



Funding cut halts Full-Service Community Schools program



Johnston City schools, like dozens of others across Illinois, are facing the abrupt loss of federal funding that supported students and families through the Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) initiative.

The funding cut stems from a federal decision to end continuation funding after Dec. 31, 2025, bringing Illinois' largest community-schools effort to an early close. The program was administered statewide through ACT Now Illinois, which notified participating districts that the U.S. Department of Education

would not continue the grant into future years.

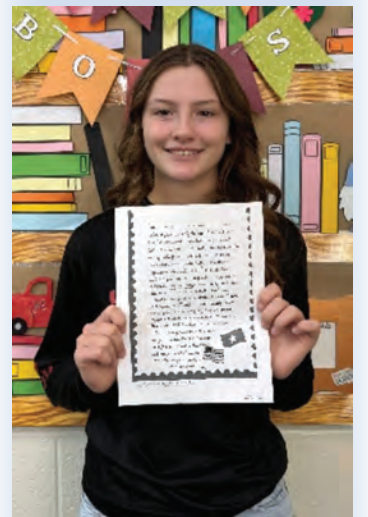
In Johnston City, FSCS funding supported family engagement efforts, after-school programming, and the distribution of school supplies and basic necessities.

According to a letter from members of Illinois' congressional delegation, Johnston City CUSD used FSCS funds to provide 1,100 families with free backpacks and school supplies, helping reduce financial stress and improve student readiness.

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Funds from the Full-Service Community Schools grant provided new books for Johnston City schools (photo from *JC Hometown Highlights*, a digital magazine published by Johnston City Schools).

From Johnston City to Vietnam: Middle schoolers trade letters, build empathy—2



ABOVE: Pen pals Alivia from WMS and Ba from Vietnam

Two downtown businesses announce closures

Johnston City is facing the upcoming closure of two familiar local businesses, as both Blondie's Bakery and Legence Bank have announced plans to close their Johnston City locations in the coming months,

citing financial pressures and changing business conditions.

Blondie's Bakery

Blondie's Bakery, known for custom cakes, sweet treats, and artisan salads,



closed at the end of December. Owner Keri Davis confirmed the decision in a social media post, pointing to medical issues and rising operating costs, including utilities and state-related expenses.



Davis emphasized that the closure is intended to be temporary. All existing orders, including wedding cakes booked into 2026, will

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Johnston City retiree wins \$250,000, national attention by purchasing wrong ticket

A retired Johnston City educator and journalist got far more than she bargained for after an accidental click turned into a life-changing lottery win.



Holly,* a longtime Johnston City resident, won \$250,000 in the lottery last month. The former journalist's story has since been picked up by dozens of local, state, and national outlets.

According to the Illinois Lottery, Holly* intended to buy a \$2 ticket online while watching a movie at home. Instead, she mistakenly selected a \$20 Magnificent Multiplier FastPlay ticket—a purchase she immediately regretted.

"I realized right away I'd clicked the wrong thing," Holly said in a statement released by lottery officials. "I remember thinking, 'Oh no—I didn't mean to spend that much.'"

Moments later, her luck changed dramatically.

When she checked her ticket online, Holly discovered she had hit the \$250,000 Magnificent Multiplier jackpot. At first, she didn't believe what she was seeing. "I honestly thought my computer had frozen or crashed," she said. "It took a minute for it to sink in."

Lottery officials say the winner, a retired educator, plans to use the unexpected windfall to help build a new family home and purchase a baby grand piano, allowing her to devote more time to her longtime love of music.

Arrow News reached out to Holly who informed us that the lottery win was not only an unexpected Christmas present, it also came just before her birthday.

*In order to avoid scams, Holly has asked the media not to publish her last name.



Southern Illinois Barbell Club provides local fitness options

As many begin the new year focused on health and fitness, Southern Illinois Barbell Club offers a local and convenient option for those looking to turn New Year's resolutions into lasting habits.

The gym, located at 302 Broadway Blvd in Johnston City, is owned and operated by Walter "Toby" Holderbaum. Originally from the Chicago area, Holderbaum now lives in Herrin with his wife, Leah, who is also a certified fitness trainer.

Holderbaum said Southern Illinois is saturated with fitness facilities, but Johnston City lacked a local option. About two years ago, he made the decision to relocate from rural Carverville to Johnston City to better serve the community. His goal is "to provide good service to good people."

Holderbaum holds multiple fitness certifications, including ISSA and NESTA,

and has more than a decade of experience working with clients ranging in age from 5 to 80+. His background includes serving as a Special Olympics coach and training individuals with special needs, amputees, and clients focused on weight loss and overall health. Among his past clients is Anthony Hargroves, a former NFL player who later coached football in Christopher. Holderbaum worked with Hargroves through football camps and provided training and nutritional guidance.

Southern Illinois Barbell Club is equipped primarily with free weights, kettlebells, weight benches, and other essential strength-training equipment, along with cardio machines such as ellipticals and stair climbers.

The gym offers a stand-alone membership for \$30 per month, following an ini-

Toby Holderbaum (left), owner of Southern Illinois Barbell Club on E. Broadway, works out with clients. The club is accepting new members.

tial first month of \$40. This membership provides 24/7, 365-day access to the facility. Training packages are also available and tailored to individual needs, typically including eight sessions per month along with full gym access. Call/text 618-579-5637 for information.

Unlike large commercial gyms, SIBC promotes a straightforward approach focused on safe, effective progress rather than quick fixes—an approach designed to help members build strength and consistency.



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'Right Back at You' Project—Washington Middle School students build global connections through literature

BY MARGIE SANDERS
Washington Middle School students are making international connections through literature as part of the "Right Back at You" Project, becoming the first school to be globally paired through this innovative program.

The project centers on Right Back at You, a middle-grade novel written in letter format by author Carolyn Mackler. The book tells the story of a girl from western Pennsylvania in 1987 and a boy from New York City in 2023, whose lives become intertwined through written correspondence across time. Using the novel as a springboard, students experience the power of letter-writing to build understanding, empathy, and connection.

