

COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Spring 2024



Message

FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

As we close out another school year, I am reflecting on the many successes and opportunities for growth that our school district experienced in 2023-2024. I am so proud of our talented and professional staff members who have shown time and time again they are invested 100% in our students. I am also grateful for the nearly 7,000 students who walked through our doors each day prepared to learn and excited for another day in The Forest.

I'd be remiss if I didn't recognize our parents and family members who serve an irreplaceable role in the education of each and every child. We all must work together to ensure our students are able to get the most out of their educational experience so they can, in turn, become valuable and productive members of our community. Congratulations as well to the Class of 2024! Be sure to check our social media pages and upcoming newsletters for highlights from graduation and end-of-year celebrations.

This Community Connection includes special moments from our spring semester, vital information about our district's approach to overall physical and mental wellness, a check-in with our growing Community Partnership Program and more.

As we look ahead to the summer months, our school district will be busy making necessary repairs and completing timely maintenance to protect the financial investment taxpayers have made in our buildings. This summer marks the start of our Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan, which was announced earlier this school year. It is based on an extensive third-party, professional review and lays out, project-by-project, how we plan to proactively maintain a safe learning environment for students and staff.

Our work also continues with staff across the district as we learn about and implement an R-Factor mindset. This process focuses on our individual responses and how they shape our professional and personal lives (Event + Response = Outcome). I've already seen a positive impact across our schools, and this work is something that we will continue to practice and improve upon moving forward. When events happen to us or around us, it is critical to take a moment to pause and reflect on what our desired outcome is so we can better respond to make that a reality.

I hope you enjoy this Community Connection and learning about just a few of the wonderful things going on in FHSD.



Sincerely,

Larry R. Hook
Superintendent

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Working Together to Ensure **EVERY *MOMENT* MATTERS**

Students, Staff & Community Celebrate Ayer's 50th Birthday



Over the past five decades, Ayer Elementary School has educated more than 9,000 students! Many of those former Ayer Apples and Falcons recently joined dozens of current and former staff and parents for a 70s-themed party celebrating the school's legacy.



Guests were treated to a detailed presentation on the history of Ayer Elementary and a tour of the current campus, which included information about renovations and upgrades made in recent years. Thank you to the countless staff members, students and families who have helped make Ayer such a special place.

FHSD Earns National Music Education Honor



FHSD is once again considered among the Best Communities for Music Education in the country. The NAMM Foundation selects school districts that demonstrate outstanding commitment to providing music access and education to all students. FHSD has consistently earned this recognition over the course of the award's existence! Students across grades K-12 are exposed to an array of music education options, including robust band, choir and orchestra programs, award-winning film and musical theater programs, and much more.

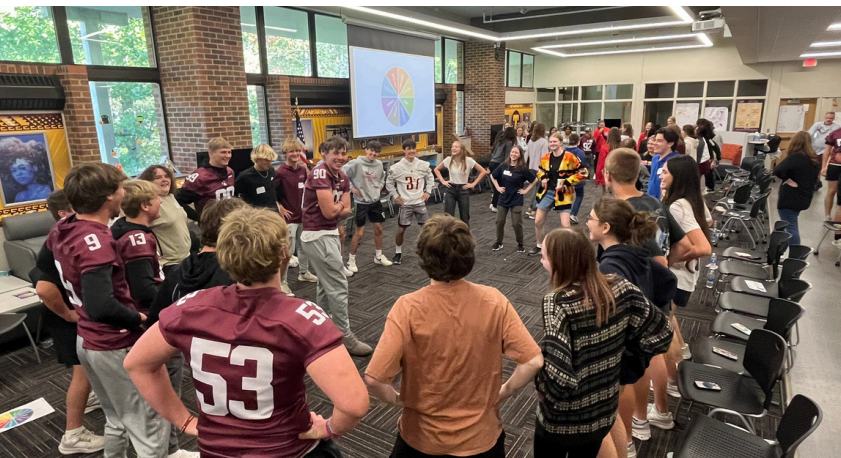
Excellent Educators Honored for Making a Difference



Loretta Kowsky (left), Intervention Specialist at Mercer Elementary, was selected as FHSD's Celebrate Excellence outstanding educator for the Hamilton County Education Foundation! Sherwood Elementary Kindergarten Teacher Cheryl Nowak (right) has been chosen as the Anderson Area Chamber of Commerce's FHSD Educator of the Year. Congratulations to both women on their well-deserved recognitions.



