

Traditions

District Publication of
Fort Thomas Independent Schools



SPECIAL FOCUS:
Portrait of a Graduate: Courageous Leader

SPRING/SUMMER 2020

From the Superintendent

As I write this, Fort Thomas Independent Schools (FTIS) is a few weeks into “staying safe at home”—as are our community, the state, much of the country and the world. We’re continuing our academic instruction using the Non-Traditional Instruction (NTI) Program and had hoped to be back on campus May 1. As you read this in the beginning of June you’ll know whether that hope was realized or deferred.

Although I never would have predicted that a coronavirus would usher in such sweeping upheaval and devastation to our local and global community, I *always* have known that—no matter the challenge—our faculty, staff, students and FTIS community are prepared to respond.

COVID-19 has forced so many of us into worst-case scenarios, but I consistently hear how our community is embracing hope, serving creatively, shouldering one another’s burdens and adapting under new pressures.

In the midst of the pandemic—and I do fervently hope we are near the end of it as you read this—we have rallied in astonishing ways.

In the pages of this issue of *Traditions*, we’re going to highlight the incredible, courageous leadership of our

faculty, staff and students, not just in the midst of COVID-19, but also in the months that preceded it. We want you to see how the Portrait of a Graduate (POG) competencies we adopted in May 2018 are essential to our students thriving in the 21st century. We were planning to showcase our “Courageous Leader” POG long before COVID-19 was on the scene, but focusing on courageous leadership couldn’t be timelier. In fact, each of our five POG competencies has proved

to be indispensable during this global crisis. Here’s a quick reminder of the qualities and skills we work to develop in students every day:

- Courageous leadership: displaying high levels of leadership, optimism and hope
- Empathetic collaboration: not only knowing how to work with others but respecting others’ perspectives
- Global communication: the ability to communicate effectively in writing, verbally and interpersonally
- Curious and critical thinking: valuing inquiry and always seeking to learn more
- Creative problem solving: demonstrating creativity and entrepreneurship

At some point, we will be back together in our classrooms and theatres and gyms. We will be sending students off to college and into careers. It’s affirming to know that we’re equipping students to be successful and purposeful in their lives. Whether we’re experiencing record economic growth or unforeseen pandemics, whether we’re learning from our kitchen tables or in the MakerStudio, we have the character and competencies to see us through.

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

Cover: **Woodfill**, in partnership with Special Olympics KY, celebrates the kickoff of their first season of Unified Bocce.

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.



FT DR. KAREN CHESER
SUPERINTENDENT

Courage in Crisis

Calendar, 2020

August

19 First Day for Students

September

7 Labor Day – No School

16 Late Arrival Day

October

9 Professional Development – No School

12 NKEA – No School

21 Late Arrival Day

November

3 Election Day – No School

25 Professional Development – No School

26–27 Thanksgiving – No School

December

9 Late Arrival Day

18 Last School Day Before Winter Break

2020 Governor's Programs

Governor's Scholar Program

- Kayla Bolling
- Alexandra Crawford
- Peter Laskey
- Corina Mills
- Sarah Redden
- Ellen Rowland
- Julianna Russ
- Margaret Stieby
- Ethan Stuart

Governor's School for the Arts

- Kendall Neundorfer – Creative Writing
- Harrison Pawsat – Cello

GSA Alternates

- Samuel Contreras – Creative Writing

Governor's School for Entrepreneurs

- Andrew Kidd
- Quinton Wehby
- Noah Wormald

2020 National Scholastic Awards

Writing

- Lela Grillot – Gold Medal
- Sam Contreras – Silver Medal
- Samantha Heilman – Silver Medal

Art

- Wyatt Richards – Silver Medal

2019–20 State Champions

Individual Champions

- Jack Banks – Swimming, 100-yard breaststroke
- Mac Russell – Swimming, 50-yard freestyle
- Marisa Bohan, Paige Ossege, Jessica Ossege and Caitlyn Morgan – STLP Feature Video

Team Champions

- Dance
- Robotics: Moyer Metrotech
- Swimming Combined Teams
- We the People

FCCLA National Competition 1st Place

- Ashley Coulter – Knowledge Challenge
- Katie Deshler – Early Childhood Challenge

Perfect ACT Score

- Maria Broering

National Merit Finalists

- Maria Broering
- Hiren Lemma
- August Hug

Traditions

Leading from the Front

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.

Superintendent **Dr. Karen Cheser** says, “The speed at which we moved and adapted and the quality of the systems and curriculum we put into place on March 16 is a testament to the courageous leadership of our administration team, faculty, staff, students and families.”

“NTI (Non-Traditional Instruction) was created to ensure that students could learn through inclement weather,” explains Dr. Cheser. “No one anticipated that NTI would be employed for a global pandemic for such an extended period of time.”

Nonetheless, FTIS was more prepared for coronavirus because the district quickly created a working plan for implementing NTI and because of the successful 1:1 technology program already in place. “Even though teaching and learning is harder at home, that hasn't deterred us,” says Dr. Cheser. All students had access to the Internet and a device to participate in online learning. The district also created a hotline for technology support. FTIS's plan was expansive. It coordinated busing lunches to students; provided tutorials on how to use NTI applications; and quickly published its learning plans, expectations, strategies and resources for students and parents.

Dr. Cheser even began recording a daily video to keep the community unified, encouraged and informed, often featuring teachers, staff, students and

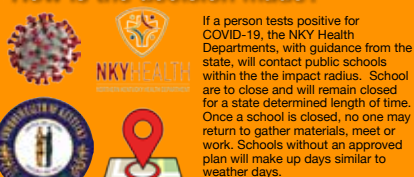
members from the administration team. She covered such topics as social distancing, creating a workspace, staying active at home, and maintaining emotional and social health.

