annual Report



FORT THOMAS

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS



HIGHLANDS
HIGH

HIGHLANDS
MIDDLE

JOHNSON
elementary

MOYER
elementary

WOODFILL
elementary



Now you can keep up with the progress as the new Johnson Elementary School goes through its final stages of construction. Scan the QR code to access current photos and a video tour of this exciting project!

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

- Karen Allen, Chairperson
- Lisa Duckworth, Vice-Chairperson
- Jeff Beach
- Brad Fennell
- Ann Meyer

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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