

March 2023

To Our Fort Thomas Families,

Greetings to each of you! I hope the spring semester is going very well and you're enjoying all of the school and extracurricular experiences we offer in each of our schools. The early part of March is one of my favorite times of the year in Fort Thomas, as we get the gift of warm sunny days sprinkled in allowing us to get out onto ball fields and venture outside, both to learn and re-charge on the playgrounds and outdoor classrooms. With more daylight, I enjoy seeing a lot of you walking, running or riding past me on my walks through town, and I appreciate you saying hello! It is a fabulous time to be a part of the Fort Thomas Independent Schools, and I want to invite you to join our community in celebrating outstanding achievements in the coming weeks.

I believe wholeheartedly that, in Fort Thomas, we have three unifying dynamics, ingredients for success, that join forces to create a school system that consistently ranks among the very best, not only in the Commonwealth of Kentucky but across the nation: a superbly prepared student body, a skilled and diligent faculty and staff and community support committed to making our schools great. One of my favorite things to do as superintendent is to visit schools to see first-hand how invigorating the curriculum is for our students, and how creatively and impactfully our faculty and staff (whom I consider the best in the state) deliver the content. I am thrilled when teachers in our elementary schools invite me to be a guest reader in their classrooms. Seeing our youngest students develop a love for books is so encouraging to me, as reading provides a crucial building block for success throughout the K-12 experience in Fort Thomas and long after they leave the Nest. The momentum only builds as our students move on to the middle and high schools, as the skills and experiences gleaned both in and out of the classroom equip our students to blossom in all kinds of postsecondary paths.

Just a few weeks ago, I joined a contingent of well-wishers from our exceptional partners at the Fort Thomas Education Foundation and the Board of Education as surprise guests at three faculty meetings before school. Totally unbeknownst to our honorees, it was such a privilege to recognize Carrie Skirvin, a first grade teacher at Woodfill, as our elementary school teacher of the year. Aaron Lense, a math teacher and Athletic Director at Highlands Middle, earned distinction as teacher of the year at the middle school level, and Highlands High art teacher Andy Eckerle captured the honor at the high school level. It was moving to see what these awards meant to our three winners. Mr. Lense has said that he felt a calling to become a teacher while stationed in Iraq with the Air Force in 2003, and thankfully for us, he made his way to teach math in Fort Thomas. Mrs. Skirvin shared that it had long been her career goal to teach in Fort Thomas, further highlighting our standing as a destination district where teachers and students ultimately want to be so they can work together and reach lofty heights in our schools. Inside Mr. Eckerle's art studio, where pop culture relics and beautiful artwork abound, students listen to music while creatively expressing themselves through projects of all kinds. It's such an inviting atmosphere that produces impressive results. Teaching is so incredibly important to our faculty and staff, and the recognition we share with the deserving recipients is truly indicative of the hard work and dedication from so many. It was such a joyful day and yet another example of how truly committed our faculty and staff are to creating once-in-a-lifetime learning opportunities for students in our schools.

Mrs. Skirvin, Mr. Lense and Mr. Eckerle will be celebrated at "The NESTIES—Best of the Nest" at the Fort Thomas Mess Hall on April 13 (and I invite you to join the festivities). We partner with

the Fort Thomas Education Foundation and Parent Teacher Organizations to host an amazing evening. Also honored will be outstanding support staff in our schools, Joe Weyer, Mike Redmond, and Whitney McKay, along with our educators that earned recognition for excellence at the regional or state levels. At its core, though, the NESTIES is a celebration of the education profession and the high-level teaching and learning in Fort Thomas that equip our graduates with the tools to succeed once they leave to make their mark on the world. It also shines a very deserving spotlight on the tightly-woven community fabric that has been a pillar of our success for generations. If you'd like to join us for NESTIES, please purchase your tickets on the Fort Thomas Education Foundation website at ftef.org/niesties.

Not only does the Fort Thomas Education Foundation highlight teachers of the year, the FTEF will also, in the coming weeks, be heading back into our schools as part of a "prize patrol"—to award grants to teachers to make their curriculum blossom even more in the classroom. Made possible because of the incredible generosity in our community, the awards last year totaled around \$100,000 and open all kinds of new possibilities for hands-on discoveries in our classrooms and labs. The classroom impact is powerful and memorable, and community support makes it possible. Please accept my sincere thanks for everything you do to support the achievement in our schools!

Our school community also continues to enhance our already-vibrant partnerships with the City of Fort Thomas. Among the many examples of our outstanding partnership, the Board of Education currently meets in council chambers inside the beautifully-refurbished city building, and as our spring sports get underway, our students and coaches will be competing in venues that both the school district and the city have worked together to upgrade: the baseball field at Highland Park, the softball venue at Winkler Field, and the re-surfaced tennis courts at Tower Park. Throughout the year, our runners also make use of park trail systems to train for competition and be at their best. What's also meaningful is that our community sees these settings as gathering spots to cheer on our teams while building connections with one another. This, I believe, is when we are truly at our best! Our students also benefit from the skilled and compassionate emergency services personnel in our city. I am very pleased that the Fort Thomas Fire Department warmly welcomes our medical pathway students at Highlands High School to the new firehouse for hands-on learning opportunities and to give a glimpse into the experiences of first responders and we partner to support our students with our School Resource Officer. Experiences such as these can literally be life-changing and inspire students to pursue careers in public service.

Our ingredients for success: prepared students, a skilled and engaged faculty and staff and unrivaled community support. Our schools have benefited from that synergy for generations, and the powerful blend continues to fuel our success. I also believe that our best days are ahead of us. In the coming weeks, we will adjourn for some much-deserved time off and I wish all of you a safe and enjoyable Spring Break. We are flourishing right now in Fort Thomas and it is such a privilege to see all of you generating our positive momentum!

Sincerely,
Brian