

Michael Bell - Class of "2004"
University of Illinois Alumnus

The three components of my education at VCHS that come to mind are the following:
-My Vandalia Junior High math teachers taught me the importance of attention to detail, particularly in relation to numbers. These lessons were invaluable as I pursued my degree in finance at the University of Illinois. A decimal place matters a lot in business.
-My Vandalia High School Language Arts instructors led instruction to question your assumptions, seek insight from a variety of sources, and communicate your own original - both written and orally. This remains an enduring life skill that I use daily. As a senior I was presented with the "Thinking Outside the Box" award. Honestly, this is the achievement at VCHS of which I am most proud.
-The number of dual credit classes offered through KC were highly valuable and nearly all transferred to my four-year university. I entered University of Illinois with more college credit than almost anyone I know. Not having to retake these general curriculum classes in college allowed me to change majors and complete an additional minor while still graduating in four years.

Sean Newcomb - Class of "2013"
HMT Tank, Inc. - Welder

I was enrolled in Power Mechanics for two years, my junior and senior years. It taught me how to work on small engines, restore old tractors, sand blasting, painting and welding. Okaw teaches you safety and work ethics, just like out in the working industries. We weren't taught welding until our senior year. Once I got the chance to weld, I instantly loved doing it and decided to make it a career. After graduation I got a job at HMT Tank, Inc. All the things I learned at Okaw help me today. If anyone is interested in pursuing a career in welding, construction, auto mechanics, auto body, office technology, commercial art, health occupations, food service, drafting, or electronics, I would highly recommend the Okaw Vocational Center.

Brandy Protz - Class of "2014"
Indiana State University Class of 2018

I was raised in the same town, the same house, across the street from the high school my whole life. Some may think that the transition to a large University would be a difficult one, but in fact, it was not difficult at all. My time spent at Vandalia Community High School prepared me to be the person and successful student I am today. In high school I was a three sport athlete, the class Vice President, and participated in quite a few other extracurricular activities; along with drag racing on the weekends. I still have relationships with my teachers, and they still help me even in my college career. Because of my experiences from Vandalia Community High School, I received a full ride academic scholarship to attend Indiana State University. This scholarship was based off of academic performance and extracurricular activities, as well as personal interviewing skills. Without the personal attention and kindness of my teachers, the work ethic I learned, and the chance to be a part of numerous extracurricular activities, I would not be where I am today.

Josie Earnest - Class of "2006"
Vanderbilt University Alumna

Vandalia was the beginning for me. It will always be a part of my story, my journey. I've been blessed with a lot of rewarding experiences and my time in this high school was a piece of those moments. I was afforded the opportunity to compete collegiately at Vanderbilt University after my time at VCHS, and it was then I realized the help I had along the way. If I didn't have the great teachers for my social sciences, humanities, and the like I wouldn't have had the open mindedness that allowed me to understand the different backgrounds and cultures I would encounter in college and traveling the world. Teachers helped me find my enjoyment in accounting, and once my days of competing and coaching are over, I plan to follow that path. When it is all said and done, one thing remains- every teacher I came in contact with helped shape my thoughts and development in some way- and for that I will always be grateful.

Quenten Austin - Class of "2012"
The Ohio State University Class of "2016"

Throughout my 22 years I have developed strong, personal relationships with the educators and community leaders in Vandalia. From primary school to high school, educators helped shape and strengthen my character and solidified my values. Community members challenged and inspired me to become a respected student-athlete, and more importantly, a caring, responsible member of society. Both educators and community members have supported my collegiate career as well. I am fortunate to have published a scientific article, served in health clinics on a volcanic island in Nicaragua, and run track for The Ohio State University. I am grateful to those who continuously support both my short-term and long-term goals.



"Home of the Vandals"

**Vandalia Community
School District #203**

Rich Well – Superintendent

Alumni Testimonials

**Drew Bell - Class of “2009”
University of Illinois Alumnus**

When I think back to my time at VCHS, a few things stand out as items of value I received that have paid dividends in the real world. First, I was able to sample broadly yet still be successful in extracurricular activities. Compared to my peers at the University of Illinois and now in professional life, the biggest difference between my education at VCHS and theirs is that it was possible - and encouraged - to participate in a wide range of activities at the same time. For me that meant being a three sport athlete, a band member, a National Honor Society member, and more.