Through the collaborative efforts of Mackler, Washington Middle School librarian Amanda Harris, teacher Dawn Simpson, and Vietnamese educator Bich Dang, the project connects 64 Washington Middle School students with

78 students in Vietnam. All participating students are reading the same novel and engaging in thoughtful discussions about its themes.

The goal of the program is twofold: to encourage students to talk openly about bullying in their own communities and to help them recognize common ground with peers whose lives may appear very different from their own. Despite cultural and geographic distance, students quickly discovered shared interests, concerns, and experiences.

The first virtual meeting between the two schools took place on Monday, Nov. 24. This introductory session allowed selected students to ask questions, exchange greetings, and learn about each other's cultures and daily lives. On Dec. 5, Washington Middle School students sent handwritten letters to their Vietnamese counterparts. Just days later, on Dec. 17, they received their own "Right Back at You" letters in return.

Additional virtual meet-

ings are planned as students continue reading the book and exchanging correspondence. While the project has required many hours of planning and coordination, teachers say the impact has been well worth the effort.

The experience has

brought a new level of excitement into the classroom and created what many students and educators describe as a "core memory"—one that demonstrates how stories, empathy, and communication can bridge continents and bring young people together.



EDITORIAL

'I wouldn't do it for a million dollars' Why today's teachers deserve more respect than ever

BY JIMMY DEAN

There are certain jobs that I would not want to do. I have great respect for the people who do these jobs, but I'm not sure I could handle their day-to-day duties.

Three of those jobs are coal miners, prison guards, and anyone working in the field of education.

I visited a coal mine once with former Congressman Ken Gray. One trip below ground was enough to convince me to stay on this side of the grass.

The idea of guarding violent people who are confined for doing something evil—or even just stupid—doesn't appeal to me in the least.

That brings me to the final area of employment: education.

My wife retired 13 years ago after teaching for 38 years. My oldest daughter is a high school math teacher. My youngest daughter taught kindergarten but moved to second grade this year, and my son-in-law is a middle school assistant principal. My son, before his death, taught high school business classes.

So you might ask why I would not want anything to do with the education field after it put food on my family's table for so many years.

Times have changed. The days of simply teaching are almost gone. Some high schools have turned into mini work camps, and colleges are sometimes used

as platforms for groups to express personal beliefs—beliefs that can sometimes turn violent.

Not all schools are like this. For the most part, schools in Southern Illinois and Western Kentucky don't fit these descriptions, but there are exceptions.

Lockdowns for a note making a threat, gun shells being found at school, or a verbal comment made by someone are now enough to send a "DEFCON One" response into place. This is written tongue-in-cheek and not meant to belittle education in any way—but it is a tough profession.

We are very fortunate to have good, competent, caring teachers who go to work every day to make a positive difference in students' lives.

Dealing with overprotective parents, spoiled kids, mean kids, and kids who never had a chance are collateral obstacles that 20 or 30 years ago were not part of the teaching equation.

Parenting has changed. Teaching requirements have changed. Curriculums have changed—and not necessarily for the better.

These factors, among others, have backed educators into a corner and fundamentally changed the way teaching and learning take place.

"Common Core" became a nasty phrase that sent 30-year veteran teachers into hair-pulling frenzies.



Jimmy Dean is a freelance writer and former mayor of Johnston City. He can be reached at jrdean@mchsi.com.

It does the same to parents trying to help their kids with homework.

I'm on the school board, and when I was elected, I told them not to put me on the negotiation committee because I know how much extra time, personal money, and effort teachers already invest.

In every profession, you're going to find a few bad workers, and education is no exception. Some may be in it for the money (that's a joke), some for summers off—but most are there for the right reason.

That reason is to see the next generation receive a good education.

Drive by any of our schools after dismissal and see how many teachers' cars are still in the parking lot, staying late to help students.

I think you might be surprised.

Educators enter the profession for the love of teaching and seeing kids succeed—not for the money.

The old phrase, "I wouldn't do it for a million dollars," comes to mind if someone asked me to be a school teacher.

Business Closings FROM P. 1

be honored, and previously scheduled rentals of the bakery's Side Room will proceed as planned. While catering for events may be limited, Davis said she hopes to revamp the business and reopen sometime this year, potentially around Mother's Day, depending on health and funding options.

Customers are encouraged to follow Blondie's Bakery on Facebook for updates and possible pop-up events in 2026.

Legence Bank, JC Branch

Meanwhile, Legence Bank has announced it will permanently close its Johnston City branch at 101 W. Broadway at 4 p.m. Tuesday, March 31, 2026. The decision was shared in a letter to customers dated Dec. 9 and reflects what bank officials described as declining in-person traffic and increased use of online

and mobile banking services.

Bank officials stated that customer accounts and services will not be affected. Full banking services will remain available at nearby Legence Bank branches in Marion and Benton. Laura Small, who currently manages the Johnston City location, will continue serving customers at those nearby branches. Small is also a member of the Johnston City Rotary Club, where she has been active in local service efforts.

The ATM at the Johnston City location will remain in operation, allowing customers continued access to basic banking services while the long-term use of the building is evaluated.

Together, the two closures mark a notable transition for downtown Johnston City, reflecting broader economic pressures and shifts in how residents shop



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The cast of St. Paul Catholic Church's Christmas program posing with Father Francis Tambala, pastor St. Paul's and St. Joseph in Marion (photo courtesy of Cindy Pulford)

COMMUNITY CALENDAR



January Events

- JANUARY 4**
Christian Movie Night, JCity Church, 5 pm
- JANUARY 6**
JC Business Meet N' Greet, Andresen's, 9 am
- JANUARY 7**
Rotary Club luncheon, Andresen's, Noon
- JANUARY 8**
Prime Timers, JCity Church, 1 pm
- JCMA Meeting, JCity Center, 6:00 pm
- JANUARY 15**
Food pantry / Commodity distribution, First United Methodist, 9 am
- JANUARY 19**
MLK Day—No school

- JANUARY 19**
Lunch at the Library, 10:30 am
- JANUARY 21**
Rotary Club mtg. Indigo Realty, 5 pm (NEW TIME)

Public Meetings

- JANUARY 12**
Library Board Mtg., 6:30 pm
- JANUARY 13**
City Council, Scout Cabin, 5 pm
- JANUARY 19**
Planning Commission mtg., Scout Cabin, 5 pm
- JANUARY 15**
School Board mtg., Unit Office, 6 pm
- JANUARY 27**
City Council, Scout Cabin, 5 pm

For calendar updates, please see Facebook or watch our video podcasts. To submit an event, email date, time, and details to jcitycenter@gmail.com or call 618-952-1272.



