

December 2022

Happy Holidays! I hope each of you enjoyed a safe and restful Thanksgiving, and are almost ready for a break. I am always impressed to see how our students, teachers, staff and leadership keep focus on the student experience and learning as we embark on the closing days of the fall semester. The choir, strings and instrumental music concerts were amazing and the elementary musicals and classroom celebrations truly usher us into the Holiday Break. Seeing our students shine under the direction of the best faculty in Kentucky, and with the support and encouragement of our school community, sets Fort Thomas apart as a destination district.

Part of what makes our district shine is the way in which our programs embrace the full community. Hoops 4 Hunger has become a tradition at Highlands High School. This annual event introduces the members of the boys and girls basketball teams from all levels and provides a platform for our generous community to assist families in need, both in Fort Thomas and across the state. Instead of purchasing tickets, donations of non-perishable food items and cash are collected. This year, organizers set aside a portion of the food and money to be sent to flood-ravaged areas in eastern Kentucky. As the old adage goes, "a picture is worth a thousand words," and watching our students stack the plentiful food supplies was a moving reflection of their commitment to serve others and our community's propensity to share willingly. Our community has also come together in recent weeks to provide support and comfort to students and families dealing with severe illness. The compassion we have for one another is heartwarming and I extend my sincere hope for everyone impacted to fully recover. We are at our best when we come together to support our neighbors.

It wouldn't be the first Sunday in December, in Fort Thomas, without the highly-anticipated Holiday Walk. Our businesses and churches were open. The City of Fort Thomas unveiled its spectacular and newly-refurbished office space, and our community reveled on both sides of Fort Thomas Avenue and Memorial Parkway while enjoying great food, drinks, holiday treats, shopping and camaraderie. Our District's central office welcomed in our community to take pictures with "Santa Bird" and listen to holiday favorites played by an ensemble from the Highlands High School Band. Thank you to everyone who came by to partake in the festivities!

The Holiday Walk also clearly exhibited the strength of our District's relationships with government and industry partners in Fort Thomas. Mayor Eric Haas invited Highlands cheerleaders and members of the orchestra to perform at the remodeled city building. Students from Highlands Middle School spent several hours there to teach event-goers about the meaning of Christmas around the world. One 8th grader, who previously visited his family in the Philippines over the holidays, delivered a lesson on beautiful lanterns that Filipinos light for a festival at the holidays. Near the Convenient Deli Mart, another group of students prepared and delivered a presentation about Ramadan, a month-long observance in the Islamic religion. Introducing our students to different cultural customs, and giving them an opportunity to teach others about their discoveries, promotes the kind of well-rounded graduates we want to cultivate in our school system. Some of the same government and industry partners in Fort Thomas that hosted students for the Holiday Walk allow our students at Highlands High School to intern and gain real-world experiences throughout the year. These experiences equip our graduates with the skills necessary to blossom in a variety of postsecondary paths, and only enhance the student experience in Fort Thomas. I want to thank our partners and express my hope that our already fruitful collaboration continues to grow in the future.

For me, the holidays mark a time of gratitude. For generations, well-intentioned community stewards have stepped up into elected positions and led FTIS to a position of prominence both regionally and nationally. It is my privilege to express sincere appreciation for two outstanding individuals who are completing their service as Board of Education members in Fort Thomas: Brad Fennell and Lisa Duckworth. The longest-serving Board member in FTIS history, Mr. Fennell will complete twenty-four years of leadership at the end of December. He has worked alongside five superintendents and led initiatives to build or renovate all five schools. Teaching and learning is happening in Fort Thomas in state-of-the-art facilities, and Mr. Fennell oversaw a complete transformation of our infrastructure. I also want to publicly thank Lisa Duckworth, who has served our school community from virtually every parent leadership position possible: PTO, site-based decision-making council and for the last eleven years as an esteemed and dedicated member of our Board of Education. I wish Mrs. Duckworth and Mr. Fennell only the best in their next chapters, and have full confidence as we welcome two incoming members to the Board that we will continue to place what's best for students and teachers at the forefront of every decision we make together.

In the coming days, please keep an eye on the mailbox because our District will be sending to all 41075 zip codes (and to our out-of-town stakeholders who elect to receive one) a copy of *Traditions*, a biannual publication that highlights the wonderful happenings in our schools. Starting in 2023-2024, if you live outside of Fort Thomas, you'll have to request to continue to receive the publication. All homes and businesses in the 41075 zip code will continue to receive *Traditions* automatically.

This is such a special time of year. I want to extend my sincere wishes for you to enjoy this season in a way that gives you joy and fulfillment. I am grateful for your contributions to our fantastic school community. Be safe, finish the semester strong, and the next time I check in with you on this blog, it will be 2023.

Happy New Year!