

MAKING THE GRADE

Education in Ohio and Kentucky has its share of challenges, but we're putting the spotlight on successes.

BY KARA HAGERMAN



SCHOOLS NATIONWIDE ARE PLAGUED

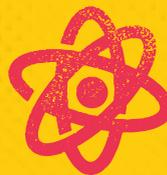
with many of the same concerns: lack of funding, low teacher pay, rigorous testing requirements, and school safety.

As Ohio and Kentucky face those challenges, along with state-specific issues (pension crisis in Kentucky, criticism of changes to Ohio's state report card grading system), it's worth focusing on some recent achievements and innovative new programs in both states.



COLLEGE-READINESS

▶ According to *U.S. News & World Report's* 2019 ranking of best public high schools, the top three high schools in Ohio are right here in Cincinnati: Walnut Hills High School, Wyoming High School, and Indian Hill High School. In Northern Kentucky, Highlands High School and Beechwood High School landed in the top 10. Why the high rankings? At Indian Hill, 85 percent of students took an AP exam, and 81 percent of those passed (27 AP courses are offered). At Highlands, students can choose from 24 AP courses, 91 percent took an exam, and 73 percent of them passed. While the Ohio schools ranked higher nationally, these stats indicate both student populations are prepared for college.



STEM LEARNING

▶ It's become more than just a buzzword. STEM education (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) or STEAM (adding arts) is now an integral part of the curriculum for every student. In Kentucky, the newly opened Ignite Institute is the only school of its kind in the region. The innovative trade school, in a former Toyota lab in Erlanger, focuses on STEAM careers for Boone County, Kenton County, and Walton-Verona students. As they study engineering or computer or biomedical science, students can also develop relationships with local businesses for mentorship.



GIFTED INSTRUCTION

▶ Gifted students are traditionally underserved in the public school population. Cincinnati Public Schools recognized the need for gifted instruction and opened the Spencer Center for Gifted and Exceptional Students in 2017. Eligible students—those who test as gifted or exceptional on the Iowa Assessment and the Cognitive Abilities Test—have access to a rigorous curriculum serving their individual needs. Spencer currently accommodates 340 students in grades 3-10, with their first senior class graduating in 2022.



CHRISTIAN GILL

EXECUTIVE CHEF AT BOOMTOWN

BISCUITS & WHISKEY.

PENOLETON

▶ **Christian Gill originally settled on the Northern Kentucky side of the river, but work and other life events led him to move downtown.**

Why did you make the cross-river move? Boomtown had just opened in the spring and I just wanted to be closer to work. I had won *Guy's Grocery Games*, but I hadn't received the winnings yet and I couldn't buy my car, so I needed to be as close to work as possible.

What do you think is the biggest difference? The feeling of separation. The thing I liked the most about living in Northern Kentucky was once I crossed the river I felt like, if it was a bad day, you could say "bye" to it... and I'm a sucker for the skyline, so I liked driving toward that every day.

Which side would you say you have more of a connection to? I'm from Kentucky so I feel like I have more of a connection there.... We're stubborn about it. I just changed my license last week and I've been in Cincinnati for seven years.

How does being involved in both communities affect your sense of place? Owning a restaurant in Cincinnati makes me feel more embraced and a part of the community. Even though Cincinnati is huge and the neighborhoods are all over, they're still tied together and you still know everyone. Covington felt very divided in that way. — C. C.



KENTUCKY

The Transit Authority of Northern Kentucky provides bus and shuttle transportation to Boone, Campbell, and Kenton counties, as well as part of downtown Cincinnati. — K. C.

CINCINNATI

The Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority manages Metro buses that service the city and suburbs; the city will take over the Cincinnati Bell Connector streetcar, which follows a 3.6-mile loop through downtown and Over-the-Rhine.