St. Paul's new pastor, Fr. Tambala, is on a mission to our community

Father Francis Tambala is now serving as pastor of St. Paul's Catholic Church in Johnston City. He began his ministry there in August.



Father Francis Tambala

Father Tambala is a missionary priest from Malawi, serving in the United States through the Catholic Church's *Fidei Donum* ("Gift of Faith") program, which allows priests from other countries to assist dioceses with pastoral needs. Ordained in 2008, he has more than 15 years of parish ministry experience.

In addition to St. Paul's in Johnston City, Father Tambala also serves St. Joseph Catholic Church in Marion, ministering to both

communities. Leadership at St. Paul's changed in August following the transfer of Father Brian Barker to Columbia, Illinois.

Parishioners have been quick to welcome their new priest. Danny Bloomberg, a parishioner and faithful Arrow reader, described Father Tambala as "a great man," adding, "We're tickled to death to have him."

Parishioners also note that Father Tambala is easy to understand. English is the official language of Malawi, while *Chichewa* (also called *Chewa*) is the national and most widely spoken language and is commonly used in church settings.

parishes within the Diocese of Belleville. His responsibilities include celebrating Mass, administering the sacraments, providing pastoral care, and supporting parish life in both com-

"Christ reigns not by force but by love. He leads not with arrogance but with humility. He serves not for personal gain but for the well-being of others. This is the kind of leadership that our world desperately needs. . . . Let us be a community that serves the least among us, recognizing the presence of our King in their faces."

—Fr. Francis Tambala, Church Bulletin, Nov. 23, 2025

FSCS Grant program ends FROM P. 1

Statewide, the program served nearly 19,000 students in 16 districts and 32 schools, providing \$18.5 million annually and nearly \$55 million projected over the next three years—funding that will now not be released.

According to Superintendent Josh Pietrantoni, the district spent approximately \$1 million over the past 18 months from the \$5 million grant award. Because the grant operated on a reimbursement basis, the district does not

have unused funds that must be returned. Locally, most grant-funded initiatives were coordinated by staff whose positions were funded directly through the federal grant. Local leaders had hoped the funding would continue through at least the end of the school year. The Johnston City Board of Education held a special meeting on Dec. 22 and voted to release personnel working under the discontinued FSCS/ACT Now Illinois grant program, effective Dec. 31, 2025.

For Johnston City, the decision means programs and positions built around the community-schools model will come to an end—marking a significant shift in how support services have been delivered to students and families.

School News Briefs

Winter edition of online magazine available

The district published the Winter 2025 edition of *JC Hometown Highlights*, a digital magazine featuring winter classroom news, student activities, and school highlights across the district. Access the online magazine by scanning the code or link <https://tinyurl.com/bdcvrzu4>



JCHS Educators Rising hosts event at SIU

Johnston City High School's Educators Rising club hosted its first Educators Rising Experience Day at SIU-C, Nov. 20. Students and sponsors from Du Quoin, Trico, West Frankfort, and Meridian attended leadership and education workshops inspired by the club's national conference trip.

The JCHS Educators Rising club was the first of its kind in Illinois, founded in 2018 by Ryan Shick, who continues as club sponsor.

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Paul E Lawrence, Agent

305 E Broadway PO Box 118
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paul.lawrence.by9j@statefarm.com



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504 E. Broadway Blvd., Johnston City, IL 62951
618-952-1272, jcitycenter@gmail.com, www.jcity.center

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF/DESIGN	Keith Fletcher	BOARD MEMBERS	Keith Fletcher, chairman
MANAGING EDITOR	Sarah Fletcher		Marta Phillips, secretary
REPORTERS	Margie Sanders, Doug Hancock, Randy Carney		Brenda McChesney, treasurer
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CHURCHES of Johnston City

Family Worship Center
400 W. 13th St.
Johnston City, IL 62951
(618) 952-1280
Brad & Kelly Dexter, pastor

Johnston City United Pentecostal Church
1101 W. 10th
Johnston City, IL 62951
618-983-5938
Brandon Abernathy, pastor

First Baptist Church
401 E. 7th St.
Johnston City, IL 62951
(618) 983-6455
Larry Stevens, pastor

***First Christian Church**
505 E. Broadway Blvd.
Johnston City, IL 62951
618-952-2591
Adam King, pastor

***St. Paul's Catholic Church**
1103 Washington Ave.
Johnston City, IL 62951
618-983-5073
Father Francis Tambala

***Washington Ave. Baptist Church**
9th and Washington
Johnston City, IL 62951
Barry Robertson, pastor
618-694-2995

***First United Methodist Church**
400 W. Broadway
Johnston City, IL 62951
618-983-5150
Paul Jacob, pastor

***Heritage Fellowship (Church of God of Prophecy)**
308 W. 12th St.
Johnston City, IL 62951
Gaylon & Dawn Stewart, pastors

***JC Kids' Lunch Bunch**
c/o JCity Church
(see above)

***JCity Center for Hope and Renewal**
504 E. Broadway Blvd.
Johnston City, IL 62951
618-952-1272

***J. C. Manna Mission**
306 E. Broadway Blvd.
Johnston City, IL 62951
618-983-6262

***JCity Church (Free Will Baptist)**
609 Monroe
Johnston City, IL 62951
618-983-5254
Dr. Randy Carney, pastor

**Active members of Johnston City Ministerial Alliance*

Why Johnston City needs a printed newspaper

—AND WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP

And the survey says...

Before we launched *Arrow News*, the JCity Center for Hope and Renewal secured a detailed demographic survey entitled *Know Your Community*. The report revealed several unexpected truths about the people who live within just five minutes of the Center—and many of them challenge the assumptions we often make about our town.

