

FOCUS

ON THE FORT

The logo for Fort Thomas Independent Schools, featuring the letters 'H H J M W' in a blue box with the text 'FORT THOMAS INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS' above it.

Hello Fort Thomas families!

I absolutely love autumn in Fort Thomas. Yes, I see the notification on my calendar in September that fall has officially arrived or, as my science teacher colleagues would remind me, the “autumnal equinox,” but the change of seasons is ushered in more unmistakably with a noticeable chill in the air and the questions we must all ask ourselves: “Do I need a sweatshirt for the athletic event, S’mores by the fire pit, an outdoor movie night or a walk through the park with family?” I especially savor the camaraderie we enjoy during fall in Fort Thomas. Woodfill hosted yet another successful spaghetti dinner and Big Top outdoor carnival to raise money for student-centered programs. It was wonderful to return to Johnson to have the time-honored Hullabaloo tradition on a beautiful new campus. “Community Conversations” have given us the time to get to know each other better and share thoughts and ideas at Highlands Middle School and Highlands High School. We’ll be traveling to each elementary school in the coming weeks and I look forward to those meaningful evenings as well. We are committed to an open-door policy, which translates into accessibility and transparency in the community as well. I look forward to saying hello and working with you too!

Our fall sports teams are performing so well. Highlands boys soccer coach Chad Niedert just celebrated his 100th career win on the pitch, a milestone victory for an exceptional mentor and teacher. But one of his posts on Twitter caught my attention because of the real power that sports (and any extracurricular activity) can have in transforming young lives for the better. Lessons are conveyed and learned that transcend winning or losing on a scoreboard. Coach Niedert and the Bluebirds didn’t have the outcome they wanted one evening, and when he returned to his car, the parent of a former player texted, “I just want to thank you for the positive influence you had on his life and for all the joy you gave him and his teammates. Highlands soccer was an important part of his development.” This kind of impact can mold young people to thrive for generations. This is what any sport or extracurricular activity in Fort Thomas is all about: doing one’s best, making friends, experiencing the successes and setbacks of competition or performance, and developing a resilient mindset. We all love to win, but it may be the pursuit of winning, the journey, that is what matters most. If it doesn’t work out the first time, let’s make adjustments and try it again. If these lessons stay with students long after they leave Fort Thomas, and if they’re incorporated into their lives as adults in realms far beyond athletics and extracurricular activities, then we have truly succeeded.

During fall in Fort Thomas, I especially savor that small window of time, usually a few weeks, in which our trees become a cascade of red, yellow, and orange before the leaves tumble to the

ground. The color orange will hold special meaning in our school system later in October, specifically October 20th, when students and staff will embrace a theme especially important to our community, Unity Day. Nationally, Unity Day is an opportunity for our schools to emphasize kindness, acceptance, and intentional messages that bullying has no place in our schools, programs, or community. It is also our opportunity to ensure that Fort Thomas schools have the programming necessary to guarantee that we are preparing ALL students for personal success in order to own their futures. You'll likely see a lot of orange clothing in our schools on the 20th, but our efforts are an everyday endeavor beginning as early as kindergarten and extending throughout the K-12 experience. We are intentional in giving our students every opportunity, in real time, to provide feedback about what aspects of school are working well and what can be further enhanced. We encourage and empower students to recognize signs of bullying and feel empowered to speak up on behalf of their classmates, not only on October 20th but on every day before and after. We also encourage students, parents, and the community to advocate for extra-curricular activities and programs that guarantee there is a way for each student to engage in the full school experience and become better versions of themselves. It is my goal for all students to be in a healthy frame of mind when they come to school as it gives them the best chance for success. Our schools, our district, and our community is best when **unified** around preparing our students for their future.

Speaking of successes, we are thriving in Fort Thomas, and let's continue to celebrate our achievements at Board of Education meetings with a "Tradition of Excellence Award". Though renamed, the nomination criteria will be very similar to years past. We want to recognize students, staff, parents, volunteers, community members, and leadership for exhibiting behaviors and attitudes that model what makes us "Rich in Tradition and Focused on the Future". I encourage any of you to identify someone who has gone above and beyond to model the tradition of excellence in "the Fort" and nominate them by following the instructions at the [following link](#) in order to give us the opportunity to publicly say thank you for making Fort Thomas better.

Our students and teachers are performing exceptionally well in and out of the classroom, and doing so with COVID-19 mitigation strategies in place to ensure we can stay in school, where we teach and learn best. Mr. Bradford recently shared state assessment and accountability data with families as well as a link to the Kentucky School Report Card information. We encourage you to contact your school's principal or Mr. Bradford at the central office with any questions. Fall in "the Fort" is an opportunity to reflect on accomplishments of the previous year, but it is also our reminder that we honor the tradition of excellence best by keeping our efforts focused on the future. Please accept my thanks for a job well done and know how proud I am of each and every member of our school community. We are off to a great start in 2021-2022. Let's keep going!

Sincerely,

Brian