FTIS created nightly district update videos for each of the 40 days of NTI. They can all be found on the district's website at www.fortthomas.kyschools.us.

In the midst of so much change, fear and uncertainty, NTI has been a prime tool for prompting students to practice specific skills of a courageous leader:

- Taking initiative to become more self-directed
- Growing through self-reflection as they process challenges and learn new skills

How is the decision made?



What happens if we close?

The state has opened an emergency version of the Non-Traditional Instruction Program to all schools to address public health concerns. These NTI days can be used only for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year and only after consultation with the Health Dept.

What do NTI days look like?

S Schoology will be the main tool for instruction delivery at the middle school. Teachers also have access to other online tools and digital course content resources.

During regular school hours, staff will be available to students, via electronic communication, to answer questions and assist students. (Email, Schoology, etc.)

SUBMIT

Student participation will be determined by assignment submission, discussion engagement or other activity involvement. Daily submission percentage will be submitted by teachers.

Time-bound events will be limited to 2 events per day. These are events such as a whole-class video conference, chat, guest speakers, etc. A period schedule will be created for these days.

What resources will be available to help students, teachers and parents?

There will be a hotline for students, parents and teachers to call to get tech support during NTI days.



Tutorials, videos and other resources will be available for students, teachers and parents for using applications that will be necessary for success during NTI days.

What can I do to prepare?



Take your MacBook and charger home nightly.



Have a copy of any student text or materials at home.



Class pets should be in a location where they can be fed and cared for if the school were closed.

Collaborate with peers to share ideas for online learning strategies.



Types of Assignments

Activities will run very much like they would in the classroom but virtually. There will be similar type assignments however the support will look different. Assignments can be broken down into 3 main categories.

Unmonitored	Monitored	Expert Led
Students require little to no assistance from the teacher to complete the assignment. Material and instruction to complete independently	Teachers guide the process from the side. They observe and give direction as needed.	Teacher leads a discussion, gives a lecture, directs an activity that requires someone knowledgeable in the content area.
What does it look like virtually?		
Clarifying questions are cleared up via electronic communication between teacher student, as needed.	Teacher is more readily available and occasional checks in via instant messaging. A time frame may be established for specific help.	Teacher leads a conversation via video conference, moderates a discussion board or uses a chat feature to share information with the entire class, for in the moment learning.

Do students follow a schedule?

- Students do not follow of daily schedule
- Flexibility is key as we realize both teachers and students will take on different responsibilities during NTI days.
- Assignment due dates will allow for “off-hour” completion.
- A rotating schedule will provide opportunities for no more than 2 time-bound events each day



What is a time-bound event?



A time-bound event is where students are expected to participate in an activity at a specific time. For example: A video conference at 10:30 on Tuesday. These events should last less than 70 minutes. Students should have at least 24 hours notice for a time-bound event.

- Developing a growth mindset and showing resilience through failure
- Staying emotionally well by reflecting and learning from their adversity and helping others
- Staying socially well by working effectively with others and developing and maintaining lasting relationships

FTIS intentionally solicits feedback about what's working and what isn't. Some of students' favorite NTI benefits are PJs as the new school uniform, having more time for hobbies and family, sleeping in and achieving new video game levels. But students are also finding new ways to organize and take charge of their work, manage their time, take on more responsibility at home and help younger siblings with schoolwork.

Junior **Maggie Schroeder** says she's found ways to harness independence. Students can skip watching teacher videos and disengage from virtual meetings by turning off their microphones and cameras, but “with NTI, students have more freedom to do their work and do it well,” Maggie says. “Students who make the conscious choice to do their best exemplify courageous leadership.”

Beth Brubaker, HHS English teacher and adviser to *The Hilltopper* and *Highlander*, says students took initiative in their learning and productivity to support the FTIS community in remarkable ways. “In 72 hours, they essentially changed the way they've received instruction for their entire schooling career,” she says. “In a traditional classroom, they have the luxury of a teacher who knows them and advocates for their learning. When you are entirely online, you must take on that role yourself—an incredible life lesson.”

Assignment Expectations

Teachers will have regularly scheduled assignments similar to what would be expected in a physical classroom. Assignments should be relevant and lead to mastery of content. Essential learning is the first priority. Be aware of and avoid busy work.

What is “participation”?

Participation is the NTI term for attendance. Students who interact with the learning are part of the participation rate. In the traditional classroom, a student who says, “here” when roll is called is considered present. Teachers will use the same principle for indicating participation.

Each day by noon, teachers will submit their participation rate for the day BEFORE. A link will be provided if NTI days are utilized.

How will we keep track of all our students?

Advisors	Daily message - Weekly 2-way communication
Teachers	Regular monitoring of grades and progress. Communicate when student is struggling or not participating.
Counselors	Monitor grades and participation daily. Intervene when necessary.
Administration	Point of contact for 504 and Special Education needs. Assist teachers with online pedagogy. Weekly department checkin. Monitor student and teacher participation.

College and career counselor will monitor and communicate the changing landscape of testing, colleges, programs, scholarships, etc.

Vocabulary

NTI day - Non-Traditional Instruction - Online learning
Participation - When students interact with learning. “Roll call”
Time-Bound Event - An event/activity that has a specific start time.
LMS - Learning Management System - software to facilitate learning
Off-Hours - Time outside of the regular school day hours (8-3:15)
Electronic Communication - contact between 2 or more people via email, instant messaging, telecommunication, etc.

That's exactly what her journalism students have done. “Without being in the same space, they've figured out how to create a yearbook that honors our senior class and documents the year,” says Brubaker. “They spent spring break meeting virtually to redo a third of the book. I could not be prouder.”