We're older than we think

The median age in our community is 42.9, noticeably higher than state and national averages. One of the single largest age groups? Men ages 60–64. Meanwhile, children under 18 make up just over 20% of residents—lower than many expect in a small town known for family life.

Income is more polarized than assumed

Here's a surprising twist: the largest income bracket is actually \$100,000–\$149,999, making up 19.2% of all households. Yet nearly one-quarter of households earn below \$25,000. Our community quietly spans a wide financial spectrum.

Healthcare cost struggles are widespread

More than 1,300 adults report struggling either “somewhat” or “completely” with healthcare costs. For a population under 4,000, that is a striking statistic—and a reminder of why local ministries and nonprofits are so vital.

Many households include seniors

Over 37% of households include someone over age 65, and 255 seniors live alone. Johnston City is increasingly shaped by the needs, perspectives, and experiences of older adults.

A high rate of disability

A surprising 46% of all households include at least one person with a disability—far above typical community averages. This has significant implications for accessibility, transportation, and community support systems.

We're almost entirely English-speaking

Despite rising national diversity, not surprisingly, virtually no households in Johnston City speak a language other than English at home. Even among children and teens, 100% are English-only speakers.

We love our pets

Over 62% of households own at least one pet—mostly dogs. We are, by any measure, a pet-loving town.

We exercise, but don't always eat healthy

While 64% say they exercise regularly, only 32% say they “somewhat agree” that they eat healthy. The disconnect may help explain the strong demand for healthcare services.

Volunteer rates are lower than expected

Only 13% of residents report volunteering for a charitable organization in the last year—3% lower than the U.S. average. In a town known for helping its own, this statistic shows great untapped potential.

The research also revealed something that inspired us as a nonprofit community development organization: *Johnston City is a town where a printed newspaper is still not just helpful—it is necessary.*

Our town's older age profile is the first clue. With a median age near 43 and over 812 residents age 65 and older, many people here still trust and depend on printed formats for their news. While major cities shift toward digital-only communication, our demographics point in the opposite direction. A physical newspaper remains one of the most accessible, reliable sources of information for a large portion of our population.

Equally important is digital access—or the lack of it. The report shows 286 seniors without a computer and 234 households with no internet access at all. For these residents, *The Arrow* isn't nostalgic or old-fashioned. It is their only dependable source for local information about schools, community programs, city notices, and available resources. Without a printed paper, hundreds of neighbors would simply be left out of the loop.

The data also reveal how many of us live alone—417 single-person households. For many, a homegrown newspaper is more than information; it's a touch



spread—from households under \$15,000 to those above \$150,000—makes print the most equal form of communication. Everyone sees the same community news at the same time,

and Renewal, a nonprofit providing counseling, meals, laundry and shower access, and basic household necessities for those who need a hand. About 30% of the Center's modest

Printed news stays visible—not buried in a feed or swept away by an algorithm.

regardless of broadband speeds, devices, or social media habits.

In a community like ours—older, diverse in income, full of single-person households, and with many residents still offline—a printed newspaper is not a relic of the past. It is a tool of unity and belonging. *The Arrow* continues to shine as Johnston City's shared front porch light, keeping all of us connected to the people and places we call home.

In a town like ours, the Arrow still points home

The December 2025 edition marked the comple-

tion of our newspaper's third volume—the 31st edition of Johnston City's only hometown newspaper. Last month alone, we printed 1,500 copies, distributed through local businesses, schools, and churches where they were eagerly picked up by readers who depend on them. Our mission has stayed the same since issue #1: *to inform, unite, and promote our community.*

And yet, we believe this paper is a vital tool for community development. We believe Johnston City deserves a voice of its own.

As we look toward a new year, we're asking our readers and friends to consider giving a donation in the new year to help us continue publishing *Arrow News* without taking resources away from the other services the Center provides. Donations may be given anonymously or acknowledged in a future issue, and every dollar is tax-deductible. **Please see the form below for donor/sponsorship information.**

When we tell our stories, we strengthen our community. When we stay informed, we stay connected. And when a hometown newspaper continues to point the way, it reminds us that in a town like ours, *the Arrow still points home.*

When we tell our stories, we strengthen our community. When we stay informed, we stay connected.

of connection. It reminds readers that they belong to a community with stories worth sharing.

And with volunteerism relatively low, the printed *Arrow* remains one of the most effective tools for calling our town into action. When service opportunities, fundraisers, and needs appear in print, they stay visible. Not swept away by an algorithm. Not buried in a feed. Printed news activates people.

Finally, our wide income

spread—from households under \$15,000 to those above \$150,000—makes print the most equal form of communication. Everyone sees the same community news at the same time,

and Renewal, a nonprofit providing counseling, meals, laundry and shower access, and basic household necessities for those who need a hand. About 30% of the Center's modest

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Your support helps ensure that local stories, school news, civic updates, and community voices continue to have a place in print.

JCity Center for Hope and Renewal is a nonprofit organization. Donations may be tax-deductible as allowed by law.

Arrow News is produced by the JCity Center for Hope and Renewal. Your donations help support our mission to **inform, unite, and promote** our town. We need your support to continue sharing the news, history, and stories that matter to Johnston City.

2025 IN REVIEW

A year for education, service & community

BY ARROW NEWS STAFF

A year that built on community

If there was a single thread running through Johnston City in 2025, it was connection—between neighbors, schools and families, volunteers and students, tradition and forward momentum. From federal investment in education to grassroots acts of generosity, the year unfolded as a steady reminder that Johnston City remains strongest when it works together.



Education at the center

The year began with one of the most significant announcements in district history: the launch of the Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) initiative, backed by a \$5 million federal grant. The program reached beyond academics, emphasizing wraparound services for students and families and reinforcing schools as community hubs.

Throughout the year, that investment took visible shape—through added personnel, expanded student support, food distribution efforts, family resources, and outreach events that extended far beyond classroom walls. Unfortunately, due to a federal decision, FSCS grant funding came to an abrupt Dec. 31, 2025.