Supporting Student and Staff Wellness **FLOURISH IN THE FOREST**



Sources of Strength Program

Anderson, Turpin and Nagel introduced Sources of Strength Ohio as a peer-to-peer suicide prevention program this school year. Sources of Strength is a comprehensive wellness program that focuses on suicide prevention. It also touches on other issues such as substance abuse, bullying and violence. This evidence-based program utilizes a strength-based, positive approach to mental health promotion and the prevention of adverse outcomes.



Healthy Habits Week

This initiative is designed to educate students across FHSD Elementary Schools on positive self-care tips, so they can better manage stress and other challenges. This holistic approach on wellness emphasizes how to keep your mind, body and feelings healthy and aligns with standards from the American School Counselor Association. Students pictured above learned how music can help with relaxation and stress reduction.

Dozens of Partners Featured in Wellness Fair

FHSD Provides Connection to Wealth of Local Resources

Residents of Anderson Township and the Village of Newtown were invited to a Community Wellness Fair in March that featured more than four dozen local organizations or businesses with a focus on physical, mental or emotional wellness. This event provided an opportunity for members of the public to learn about the wide-variety of wellness resources available in the broader Forest Hills community.

The Wellness Fair was hosted in conjunction with FHSD Parent Academy, an engaging and informative series that just concluded its second year. The district hosts multiple Parent Academy nights throughout the school year, often including expert presentations on topics like mental health, executive functioning, overall wellness and much more. The district thanks Hamilton County Public Health and the Forest Hills Foundation for Education for sponsoring the Wellness Fair and Parent Academy series, respectively. FHSD hosts events like this to build connections throughout the community to promote overall wellness for students, staff and families.



A Look at FHSD's Approach to Wellness



SCAN ME!



Or visit www.foresthills.edu/wellness/

FHSD Wellness Webpage

Use your smartphone camera to scan the QR code above to access the Wellness Section of the district's website. It contains detailed information about FHSD's work to support positive mental health and wellness, a look at school-based supports and resources, an overview of the guiding standards for school counselors, FHSD's success with Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, and much more!

Dedicated Wellness Curriculum

Did you know FHSD recently created a dedicated Wellness Course of Study? This is the first of its kind for the school district! FHSD's approach to wellness addresses positive mental health by building the capacity to promote and nurture social, emotional, physical, and intellectual well-being for our school community and learners. Students in Forest Hills learn how to adopt a more positive outlook, be a respectful and responsible communicator, collaborate, set goals, resolve conflicts, be a good friend, and be a productive citizen. You can read the Wellness Course of Study by scanning the QR code on the top left of this page.



**Anderson
Mental Health
Collaborative**

Working toward total wellness, together

FHSD is a proud member of the Anderson Mental Health Collaborative. This network of local organizations works to educate, share resources and create a supportive environment around mental wellness in Anderson Township. FHSD works with the Collaborative to promote positive conversations about mental health and organize related community events.

A Message of Hope to Students, Community

Hilinski's Hope Discusses Suicide-Prevention and Mental Health



"You don't need to experience tragedy to ask for help." Mark Hilinski offered that perspective to Anderson High School students during a visit to the school in March. Mark and his wife Kym started the Hilinski's Hope Foundation to share the story of their son Tyler, who died by suicide in 2018.