Junior **Lexie Crawford**, editor-in-chief, expresses the challenges they faced: “With a staff of only seven people, I wasn't sure what to do. Would events still happen? What would we include? How would we cover all of this on our website?” But there was opportunity amid the challenge. “In the middle of chaos, we had to be leaders. On the day NTI was announced, we sprang into action.”

Junior **Tessa Killen**, graphic design editor, knew that the only way to navigate the crisis was with quiet strength. “Balancing that staggering task with unfamiliar formats of schoolwork and an online newspaper required me to step up,” says Tessa. “I took the reins and organized the chaos. A key characteristic of a leader is to refrain from startling the herd. I tried to be a calming aspect of my team and my own anxious mind. Triumphant over fears and difficult times is what makes a courageous leader.”

Students successfully pioneered new ways of reporting the news virtually and were honored by the Student Press Law Center for their coronavirus reporting.

“Teachers and students worked hard with more creativity and grit than ever before to make online learning as convenient and valuable as possible,” says Dr. Cheser. “They are the definition of courageous leaders. Their adaptability and positivity have been nothing short of heroic.”



Johnson Elementary School

Temporary Location ... New Opportunities

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!)

Without spaces designed for optimal learning, JES teachers and students have had to lead the way in creating new avenues to obtain the world-class education JES is known for, and they haven't had to do it alone. HHS and Highlands Middle School (HMS) have come alongside JES in every way to help faculty and staff find creative ways to ensure that students have access to every learning opportunity.

Marie Zimmerman, JES's library media specialist, benefited from the help of her HMS counterpart, Stephanie Griffith. "Honestly, we wouldn't have been able to host our book fair if HMS had not stepped in," says Zimmerman. "The teachers at HMS and JES were so flexible as I transported students across the football field during every library class for a week. It was such a treat for our students to go to HMS, and they were so excited to have Mrs. Griffith as their librarian."

Jason Gay, HHS library media specialist, allowed JES 3rd-graders to take a virtual field trip to Mexico using his Google virtual reality kit. "This was the perfect entry event to our Global Read Aloud project," explained Zimmerman. **Jason Burgess**, director of the HMS and HHS theatre program, has also made the PAC and Black Box Theatre available to JES for author visits. "Our temporary location hasn't changed the amount and variety of amazing educational opportunities our students get to experience," says Zimmerman, "and we couldn't do that without HMS and HHS."

The unique challenges of learning in a temporary location have required JES students and faculty to forge new ways of learning and to take up new mantles of responsibility. **Jillian Booth**, 4th-grade science teacher, has seen her students grow as courageous leaders by running their daily morning meetings; creating enrichment competitions and corresponding prizes for the class; and using advanced technology in the classroom.

Teachers have also found ways of leveraging their temporary location to create new learning opportunities. "We can collaborate much more easily with HMS and HHS, which provides opportunities for both groups to learn together and



While in their temporary "valley" location during construction, students from JES and HHS took advantage of opportunities to collaborate on projects.

support each other," reports **Aimee Shadwell**, whose 3rd-grade class worked with HMS students on a language arts project for the first time. Students have stepped out of their comfort zones to "build relationships beyond our school," says Shadwell.

Booth's students have done the same. As part of a project-based learning experience, her class worked with HHS's engineering technology students to create prototypes of features that will benefit native species in the new JES habitat. Student **Maya Wells** says, "The high school students were great role models because they helped us come up with ideas." She felt inspired by the project, adding, "I want to contribute and communicate to make a difference in our community."

JES students also worked with the architectural design class to lay out the outdoor habitat they hope to implement at the school's new location. **Ava Sketch**, a 4th-grader, says these projects grew her as a leader and helped her "work better with people of all ages."

JES Principal **Ashley Dikeos** couldn't have imagined a more unified and supportive partnership with HMS and HHS. "Aside from student-to-student collaboration, they have freely opened up their space to us, and we couldn't be more appreciative," she says. "They have been generous in every way, and I'm grateful to work with such talented and thoughtful people."

Moyer Elementary School



Student Leadership in Action

Moyer Elementary School (MES) began implementing "Leader in Me" during the 2019–20 school year, based on the principles in Stephen R. Covey's leadership and productivity book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

Leader in Me is an approach to teaching and learning that gives students the leadership and life skills they need to thrive in the 21st century, making it an ideal fit in building FTIS's Portrait of Graduate competencies.

Although people often associate leadership with a position of power and authority, Leader in Me asserts that anyone can be a leader. "Students can learn to be leaders by understanding and practicing how to lead in their own lives and by encouraging and working with others in their sphere to do the same," says Principal **Dawn Laber**.

One of the specific ways Leader in Me inspires a leadership culture in a school system is by directing schools to create "shared leadership" opportunities for students through the creation of action teams. These teams give students leadership roles and a place to voice their ideas, which often leads to innovation in the school. MES has five action teams that oversee:

1. Morning announcements
2. Lost and found
3. Hallway leaders
4. Habit helpers
5. Recycling

First-grade teacher **Katy Wall** serves as the coordinator of the Shared Leadership Action Team at Moyer, which developed and executed the five action teams. "Our goal is to foster opportunities for student leadership," says Wall. "We want students to feel empowered and to help them figure out ways to lead our school." Wall's team seeks to give students a platform to use their passions, interests and previous experiences.

Several of the action teams require MES students to apply for the leadership positions. The hallway leaders team was available to 4th- and 5th-graders, who had to explain why they wanted the position and why they would be a good leader. Then they had to get parents and teachers to approve the submission of their application.