In June, longtime Superintendent Kathy Clark concluded her career, retiring after a decade of leadership marked by collaboration, innovation, and measurable student success. Her tenure was capped with statewide recognition as a Superintendent of Distinction, honoring achievements that included expanded career-technical education, fine arts growth, and stronger community partnerships.

Leadership transitioned seamlessly in July as Josh Pietrantonio assumed the superintendent's role. A familiar face with deep roots in the district, Pietrantonio brought continuity, expe-

rience, and a clear commitment to building on the foundation already in place.

That foundation was formally affirmed in December when Lincoln Elementary and Jefferson Elementary were named Exemplary Schools by the Illinois State Board of Education, placing both buildings among the top 10 percent of elementary schools statewide—with no underperforming student groups. The designation reflected

years of steady progress, not a single-year spike.

Schools serving the whole child

Few initiatives captured the spirit of the year better than Kicks for Kids, a local partnership spearheaded by Johnston City's Edward Jones office. Beginning with PreK students and expanding through first grade, the program provided hundreds of students with brand-new shoes and socks—meeting a basic need while boosting confidence and dignity.



Similarly, JC Kids' Lunch Bunch marked its 16th summer of service and expanded operations by opening a second meal site on the west side of town, increasing access for children and families. Community volunteers, donors, and partner organizations made thousands of meals possible.

As the year closed, Johnston City Schools launched a district-wide food and toy drive, mobilizing students,

families, and staff across all buildings. Student groups—including Student Council, FFA, and Educators Rising—took leadership roles in sorting and organizing donations for local families, reinforcing lessons in service and responsibility.

Community generosity on full display

December revealed the heart of Johnston City in especially clear ways.

The Johnston City Ministerial Alliance Christmas Food Box Project once again ensured that every family in the school district had access to a traditional Christmas meal—no income verification required. Boxes filled with fresh, local ingredients were assembled and distributed by volunteers, supported by churches, businesses, and individual donors.

Nearby, JC Manna Mission's Angel Tree continued a tradition now nearing three decades. Hosted at Banterra Bank, the Angel Tree represented nearly 100 local children, each receiving clothing, pajamas, toys, and holiday cheer through the generosity of anonymous "angels."

The season also brought reflection and remembrance. Members of the Johnston City Rotary Club, joined by community volunteers, placed wreaths at Lakeview Cemetery in honor of local veterans—an act of gratitude echoed earlier in the year during the annual Memorial Day ceremony downtown.

Slow, but steady growth

Civic planning and infrastructure improvements remained part of the long view in 2025. City officials confirmed state plans to replace the Stiritz I-57 overpass and begin improve-

ments at the Johnston City interchange in the coming years.

Residential growth continued as the Tomahawk Hill Subdivision expanded, adding a new street—Joy Lane—and new homes overlooking Tomahawk Lake. Downtown, historic preservation met entrepreneurship with the opening of The Painted Cowgirl boutique on Broadway, breathing new life into a restored building and re-



inforcing the importance of local business.

Traditions, celebration, and the life of the town

From spring to fall, Johnston City's calendar remained full.

The Fireworks Spectacular at Arrowhead Lake once again drew thousands, funded almost entirely

Athletics, school spirit

Johnston City athletics provided countless moments of pride. Football, basketball, wrestling, bowling, baseball, and softball programs saw competitive seasons, new leadership, and postseason honors.

Across winter sports, student-athletes balanced



through donations and volunteer-led fundraisers.

The Arrowhead Endurance Run tested athletes from across the region.

Jack-O-Lantern Lane, now in its fifth year, returned stronger than ever after rebuilding from storm damage.

Seasonal events—from the Farmers Market to Halloween festivities and Christmas concerts—continued to anchor community life.

At the Johnston City Public Library, summer reading programs, Santa's Workshop, and youth activities partnered with first responders and volunteers to make learning joyful and accessible year-round.

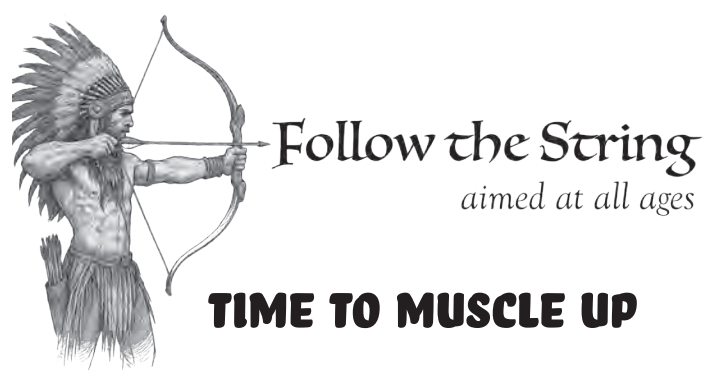
competition with academic and community commitments—reinforcing the district's emphasis on whole-student development.

A community that shows up

If 2025 proved anything, it was that Johnston City's strength lies not in any single program or project, but in its people—students who serve, volunteers who give, educators who lead, and neighbors who show up when it matters most.

As the year closed with food drives, concerts, wreath-laying, and quiet acts of kindness, Johnston City didn't just celebrate Christmas—it demonstrated who it is.





What is it, and why do doctors recommend it?