The organization is focused on raising awareness of suicide and mental health challenges, reducing the stigma associated with mental illness and connecting students and schools to resources that can help. All AHS students attended a presentation from Hilinski's Hope, which was also made available to interested Turpin and Nagel students. Community members were invited to

an evening event where the Hilinskis geared the conversation more toward parents and adults. These important presentations were made available to students and the community thanks to generous support from the Forest Hills Foundation for Education.

Community Partnership Program

Building Real-World Skills and Professionalism

By Vivienne Staton, THS Student and Community Partnership Participant



Forest Hills School District held a new series of mock interview workshops this school year to help students gain important interviewing and networking skills. These events help prepare students to pursue internship and job opportunities and



engage in other professional or academic areas. At these events, students have the chance to connect with local business partners who share their professional knowledge and expertise.

"As a community member and volunteer, I am investing in the future by mentoring the next generation," Trisha Pimenidis (pictured above, right), a bookkeeper and human resources coordinator at ES Properties, said. "The students who show up are investing in themselves, and I will show up for that every time."

Pimenidis attended a Mock Interview Workshop event in May, helping students build skills to guide them in the future when they join the workforce, apply for college or enter military service. FHSD's growing Community Partnership Program hosted multiple mock interview and networking events this school year to offer high school students a chance to build real-world skills that can benefit them now and down the road.

Repairs & Renovations Running for a Cause

Summer Facilities Projects Ready to Kick-Off

FHSD is utilizing funding from the 2023 permanent improvement levy and other available sources to begin to address a variety of necessary building improvements. Projects for this spring and summer include multiple roof repairs, asphalt patching and resurfacing, technology infrastructure and more. Please visit www.foresthills.edu for a link to view the district's full Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan and to stay up-to-date on summer work.



FH5K Supports Crucial Initiatives for Learning

The 15th Annual FH5K was held in May to support the work of the Forest Hills Foundation for Education. Community members helped raise more than \$100,000 to support the multitude of services and programs made possible by FHFE! The Foundation helps address district needs in many areas, including wellness and innovation. Thank you to the entire community for your long-standing support! Visit fhfe.org to learn more or donate.



FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

At Forest Hills School District, we are deeply committed to providing enriching and engaging educational experiences to all students. We also understand how crucially important it is for the district to be fiscally responsible in all of our operations, and we continually strive to better serve students, staff and community members through sound financial practices. By taking a prudent and intentional approach, the Treasurer's Office helps our talented educators provide the best possible education today while also planning for the district's financial future.

Earlier this semester, FHSD once again earned Ohio's Auditor of State Award. This is a prestigious recognition of the district's accurate and effective financial practices. Less than 13% of all entities are able to earn this honor, according to the Auditor of State's office.

A crucial responsibility of any school district is to be open and transparent about how tax dollars are spent, and we try to meet those expectations in several ways. I have worked collaboratively with the Board of Education to redesign the monthly financial reports presented at our public meetings. Our goal is to offer an easy-to-understand snapshot of district finances, and we've also added specific reports related to the Permanent Improvement Fund.

The district is grateful for our community's long-standing support of public education, and we recognize the significant investment made by the passage of a combination levy in May 2023. We have worked diligently to develop a Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan that prioritizes necessary physical improvement to make the most of every dollar spent. You can view that plan and follow its progress by visiting:

www.foresthills.edu/departments/facilities/ongoing-projects/

I hope our practice of holding regular public meetings, distributing publications like this and providing a wealth of information on our website helps you stay informed and engaged in the operations of our school district. As always, we will continue to look for the most efficient way to provide the highest quality education possible at a reasonable cost.

Sincerely,

Alana



Alana Cropper
Treasurer, CFO

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The Ohio Auditor of State's Office presents Forest Hills School District with its Auditor of State Award in recognition of accurate and effective financial reporting.



Summer facilities projects will address a variety of pressing building needs, including this roof work currently taking place at Mercer Elementary.



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