Students selected for the team arrive at school early, wear lanyards and position themselves throughout the hallways to greet students, encourage students to move around safely and offer help when needed. "We wanted these students to help create a positive feeling in the hallways for all students to



Moyer students (L-R) Kendall Shields, Emma Hood, Chanith Abeyesinghe, Brady Smith, and Jack Buecker learn leadership skills while taking care of the school.

start their day on a happy note," explains Wall. "It was really great to see 4th- and 5th-graders talking to kindergartners and 1st-graders and those younger students feeling comfortable enough to make eye contact and greet them back. It has been a great community-building experience so far."

Cate Fischer, a 5th-grade hallway leader, enjoys the interaction with other students. "I'm becoming a better leader by directing people in the halls and taking care of our school," says Cate. "My favorite part is brightening people's days, because some people have bad days, and I want to fix them."

Fifth-grader **Lucy Jennings** loves encouraging her school community. "If kids got to school early, I helped direct them to the cafeteria. If they got there on time, I helped the little ones get to their classrooms," she says. "I really liked greeting everyone each day and putting a smile on their face."

MES hopes that through its action teams, students will be able to find a leadership opportunity that interests them and serves the community. "Students reflect on their personal strengths and interests and then on how they can use those to help our school," Wall says.

They're also learning what it means to lead with courage. "It takes a courageous leader to apply for a position, knowing that not everyone will be accepted," adds Wall. "You have to be brave to put yourself out there, but the reward is worth it; you become the person other kids look up to, and you realize the capacity you have to impact the world around you."



Woodfill Elementary School

'WES Talks' Kindle Courage

Woodfill Elementary School (WES) held its first annual "WES Talks" event in 2017. It's modeled after the popular TED Talks, which feature speakers giving short, innovative and engaging presentations of their ideas about a wide range of topics from science to culture.

Principal **Keith Faust** wanted to mimic the format and purpose of TED Talks, offering the Fort Thomas Independent Schools community a place to hear a collection of brief, compelling stories designed to inspire, encourage and challenge listeners. Presenters strive to impact others with their passions and gifts.

Samantha Reynolds, a 2nd-grade teacher at WES

and part of the planning team for WES Talks, believes that the best part of the event is its purpose. "There's no hidden agenda," she says. "It's simply Principal Faust believing in teaching the whole person and supporting efforts to help us be the best school and community members possible."

In its first year, the talks started with a small group of teachers and staff meeting in the library and sharing stories with WES parents. Now the audience has grown to more than 175 people and meets in the school cafeteria with a staged set courtesy of Best Furniture. The speakers are provided with treats from the Little Cookie Company and the Highlands High School Culinary Class.

Now in its fourth year, the talks gather individuals from all occupations, locations and walks of life. It's one of the many ways WES promotes courageous leadership in its community. "Not only do the talks themselves model people who have taken a bold step and vulnerably shared their personal stories, but everyone in attendance—online or in person—is encouraged to 'break the mold' in some way," says Reynolds. "What's miraculous is that no two talks share the same message, meaning that everyone who shares is simply a

person who did the extraordinary and is encouraging us all to do the same."

First-grade teacher **Casey Gesenhues**, who helps execute the annual WES Talks, relates how the event gives the community something positive to rally around. "It empowers individuals and brings our community together," she says.

WES student leaders play a part in hosting and introducing the speakers. In fact, next year Gesenhues and the WES Talks team are planning a WES Student Talks, geared toward an elementary audience and featuring their peers. "We want to embolden students to lead in their own unique ways, and the talks are designed to showcase how everyone has a story to tell

and a way to make a difference," says Gesenhues.

Although the WES Talks 2020 event, which had been planned for April, has been postponed to the fall due to COVID-19, it will feature the same dynamic speaker lineup, including:

- Richard Dube: Braxton Brewery cofounder and brewmaster
- Griffin Fruge: world traveler
- Kyle Gagner: marathoner, speaker and cofounder of Levi's Hope
- Megs Gelfgot: founder of *Keep Her Wild/TEDx Cincinnati*
- Donna Hicks: WES teacher and mom
- Beth Rowland: author of 2019's 16th-ranked blog for *Crime and Unsolved Mysteries*
- Maryanne Zeleznik: *WVXU Morning Edition* host

"Don't miss it," urges Gesenhues. "This is by far my favorite event we host every year. I'm so proud we are encouraging leaders to share their stories, and in turn they encourage our community to greatness."



Students take part in leading Woodfill Elementary School's annual WES Talks event.

Highlands High School



Going Green Grows Leaders

Nearly 10 years ago, Highlands High School (HHS) began a recycling program. The AP Environmental Science class, taught by **Colleen Epperson**, began collecting bottles and cans, setting up recycling containers in classrooms and emptying them into Dumpsters at the end of each day.

This was an important start, but over time the work became drudgery. There wasn't a building-wide system in place, recycling bins were only available in limited locations and too few students were committed to the cause.

This year, HHS's Green Club decided it was time for a change. Epperson, sponsor for the club, says students investigated the guidance of the Kentucky Green and Healthy Schools (KGHS) program, which provides strategies for students and staff to work together to implement projects to improve the health, safety and environmental sustainability of their schools. The Green Club chose three categories to focus on for the year: solid waste, green spaces and community outreach.

Six elected students lead the various projects. Junior **Carter Ahlfeld**, Green Club member, says they applied their courageous leadership skills right from the start. "Revitalizing the recycling program required all members of the Green Club to step outside their comfort zone and go out and push teachers and students toward making our school green again," says Carter. The club held meetings with associates from HHS's waste management provider and Fort Thomas's director of facilities, **Jerry Wissman**, to understand what current systems were in place and how things could be done more efficiently.