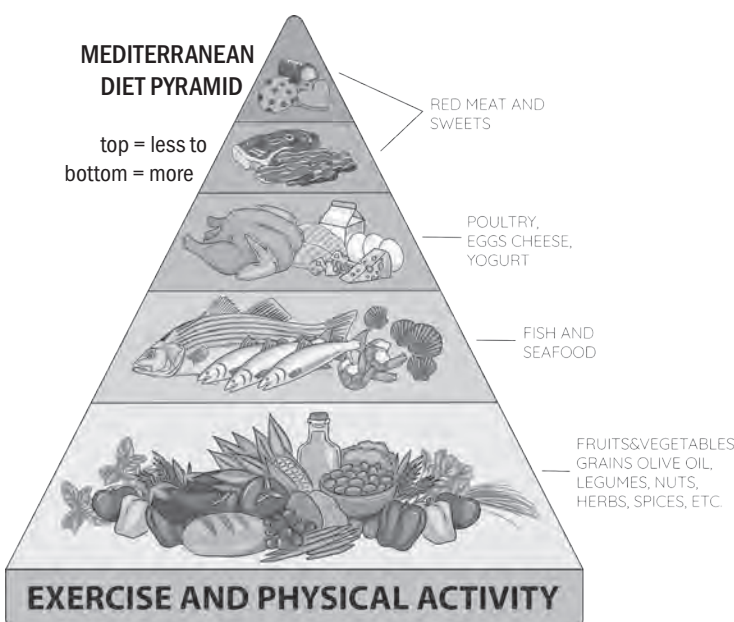
The Mediterranean diet reflects traditional eating patterns in countries such as Greece, Italy, and southern France. Rather than focusing on calorie limits or restrictive rules, it emphasizes whole foods—vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, nuts, olive oil, and moderate amounts of fish and poultry—while limiting red meat, sweets, and heavily processed foods.

Doctors frequently recommend the Mediterranean diet because it is strongly linked to heart health. Long-term studies show lower rates of heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol among those who follow this way of eating. Olive oil replaces butter as the primary fat, providing

healthier monounsaturated fats that support cardiovascular health.

The diet is also associated with better blood sugar control and reduced inflammation, making it beneficial for people with diabetes and other chronic

conditions. Because it is flexible, affordable, and based on everyday foods, many health professionals consider it one of the most sustainable approaches to long-term wellness.



One-Pan Mediterranean Chicken & Potatoes

A hearty, economical dinner featuring lean protein and vegetables

INGREDIENTS

4 bone-in chicken thighs or drumsticks
1½ pounds potatoes, cubed
2 tablespoons olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste
Optional: onion wedges or carrots

1 teaspoon dried oregano
Juice of 1 lemon
½ teaspoon garlic powder

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 400°F. Toss potatoes with half the olive oil, salt, and pepper; spread on a sheet pan. Rub chicken with remaining olive oil, lemon juice, oregano, garlic powder, salt, and pepper. Place chicken among potatoes. Bake 45-50 minutes, turning potatoes once, until chicken is cooked through and lightly browned.

Serving suggestion: Add a cucumber-tomato salad or steamed greens.

Mediterranean Lentil Tomato Stew

A plant-based, protein-rich meal that is both filling and budget-friendly

INGREDIENTS

1 tablespoon olive oil
1 onion, diced
2 carrots, sliced
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 cup dried lentils (brown or green), rinsed
1 can (14-15 oz.) diced tomatoes

3 cups water or low-sodium broth
1 bay leaf
1 teaspoon dried oregano
Salt and pepper to taste
Splash of red wine vinegar or lemon juice

DIRECTIONS

Heat olive oil in a pot over medium heat; sauté onion and carrots 4-5 minutes. Add garlic and cook briefly until fragrant. Stir in lentils, tomatoes, broth, bay leaf, and oregano. Simmer 30-35 minutes until lentils are tender. Remove bay leaf; season with salt, pepper, and a splash of vinegar or lemon juice.

Serving suggestion: Serve with whole-grain bread.

DEVOTIONAL

Will there be a 'Happy New Year' in Johnston City?

BY THE EDITOR

"The fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines.

The olive crop fails and the fields produce no food.

There are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls."

—Habakkuk 3:17-19 NIV

Habakkuk was a prophet in the Old Testament who openly questioned God about injustice, suffering, and bad news facing his nation. Instead of receiving easy answers, he learned to trust God and choose faith even when circumstances did not improve.

In his prophetic writings, Habakkuk painted a bleak picture of his times. In other words: the economy had

stalled, the future felt uncertain, and what once sustained the community was slipping away.

As we enter a new year, Habakkuk's situation feels uncomfortably close to home.

In recent days, Johnston City has absorbed news that weighs heavy on the heart. Two downtown businesses—places that represented jobs, relationships, and stability—are closing their doors. At the same time, the school district has learned it will not receive the remainder of a promised \$5 million grant, money that was expected to support students, families, and long-term planning.

That's not just sad news. It's disruption and disappointment.

Habakkuk understood that feeling well. He lived in a time of uncertainty and loss. Yet his book ends not with denial, but with a declaration of faith as he focuses on God-centered joy rather than circumstantial happiness.

"Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights."

Habakkuk does not claim the crops return or the losses vanish. Instead, he says even if the worst

Hey kids! I bet most of you would love to have muscles like Superman or Wonder Woman—or even be a real-life superhero. Your muscles are what keep you moving: walking, jumping, running, skipping... you get the idea! They also help you do quieter things, like sitting still, holding your back straight, and keeping your head up high.

Some muscles are easy to see, like the ones in your arms and legs. But there are many muscles you don't even realize you're using. Your heart, lungs, stomach, eyes, and even your ears all have muscles that work every day. Yes—there are muscles in your ears! Without muscles, your body simply couldn't survive.

Some muscles, like those in your heart and digestive system, work nonstop and get plenty of exercise all on their own. Other muscles—

especially the ones in your arms and legs—need you to keep them strong by moving and exercising every day. All your muscles also need energy, which comes from eating the right kinds of foods (and not too much junk food!). Even muscles that never stop working need rest so they can heal and stay healthy. Exercise, good food, and rest are the three keys to strong, healthy muscles.

The hardest-working muscle in your body is your heart. It never takes a break and keeps pumping 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The smallest muscle is called the stapedius, and it's inside your middle ear—less than 2 millimeters long! And the biggest muscles? Those belong to a group called the gluteus maximus. (Here's a hint: they're the ones you sit on!)

A SMART LIFE

What you eat can make a big difference

BY DON MCCHESENEY

What you eat can make a big difference in your health. Sometimes it's hard to know where to start when you're trying to plan healthy meals. Here is one simple way to do it.

Draw an imaginary line down the middle of your plate. Next, divide one of those sections in half so you now have three sections on your plate.

Start by filling the largest section with non-starchy vegetables, such as asparagus, broccoli, cauliflower, green beans, kale, spinach, zucchini, lettuce, celery, and mushrooms.