While the schools my suburban college peers attended were often more diverse in population, VCHS's flexibility in extracurriculars actually magnified the amount of diversity I was able to encounter. By being able to participate in multiple extracurricular activities, at VCHS I learned to interact with people across a broad spectrum of age, interests, and socioeconomic statuses. Academically, the strongest part of my education, a part that has of great value in communication and writing, was the strength of the fundamentals taught in my English courses. To this day, even though I work in a STEM-based field where math is the most important core subject, I have always gotten my highest test scores in English and attribute much of my handle of the English language to the teachers at VCHS.

**Rachelle Leiken - Class of “2013”
University of Louisiana Monroe Class of
“2017”**

Moving to a new town is not easy, especially when the transition is in the middle of high school and halfway across the country. Coming from a fairly large high school in Oregon, Vandalia Community High School made the switch painless. Some of my absolute favorite memories were playing for the volleyball team. The coach worked us to our full potential and the team was packed with girls all supporting one another to try to achieve the same goal. I owe the school and the community a “thank you” for helping shape the student-athlete I am today. Currently I am a golfer at a Division 1 University, and VCHS prepared me both academically and athletically for a successful college experience!

**Austyn Krueger - Class of “2013”
Millikin University Class of “2017”**

Without Vandalia Community High School, I would not have found many of the things I know as passions today. Through lectures in science classes, I fell in love with chemistry. Today, I am studying chemistry at Millikin University in Decatur. I recently completed the first half of my junior year and continue to maintain a high GPA while balancing extracurriculars. These time management skills lead me back to my time at Vandalia; being enrolled in dual-credit courses, a dual-athlete, class president, as well as an active member of several other student organizations. Although Vandalia High School may be small, its size helps facilitate much more meaningful relationships with students and staff. Instead of walking back into a school years after graduation to blank stares, I am greeted with open arms by my former teachers, who have slowly turned to friends and mentors.

**Blake Rabe - Class of “2006”
Illinois State University Alumnus**

My high school career started with my guidance counselor steering me in the right direction to select the right mix of classes. Some of the classes I took offered both high school and college credit. Teachers and faculty were very friendly and presented material in a way that was easy to understand. This made learning and academic success attainable by anyone who wanted to succeed. I looked up to many of my teachers and coaches while growing up and they were good role models for me. I operated my own mowing service outside of high school and maintained the records of how I managed and operated the service through a program called a Supervised Agricultural Experience. My records were then used to judge against other FFA members in different high schools across the state and nation who managed the same type of business. I built on these experiences throughout college during job interviews and use these skills today when I have to present and share information with others. During football I learned the value of determination, teamwork and courage. I soon discovered that when you are determined, motivated and courageous, anything is possible. The classes that required me to present material helped my public speaking and communication skills, two skills I continue to improve on and use every day. Working in group projects or participating in PE sports teams with students I was unfamiliar with helped develop my networking skills and build friendships. Vandalia High School not only offered classes that prepared me for college and my future career but learning experiences that helped shape the person that I am today.

**Rachel (Bell) Parks - Class of “2006”
Iowa State University Alumna**

Unlike large schools where students have to "specialize", I appreciated the opportunity in Vandalia to participate in multiple extracurricular activities (i.e. cross country, volleyball, basketball, track, band, yearbook, etc). I think the broader exposure to different experiences has helped me relate to a wider variety of people in my job now. I also appreciated the kindness of the teachers of the Vandalia schools. My teachers knew my name. They were my sport coaches. They are still family friends. Every high schooler needs someone [besides their parents] who both challenges and encourages them. I had several teachers, especially in late high school, who did that, and it gave me more confidence to apply to the colleges I wanted to attend.

**Haley Wollerman - Class of “2012”
Monmouth College Class of “2016”**

During my time at Vandalia High School, I was able to build strong relationships with the teachers who helped me academically, athletically, and personally. Luckily, VHS gave me the opportunity to have a teacher as a basketball coach who helped me to grow personally and athletically through the game of basketball. Another opportunity that VHS provided me with was dual credit courses. I now attend a liberal arts college where when enrolled I was considered a sophomore, because of dual credit courses I had taken in high school. I appreciated this because it gave me the flexibility to take courses I was interested in and begin my major courses a couple semesters early. Vandalia High School is where all the teachers know your name and the principal knows your game.