The students promoted their new initiatives through posters and school announcements, and they met with classroom teachers and their advisory groups to ensure that recycling bins were in the best location and to educate classmates on why these initiatives are important.

Senior **Abigail Verst** says she knew many students wished the recycling program at HHS was more effective. That gave her a desire to create and implement a new and sustainable recycling program. "I took on a leadership role, not knowing how the system would turn out," she says. "Yet after feeling the support of the student body, faculty and staff I felt assured that the time and effort we had risked to reimplement the recycling program had paid off."

The Green Club students discovered that on top of the environmental benefits of recycling, there are financial benefits. The students found that the landfill Dumpster costs about \$100 a day to empty whereas the recycling Dumpster is only \$70 a month for a weekly pickup. Students have been researching ways to take advantage of the cost savings and have since formed partnerships with the custodial staff, who now handle a large part of the collection system previously managed by students, allowing students to work on other categories of their initiative.

For senior **Casey Race**, her leadership in the club not only grew her confidence as a leader but also uncovered her interest in environmental work. "This program helped me find out more about myself, how truly passionate I am about sustainability and protecting the environment," she says. "I want to pursue this in my future career."

Epperson believes that anytime students seek to understand a local as well as global issue and work together toward a solution, it creates value. "It's a win for everybody," she says. "Students are not only improving our environmental sustainability, but they're also growing as courageous leaders."



*HHS freshmen **Robert Kirkwood** and **Carson Schwalbach** take care of the school—and the environment—through the Green Club.*



Highlands
Middle School

HIGHLANDS
MIDDLE

Finding the Courage to Lead

On March 2, Highlands Middle School (HMS) hosted its second annual Student Showcase, exhibiting student work that ranged from disease research to T-shirt designs to 3D engineering prototypes to zoo structural plans to materials on stress reduction and so much more.

Family members, friends and community guests wandered the project-adorned rooms and hallways of HMS, often pulling out their smart phones to interact with a display's QR (quick response) code to listen to a podcast or view a video. Students from the strings program provided background music, and the journalism class organized a free spaghetti dinner for visitors.

One of the unique and intentional elements of the exhibit, besides the range of student learning and creativity it illustrates, is how students do the leading. **Karen Kampschmidt**, 6th-grade language arts teacher, says, "Students guided their parents and grandparents around the building, explaining the work they did. They are leaders in the process instead of teachers explaining the projects."

Students not only courageously led their community through the exhibit, presenting their work and answering questions, but they also sharpened their leadership skills in the creation of

"When you offer others a chance to evaluate your work, you show ultimate courage and leadership, especially as a middle grade learner."



Eighth-graders **Fran Eckerle**, **Anne Marie Sempier** and **Maggie Carnohan** make salads as part of the set-up crew.

their projects. One of Kampschmidt's classes chose to collaborate with **Aimee Shadwell's** 3rd-grade Johnson Elementary class on a literature project that required the 6th-graders to teach the elementary students how to identify common themes across texts, write theme statements and lead group work.

Elizabeth Perkins, a 6th-grade participant, says it required her to exercise her leadership without reservation. "I was a little scared at first that I was going to accidentally tell them to do the wrong thing or give them false information, but this project helped me realize that it's OK to make mistakes when leading a group," says Elizabeth, who gained confidence through the project. "I'm definitely going to be a leader in future group projects at school and in the real world."

Journalism teacher **Lisa Birkley** witnessed her 8th-graders rise to the challenge of running the free spaghetti dinner. Students solicited donations from local businesses: Skyline in Highland Heights donated the spaghetti and Servatti's donated the bread. Students brought in desserts and were trained on prepping, serving and cleaning by café staff members **Cathy Kelly** and **Gina Sawma**. "Students showed leadership throughout the whole event, in the planning and execution," says Birkley. "They did their duties with enthusiasm, and when they came up against a problem, they figured it out together."

The journalism students served about 150 meals. **Madie Lecky**, one of the 8th-grade servers, was nervous, but her doubt waned and her boldness grew. "During the showcase and dinner, I realized that my class and I had assembled a remarkable night for our peers," says Madie. "I had a great time, and everyone attending depended on me."

Seventh-grade language arts teacher **Brian Alessandro** was also proud of the

courageous leadership his students demonstrated throughout the creation and demonstration of their projects. "Their willingness to put a project out there for others to see takes guts," he says. "When you offer others a chance to evaluate your work, you show ultimate courage and leadership, especially as a middle grade learner."

Seventh-grader **John Exterkamp** saw the exhibit as a way to demonstrate to his parents how hard he was working at school. He sees that same kind of motivation transferring to his future workplace. "This showcase can prepare me for later in life, like working in an office where I present my work to a boss or leader to prove what I have done in that year or quarter, maybe even leading to a promotion if they like what they see," says John.



Eighth-graders **Abby Kiefer**, **Sophia Scherrer** and **Madie Lecky**, serving food to **Rob McCoy**, language arts teacher. He says, "The dinner was fantastic! The kids were super polite and friendly and did a great job of serving the families. The dinner on these showcase nights really sets the tone for a great family night!"



Students lead their parents through reviews of their projects and artwork during the HMS Student Showcase.

If you missed the showcase this year, the HMS faculty hope you'll attend next year. "It's a great opportunity to connect with the school community," insists Alessandro, "and it celebrates the hard work of your children."



Sixth-grader **Morgan Pompilio** shows her work to her mom and brother. Sixth-graders put some of their work on their lockers to show parents. Also, some projects were saved as a QR code so visitors could use their phones to access the work.