In one of the smaller sections, add carbohydrates, such as black, kidney, or pinto beans; green peas; squash; brown rice;

bread; potatoes; pasta; sweet potatoes or yams; tortillas; and quinoa.

In the remaining section, add protein, such as chicken, salmon, tuna, turkey, tilapia, eggs, low-fat cheese, or tofu.

You can then round out your meal with fruit and/or a serving of dairy, such as milk or yogurt.

Finish your meal with a low-calorie drink, such as water, unsweetened iced tea, or unsweetened coffee.

If you feel you need fats in your diet, choose healthy options, such as avocado or nuts, and enjoy them in small amounts.

Eating these healthy foods can help you eat your way to a healthier and better life.

SCHOOL SPORTS CALENDAR



JCHS Boys Basketball—Varsity/JV

(JV 5 pm, varsity follows unless noted)
 Jan. 6—Century, 6 pm, home
 Jan. 10—@ Christopher, noon
 Jan. 12—Thompsonville, 6 pm, home
 Jan. 13—@ Webber, 6 pm
 Jan. 16—@ Trico, 5 pm
 Jan. 17—@ Wayne City, 4 pm
 Jan. 19—24—Arrowhead Classic, home, TBA
 Jan. 30—@ Zeigler-Royalton, 6 pm
 Feb. 3—@ Goreville, 5 pm
 Feb. 6—@ Vienna, 5 pm
 Feb. 7—@ Hardin County, 5 pm
 Feb. 10—Christopher, 5 pm, home
 Feb. 13—@ Waltonville, 5:15 pm
 Feb. 14—Hamilton County, 5 pm, home
 Feb. 17—Goreville, 5 pm, home
 Feb. 19—Sesser-Valier, 5 pm, home

JCHS Girls Basketball

Jan. 6—@ Anna-Jonesboro, 6 pm
 Jan. 8—Christopher, 6 pm, home
 Jan. 10—Galatia, 6 pm, home
 Jan. 12—@ Goreville, 6 pm
 Jan. 15—@ Steeleville, 6 pm
 Jan. 22—@ Wayne City, 6 pm
 Jan. 26—Christopher, 6 pm, home
 Jan. 29—@ Sesser-Valier, 6 pm
 Feb. 2—@ Webber, 6 pm
 Feb. 5—@ Trico, 6 pm
 Feb. 7—Eldorado, 6 pm, home
 Feb. 9—Vienna, 6 pm, home
 Feb. 10—@ Herrin, 6 pm
 Feb. 12—Century (Senior Night), 6 pm, home
 Feb. 14—IHSA Regionals, TBA

JCHS Bowling

Jan. 6—Herrin, 3:30 pm, SI Bowl
 Jan. 16—17—IHSA Boys Regionals, TBA
 Feb. 3—Massac County (girls), 4 pm
 Feb. 6—7—IHSA Girls Regionals, TBA

JCHS Coed Wrestling

Jan. 2—Marion (girls), 9 a.m.
 Jan. 7—Triangular (Senior Night), 5 pm
 Jan. 9—Murphysboro Tournament, TBA
 Jan. 10—Murphysboro Tournament, TBA
 Jan. 14—BDC Conference, 5 pm
 Jan. 17—@ Paducah Tilghman, TBA
 Jan. 23—Marion (girls), TBA
 Jan. 29—Anna (freshmen), TBA
 Jan. 31—IHSA Boys Regionals, TBA
 Feb. 6—IHSA Girls Regionals, TBA

WMS Boys Basketball

(Home games @ JC Unit #1 unless noted)
 Jan. 3—Ewing Shootout, TBA
 Jan. 8—Vienna Grade School, 6 pm
 Jan. 12—@ Zeigler-Royalton, 5:30 pm
 Jan. 13—Unity Point, 6 pm
 Jan. 15—@ Sesser-Valier, 6 pm
 Jan. 21—Goreville, 6 pm
 Jan. 22—Christopher, 6 pm
 Jan. 26—@ Hamilton County, 6 pm
 Jan. 28—@ Central JH (West Frankfort), 6 pm
 Jan. 29—Eldorado MS, 5:30 pm

WMS Girls Basketball

Jan. 6—@ Sesser-Valier, 6 pm
 Jan. 7—@ Hamilton County, 6 pm
 Jan. 8—Goreville, 6 pm
 Jan. 12—Central JH (West Frankfort), 6 pm

WMS Girls Volleyball—Spring 2026

Feb. 3—Eldorado, 5 pm
 Feb. 9—@ Hamilton County, 6 pm
 Feb. 10—Central JH (West Frankfort), 6 pm
 Feb. 11—Unity Point, 6 pm
 Feb. 18—@ Unity Point, 6 pm
 Feb. 19—Christopher, 6 pm
 Feb. 20—@ Goreville, 5 pm
 Feb. 23—Hamilton County, 6 pm
 Feb. 24—@ Herrin, 5 pm
 Feb. 25—Goreville, 6 pm
 Feb. 26—@ Sesser-Valier, 6 pm
 March 2—Christopher, 6 pm
 March 4—Zeigler-Royalton, 5:30 pm
 March 5—@ Carterville, 5 pm
 March 9—Sesser-Valier, 6 pm
 March 11—@ Crab Orchard, 5:30 pm
 March 14—@ Massac County, TBA
 March 16—@ Central JH (West Frankfort), 6 pm

Scan for updated
 schedule
 information



<https://jcindians.bigteams.com/main/calendar>



JCHS boys basketball coach Quinton Smothers' first season with the Indians, has focused on effort, relationships, and building a strong basketball culture (photo and article content from *JC Hometown Highlights*).

Coach Smothers looks to build a basketball tradition

Johnston City High School basketball has entered a new chapter under first-year head coach Quinton Smothers, who is focused on more than wins and losses as he begins building a lasting program.

Smothers, a Herrin native and 2003 graduate, brings more than a decade of coaching experience to

mentors who helped shape his coaching philosophy. He says those experiences taught him that success starts with relationships.

"You have to build trust first," he said. "If kids trust you, they'll work hard for you."

