

Hello Fort Thomas families!

During the first week of every month, I am going to check in and share my thoughts with you on a blog called "Focus on the Fort". As the name conveys, it will be all about the people and programs that make the Fort Thomas Independent Schools a beacon of excellence locally, regionally and nationally. It will be a space, both positive and upbeat, where I relay observations and extend my congratulations for academic and extracurricular accomplishments in our District. I am a big believer in fostering an environment filled with trust and unity, and especially so when our District will be called upon to react quickly to changing metrics in the COVID-19 pandemic. It allows for grace and a recognition that compassionate and well-intentioned adults are making the best possible decisions for our students and families. As I visit our schools and see our students, staff, teachers and leadership thriving in these first weeks of the academic year, I am privileged see first-hand the memorable learning experiences that have become synonymous with going to school here. Our students and staff, with remarkable resilience, have not blinked despite the pandemic's challenges. And I am grateful to witness such excellence.

Today, we had another situation that tested our collective resolve. Nothing will ever be more important in the Fort Thomas Independent Schools than the safety of our students, staff, teachers and leadership inside the five schools and at central office. This morning, someone called a bomb threat into Highlands High School and I want to thank everyone on-campus for flawlessly following our emergency response protocols. All students and staff were quickly accounted for, jumped into action and relocated temporarily to the football field on the east side of the school while law enforcement authorities responded to our call for help. I want to express my gratitude to the Fort Thomas Police Department and the neighboring agencies, one of whom provided a K9 officer, to thoroughly investigate the matter. A complete search revealed that there was no credible threat at Highlands High School, and I'm very grateful for that. We will always take every precaution necessary when it comes to protecting the people in our buildings that we care so much about. We will continue to cooperate and aid law enforcement as they investigate and prosecute this matter.

We alerted Highlands Middle School right away about the isolated incident and, since no threat was validated at HMS, the middle school went on with teaching and learning as usual.

I want to say thank you again to everyone involved. We have a wonderful community, and our character is sometimes revealed during adversity. We responded today, we looked out for one another and we are all safe.

I started on July 1st, and in just more than two months, I am absolutely thrilled with the direction in which we are heading, in no small part because of the unwavering commitment our employees exhibit to the student experience. There often isn't a defined workday or work week. Our technology staff worked around the clock, even recruiting colleagues to lend a hand on nights and weekends, to ensure that the rollout of devices to students went as smoothly as possible. And it did, so **well done** to all. Our students are equipped with state-of-the-art

technology for the 2021-2022 school year. The Johnson ribbon cutting was such a wonderful celebration of the amazing work and coordination it took for generations of future Jaguars to now learn in a cutting-edge and beautiful new building. Our fall sports programs are competing at a high level. Coach Bob Sphire has fully embraced the tradition built through the decades in our football program, and the Bluebirds are off to a great start on the gridiron. And what a night it was, at Great American Ball Park, listening to Johnson music teacher Alyssa Vanderpool deliver a magnificent rendition of the National Anthem. It was also enjoyable to sit with colleagues and friends, students and parents, and enjoy a night of Reds baseball. These are just a few examples in a short time. Our successes extend to each school building and I salute you all.

If any questions or concerns arise, please email me, call the central office or schedule an appointment to visit in-person. In keeping with my open-door philosophy, we will be hosting “Community Conversations” at all five schools this fall: Moyer, Johnson, Woodfill, Highlands Middle, and Highlands High schools. I will be attending, along with the principal and assistant principal in each building, and it will be a great venue for us to visit and allow you to ask questions and share anything on your mind. Community members as well as past and current families of each school are invited, and we will communicate the specifics of each event for each school. Please know that these are separate from “Open Houses”, in which parents and guardians have the opportunity to meet their child(ren)’s teachers.

We are a District comprised of hard workers and high achievers, a blend that has generated a great start and the momentum for sustained successes. I am grateful to be working together! Thank you for everything you do.

-Brian

September 2021