Bringing the Future into Focus

Fort Thomas Independent Schools (FTIS) conducted its first College and Career Day on March 10 for high school students, but it was the culmination of an intentional, strategic exploration process that began for students in elementary school. “One of the essential qualities of courageous leaders is that they are future-focused,” says Superintendent **Dr. Karen Cheser**. “We want students to graduate feeling confident in their gifts and equipped with the skills they need to identify their postsecondary plan and pursue it successfully.”



A variety of guest speakers described their careers during the HHS College and Career Day.

Specifically, FTIS has defined two future-focused characteristics that courageous leaders demonstrate. They have:

- Significant insight concerning personal skills and interests and have taken steps to further them related to future vocational opportunities
- A well-developed plan for postsecondary education or vocation and have taken steps to progress toward that goal

FTIS provides opportunities for students to discover, explore and develop their strengths and abilities throughout their tenure at FTIS. Elementary students are exposed to a wide range of subjects and activities to help ignite and nurture their curiosities. In middle and high school, students take the YouScience assessment, which identifies their aptitudes and interests to determine potential careers in which they would thrive.

College and Career Day was designed to help Highlands High School (HHS) students further identify and refine their interests, learn from others who are in professions they are interested in and equip them with the tools they need to accomplish their future plans.

Ninth-graders from across Kentucky can explore their region's most in-demand jobs at the Junior Achievement

Inspire event. On College and Career Day, HHS freshmen experienced the variety of opportunities they can pursue after high school, including technical training, job training, college and more. “Students visited with industry professionals to better understand their career interests and how to achieve their postsecondary goals,” says **Trinity Walsh**, HHS college and career counselor, who planned the event for Highlands students.

Sophomores participated in a career fair hosted by FTIS, which included more than 30 presenters from numerous professions, including an animator, anthropology lecturer, architect, attorney, civil engineer, USAF rescue pilot, paramedic, real estate professional, social worker, statistical programmer and vice-president of a bank.

After taking the ACT, juniors heard from four local university representatives about how to make the most of a college visit. Plus they got advice from seniors on how to succeed in their final year of school.

Seniors spent the day attending “Adulting 101” sessions on how to do some of the new tasks and challenges they will face upon graduation. With 16 sessions available, students could choose multiple sessions to attend, including:

- Changing a Tire
- How to Do Laundry
- Meal Planning
- Stress Management
- First Aid Tips
- Check Writing, Credit Cards, Credit Reports

“This day is one more way to ensure that students graduate as courageous leaders,” says Walsh. “Before they leave us, we want all students to have insight about their personal skills and interests, take steps toward applying those strengths to a future plan and enact that plan.”



HHS seniors attended classes on practical skills, such as changing a tire.

Mayor Eric Haas, FTIS ‘Portrait of a Graduate’ Courageous Leader

By **Maggie Schroeder**, HHS junior and yearbook editor

“If you want to be in a leadership position, don’t ask for it. Let your passion allow people to see that you are capable of doing something,” says Fort Thomas Mayor **Eric Haas**. This simple yet effective philosophy has allowed Haas to go from a student at Fort Thomas Independent Schools all the way to mayor and to become the “Portrait of a Graduate” courageous leader for this issue of *Traditions*.

Born and raised in Fort Thomas, Haas started his education at Ruth Moyer Elementary, walking to school from his childhood house on Holiday Lane. He attended both Highlands Middle and Highlands High School, participating in band as well as school variety shows before heading to Hanover College to pursue a Bachelor of Arts.

He recalled, “My first real leadership experience was in college when I became house manager of my fraternity as just a sophomore. Anytime I’d see something that needed to be fixed, I’d just do it, and before I knew it, I was house manager.” Later, he became president of the fraternity before graduating with the Class of ’87.

This mentality and dedication to fixing problems launched Haas into various careers and positions that helped him become a successful, productive mayor. Out of college, Haas took a job with The Film House Inc. as an account executive and production assistant in Cincinnati. After two years he moved to North Hollywood, California, working for large names like Universal Studios and Imperial Enterprises.

He soon returned to the greater Cincinnati area and took a variety of positions, including commissioner for the city of Newport. “That job was really a turning point for me as I saw that

people had faith in me and what I could do.” Haas increased his work with nonprofits, including being president of the Brighton Center while also working with his family business, the National Band & Tag Company. Haas soon moved back to Fort Thomas where he currently lives with his wife.

In 1997, Haas was asked by his friend Steve Pendery if he wanted to be part of the Fort Thomas City Council after a former council member stepped down. Haas accepted and ran for the position readily. He held his seat into 2014, when a larger opportunity emerged. “When

“If you want to be in a leadership position, don’t ask for it. Let your passion allow people to see that you are capable of doing something.”

— Fort Thomas Mayor Eric Haas

I heard Fort Thomas might be looking for a new mayor, I ran unopposed and became mayor in 2015.”

Haas has brought many improvements to Fort Thomas. He and the City Council, as well as City Administration Officer Ron Dill, set forth a plan to enhance Fort Thomas. They use a large white board to brainstorm, as well as a Gantt Chart, which maps plans for Fort Thomas on a timeline of beginnings and completions.



Mayor **Eric Haas**

“I want to know what we can work on and what we can do at all times,” Haas says.

Mayor Haas has enacted the Fort Thomas Forward project, which not only added underground wires to the center of town but also brought in new pavers and landscaping to beautify the city center. Currently, Haas is also working with the city to improve the parks. New land has been built up at Rossford Park to expand the usable area for recreation. Construction is underway at Tower and Highland parks to build new parking lots, sidewalks, basketball courts and a new sand volleyball court.

Ground recently broke at one of Haas’s largest projects yet—One Highland. He calls One Highland “transformational for Fort Thomas.”