Joining him on the bench is assistant coach Hayden Holloway, a former player Smothers once coached, who now brings both basketball knowledge and classroom experience to the program.

Since summer workouts began, the coaching staff has emphasized effort, accountability, and community pride. Smothers hopes to create excitement not only within the team, but throughout the town, while also strengthening youth involvement to build a strong future pipeline.

"Our goal is to build something that lasts," Smothers said. "This is about creating a culture Johnston City can be proud of."

Johnston City. While he had no prior ties to the community, he says the town's passion for sports has made him feel at home.

"I feel very welcome here by everybody," Smothers said. "I like the passion the town has for sports. I'm hoping that passion can be brought to basketball."

Before arriving at JCHS, Smothers coached at multiple levels, including junior high and high school, working under respected

"If kids trust you, they'll work hard for you."

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Curiosity meets STEM at Lincoln Elementary

BY BROOKE KELTNER
 Hands-on learning is helping students at Lincoln Elementary discover new interests and confidence through an expanding STEM program led by teacher McKinley Carver. Designed for third- and fourth-grade students, the STEM program focuses on *science, technology, engineering, and math* through interactive, real-world projects.

During the school day, Carver regularly transforms his classroom into a space for exploration, where students design

structures, test buoyancy, and experiment with coding and robotics. Learning continues after school through the STEM Club, which has quickly become a place where curiosity and creativity thrive.

Carver's passion for STEM is personal. As a student, he struggled with undiagnosed ADHD and often doubted his abilities. Today, he works to ensure his students understand that their background or circumstances do not limit their potential.

"Nobody can take your intelligence away," Carver



McKinley Carver, a teacher at Lincoln Elementary, leads hands-on STEM lessons that help students explore science, engineering, and technology through creativity and real-world problem solving.

er said. "Nobody can take away your resilience."

With grant funding, Lincoln Elementary has added new tools such as 3D printers, robotics kits, and updated curriculum.

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Each month, volunteers distribute at least 1,000 copies of *Arrow News* to more than 30 local establishments. Here is a partial listing of places to pick up your copy:

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A Season to Remember WMS Baseball celebrates perfect season

Washington Middle School's Indians baseball team delivered a season that will be remembered for years, finishing the 2025 campaign with a perfect 19-0 record, a conference championship, and a historic run to the state tournament.



The remarkable season marked the program's first conference title in 15 years, a milestone achieved through consistent effort, teamwork, and strong leadership. After rolling through an undefeated regular season, the Indians advanced to state competition, where their run ended in a tightly contested 1-0 loss to Belleville Whiteside.

Despite the narrow defeat, Head Coach William Brayfield said the season far exceeded expectations.

"The boys accomplished something that we didn't even dream possible," Brayfield said. "The hard work and effort they put

throughout the season as Washington Middle School consistently found ways to win behind strong pitching, timely hitting, and steady defense. More than wins and records, the season created lasting memories for players, families, and the Johnston City community.

Though the Indians' season ended just short of a state championship, the legacy of the 2025 team is secure—an undefeated record, a long-awaited conference title, and a season that proudly represented Washington Middle School and the Tribe.



into every practice and game were amazing. It was truly an honor to coach these boys, and I couldn't be more proud of them."

One of the standout contributors to the Indians' success was 8th-grader Jaxson Mapps, who delivered a record-setting season on the mound. Mapps broke multiple school records, including:

- Wins in a season: 10
- Wins in a career: 14
- ERA (season): 0.146
- Strikeouts in a season: 99
- Strikeouts in a career: 155
- WHIP (season): 0.546

While the numbers tell part of the story, Mapps emphasized the team-first mentality that fueled the Indians' perfect run.

"I like playing with these guys," Mapps said. "They're really fun to play with. Good chemistry."

Mapps went on to become one of six student-athletes at Washington to be named a 2025 Coal Belt All-Conference Team.

These other talented athletes include Brantley Davis, Carson Lenon, Jaxon Norris, Gage Spiller, and Jordan Williford. That chemistry showed

WMS eighth-grader Jaxson Mapps played a key role in the Indians' perfect baseball season, setting multiple school pitching records. Now, Mapps' attention has shifted to the WMS Basketball season, playing both forward and center. (photos and information in this article are from *JC Hometown Highlights*, Winter 2025)

HIGH SCHOOL SCOREBOARD

Girls Basketball

Dec. 1—Vienna 64, JC 35
Dec. 4—Gallatin County 55, JC 41
Dec. 6—JC 44, Meridian 27
Dec. 8—SVW 57, JC 30
Dec. 11—Trico 51, JC 27
Dec. 13—Frankfort 61, JC 33
Dec. 15—JC 57, Hardin County 28
Dec. 18—JC 46, Goreville 41
Dec. 26—JC 44, Greenville 42*
Dec. 27—Fr. McGivney 65, JC 22*
Dec. 29—DuQuoin 56, JC 38*
(*CORL Holiday Tournament)

Boys Basketball

Dec. 6—JC 66, Agape Christian 27
Dec. 12—Trico 47, JC 44
Dec. 13—Eldorado 56, JC 39
Dec. 16—Sesser-Valier 55, JC 46
Dec. 19—JC 53, ZR 24
Dec. 20—Vienna 56, JC 20
Dec. 26—JC 52, Elverado 37*
Dec. 28—Cairo 48, JC 29*
Dec. 29—JC 51, Century 46*
(Cobden Holiday Tournament)

Indians battle through busy December on the hardwood

December proved to be a demanding month for the Indians, as both the boys and girls basketball teams balanced conference play with holiday tournament competition. The Indians opened the month with a strong non-conference win and added a conference victory before facing a challenging slate that

tested depth and consistency, including action in the Appleknocker Holiday Tournament in Cobden.

The Lady Indians also worked through a full December schedule, mixing league games with holiday tournament play. Johnston City earned several key wins, highlighted by a narrow 44-42 victory

over Greenville, while late-month matchups against larger-school opponents provided valuable experience.

Both programs now turn their attention to January, when conference games begin to carry added importance in the race for postseason positioning.

MORE SPORTS INSIDE

See p. 7 for more sports news and schedules for JCHS and WMS

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