Haas says, “I feel absolutely honored to be selected as the portrayal of a courageous leader. We’re so blessed in this community to have all we have, and I would like to continue to improve that in the coming years.” When asked for advice for younger people wishing to become leaders, he replied, “Volunteer! Get involved in your passions. There’s no better way to show your interest.”

Facilities Update (Johnson Elementary)

Gymnasium to Stage



Front View,
Building 2



Rear View of
Classrooms,
Buildings 1 and 2



Aerial View

Campaign for Johnson



The
Final
Piece
of the
Puzzle

Over the last 20 years, in part by your generosity, we have rebuilt or renovated four of the five schools in our district, costing \$125 million. **Johnson Elementary is the last piece of the puzzle**, and we need your support to get across the finish line.

Our schools have a rich tradition of excellence, as evidenced by the superior school facilities, which at the time of completion were state-of-the art and include only the best for our students and teachers. As Johnson Elementary is our last school building to be updated, we want to ensure that it measures up to this same level of excellence.

So that Johnson Elementary will measure up to our expectations of excellence and match all of the other schools across the district, we are currently fundraising for as many of the following items as possible to be added to the project.

ITEM	BENEFIT(S)
Security cameras	School & student safety
Acoustic wall panels in cafeteria	Decreases noise, promotes learning
Durable wall covering in corridors and restrooms	Decrease damage to drywall
Landscaping/sod	Aesthetic, ground protection, drainage
Millwork & carpentry	Makes the building more inviting, incorporates craftsman style inside
Terrazzo flooring (cafeteria & hallway)	Decreased maintenance cost, longer replacement time, FTIS standard
Translucent panels to handrails in main areas	Aesthetics, FTIS standard
Upgraded ceiling option	Aesthetics, FTIS standard
New parking lot	Additional parking for staff & visitors



If you are interested
in learning more
or contributing to
the Campaign for
Johnson, please call
Amy Shaffer
at 859.815.2004.





Tradition Never Graduates

Alumni Spotlight:

Courageous Leader John Schlarman (HHS Class of '93)

by Katie Walters

In Spring 2018, **John Schlarman** thought he had acid reflux. After a month or so of taking antacids, something just didn't feel right. Around July 4, his doctor ordered an ultrasound and MRI. He then flew to Houston for more tests and was diagnosed with stage four bile duct cancer. Yet, he returned to Lexington and continued coaching the University of Kentucky (UK) football team's offensive line.

Schlarman graduated from Highlands in 1993. He played varsity football all four years and varsity track and field for two years. In football, he was an offensive tackle and a defensive lineman. In his junior and senior years, he was named to the All-State team as a first team lineman. As a senior he was captain of the 1992 AAA state championship football team that went 14-1, led the team in tackles, and was MVP.

In track and field, Schlarman qualified for the sectional and state meets in both his junior and senior years. At the 2A state meet his junior year, he finished third in the shot put and was 2A state runner-up in shot put his senior year. As a team captain his senior year, he was named a Northern Kentucky All-Star and Most Valuable Field Athlete.

Schlarman played football at UK on a full athletic scholarship, graduating in 1998. While at UK he was selected for the All Southeastern Conference (SEC) freshman team. A three-time letter winner, he was also named to the SEC Academic Honor Roll three times and was an Academic All-American award finalist. Twice he was named UK's best offensive lineman and in his senior year, first team all-SEC offensive lineman.

Following graduation from UK, Schlarman coached high school and college football. He is currently the offensive line coach at UK and played a key role in several milestone wins, including a Citrus Bowl win over Penn State in 2018 during a 10-win season. He was awarded the game ball in UK's win over Florida in 2018.

Balancing chemotherapy and coaching has become Schlarman's new normal. Every other week for the past two seasons, he has chemo on Monday, then goes straight to UK's



John Schlarman ... the definition of a courageous leader.

practice field. He explains, "Every team needs a leader who can motivate the guys around him, even in the most adverse situations. When things aren't going as planned a voice must rally the troops and maximize their individual efforts for the overall success of the team."

Schlarman currently resides in Lexington and is married to the Lee Anne, daughter of former UK linebacker Joe Federspiel. They have three sons: Joseph (13), Benjamin (10), Matthew (9), and a daughter, Evelyn (3). John was inducted into the Highlands High School Athletic Hall of Fame in 2019.

Schlarman credits a lot of his internal strength and determination to what he learned from sports at Highlands.

He was taught as a Bluebird athlete, "When the going gets tough, continue to press on." And press on he does. Schlarman continues to coach and lead through example. "Never let circumstances or others keep you from accomplishing your goal, and be sure to affect others so that you bring out the best in them."

John Schlarman is the definition of a courageous leader.

Sources: John Schlarman, Highlands High School Athletic HOF Bio (John Schlarman), UK Athletics Bio (John Schlarman)



John (45) currently resides in Lexington and is married to the former Lee Anne Federspiel, daughter of former UK linebacker Joe Federspiel. They have three sons: Joseph (13), Benjamin (10), Matthew (9), and a daughter, Evelyn (3). John was inducted into the Highlands High School Athletic Hall of Fame in 2019.

HIGHLANDS HIGH SCHOOL LEGACY LOCKERS



Football Basketball Volleyball



A unique opportunity to ensure your personal legacy is permanently associated with Highlands tradition of athletic excellence.

**MAKES THE PERFECT GIFT FOR
YOUR HIGHLANDS ATHLETE**

ftf@ftf.org | 859.815.2004 | www.ftf.org



FTEF Teacher Grant Program

Promoting Courageous Leadership since 2001

The 2020 Grant Patrol to surprise teachers with their "big checks" looked a little different this year as we moved the surprises to online meetings. Thanks to your generous donations and support of the FTEF during the year, we were able to award **more than \$51,000** in teacher grants. Eighteen teachers were surprised over the course of three days this spring by the FTEF Grant Patrol. We are excited to see these #GrantsInAction next school year.

Highlands High School

- Engineering lab updates
- Light boxes for Fashion Design class

Highlands Middle School

- Broadcasting equipment
- Cameras for Journalism
- VR/AR goggles

Highlands High & Middle Schools

- Soundboard for PAC
- Gong and stand
- String instruments

Johnson Elementary

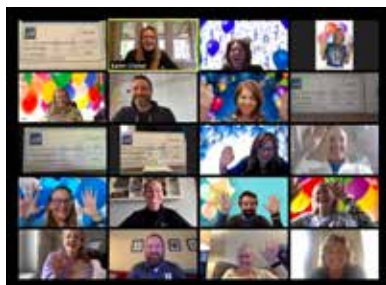
- Digital bulletin boards
- Orff instruments
- Social studies resources
- Makerspace STEM kits
- Bloxel lifetime licenses

Moyer Elementary

- Spanish novels
- Social studies resources
- Bloxel lifetime licenses

Woodfill Elementary

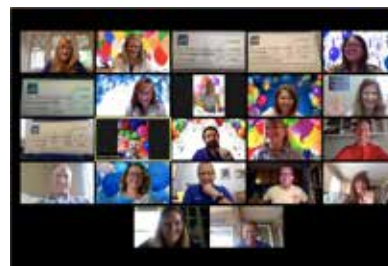
- Reading vending machine
- Indoor sets for Unified Bocce
- Makerspace STEM equipment
- Social studies resources



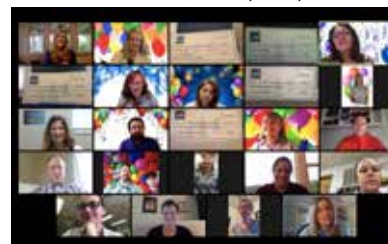
We had fun surprising teachers at HMS with their virtual big checks.



FTEF board members added balloon backgrounds to replace the real balloons we normally give teachers.



HHS 2020 FTEF Grants delivered virtually. Even the FTEF had NTI days this year!



JES teachers were invited to a "fake" meeting with Dr. Cheser to keep the surprise.



"SURPRISE!" Woodfill teachers learning that their FTEF Grant request has been funded.



BluebirdPalooza, the indoor music festival, as been POSTPONED until 10/17/2020. Hope to see you there!

STAY CONNECTED | ALUMNI.FTEF.ORG | FTEF@FTEF.ORG | 859.815.2004

Alumni & Teachers of the Year



We are extremely disappointed that the COVID-19 pandemic caused us to cancel the HHS Alumni Association Alumni & Teacher of the Year Dinner. We are making new plans to celebrate all of our honorees so please stay tuned to our website and Facebook page for information.



Fred E. Haas Jr. ('57)
2020 Alumnus of the Year



Nina Kearns High School
Teacher of the Year



Karen Kampschmidt Middle
School Teacher of the Year

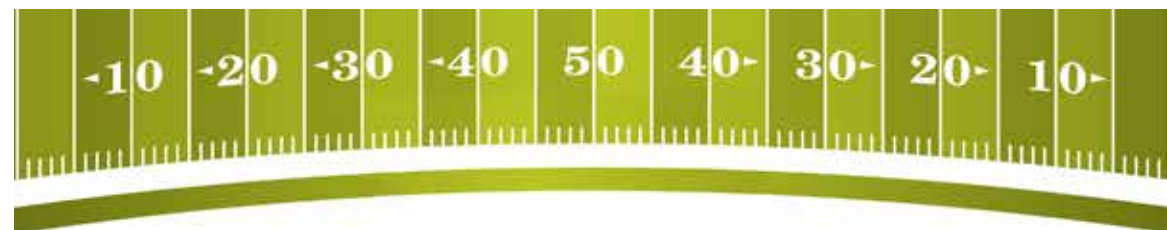


Kelly (Bookley) Smith ('89)
Elementary School Teacher of
the Year (Woodfill)

HELP US CELEBRATE THE 2020 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.



2020 Homecoming & Hall of Fame Weekend

OCTOBER 23-25

WE HOPE TO SEE YOU BACK AT THE NEST! EVERYONE WELCOME!

Friday October 23 – Homecoming Game: HHS v Cooper @ 7pm

Join us for the **TAIL FEATHER TAILGATE** before the game — 5:30–7:00pm

Gymnasium Plaza and Avenue of Champions

LIVE MUSIC • FREE FOOD & DRINKS • FUN FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY

Sunday October 25 – HOF Ceremony and Banquet

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

- 1960 – October 16–18
- 1970 – September 25–27
- 1980 – August 21–23
- 1990 – October 23–25



**Planning a Reunion?
Let us help!**

- Reunion Resource Kit
- Tour Coordination
- Alumni Contact Information

859.815.2004 • ftef@ftef.org

STAY CONNECTED | ALUMNI.FTEF.ORG | FTEF@FTEF.ORG | 859.815.2004

FORT THOMAS

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

H

H

J

M

W

HIGHLANDS
HIGH

HIGHLANDS
MIDDLE

JOHNSON
elementary

MOYER
elementary

WOODFILL
elementary



HHS seniors proudly display their Highlands Class of 2020 T-shirts!

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

Non-Profit Org.

US Postage

PAID

Bourbon, IN

Permit #29

**** ECRWSS

Postal Customer



Traditions

FORT THOMAS
INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

28 N. Fort Thomas Ave.
Fort Thomas, KY 41075

www.forthomas.kyschools.us