



inside HIGHLANDS

Fall 2021

HIGHLANDS SCHOOL DISTRICT PARENT & COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

District Resumes Full In-Person Learning



It was our pleasure to welcome back students to full-week, in-person learning for the 2021-22 school year. I know these past few years have been difficult on our students, families and our community, but I also know that we continue to push through the tough times by supporting each other.

The district will always

have the students' best interest at heart, and it is our priority to maintain the safety of our children throughout the COVID pandemic by assuring that our classrooms and buildings meet the guidelines outlined in the district's Health and Safety Plan.

Our teachers and staff have embraced and enjoyed the return to in-person instruction and interaction with our students. The district is back to offering extracurricular activities, sports and other school-related events to the students so that they can get that socialization time with their peers that is critical for their health and well-being.

Please know we recognize the struggle many of our students faced academically, socially and emotionally as a result of COVID. The district's student services department, along with our entire staff, is here to provide them with the support and resources they need to experience success throughout the school year.

The district continues to focus on Framing the Future for our RAMS students by concentrating on accomplishing the district approved goals: Student Achievement and Growth; Teaching and Learning; Operational Efficiency; Safety and Security; and Collaborative Community and Culture. I am honored to be a part of this wonderful school district and community. We've had a successful start to the year, and I truly look forward to seeing a lot more rewards, recognition and accomplishments among our students, staff and community as the year progresses!

Warm Regards,
Monique Mawhinney, Ed.D., Superintendent

New & In the Works... Student Voice & Leadership Opportunities, Clubs

Highlands administrators and principals are dedicated to providing opportunities for our students to have a voice, take ownership, and have a lead role in their educational career. Here is what's new and in the works at Highlands:

Superintendent Student Cabinet Meetings

Superintendent **Dr. Monique Mawhinney** is resuming her Student Cabinet Meetings at all Highlands schools after a year hiatus due to COVID. Students will have the opportunity to share issues and concerns or positive news, suggest ideas and discuss ways to improve the overall climate and culture of their school.

Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) Student Core Team - High School

The PBIS Student Core Team comprises grades 9-12 students nominated by staff who consult the High School PBIS Team on ways to improve school culture. Team members meet with the students on a regular basis for feedback about utilizing PBIS grant monies, developing fundraisers for the program, and suggesting ways to reward students for meeting expectations. Most recently, the students assisted in the creation of an attendance video lesson. The adult core team led this effort, but future lessons will be created by the students themselves. The students will host a candy gram fundraiser for Thanksgiving, as well as a "pie a school faculty member" fundraising event.

Student Learning Showcase & New Clubs - Middle School

Middle School Principal **Dr. Kimberly Price** is coordinating with teacher leaders and the PTO to organize a Student Learning Showcase on Nov. 11. The goals of the event are to give students the chance to practice public speaking, share what and how they are learning, and to bring their parents into the learning process and take the lead on those conversations. The event will feature representative

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student groups from all four core academic content areas, music, visual arts and STEM. The Middle School also introduced two new after school clubs this year - STEM Club and Art Club. The STEM Club is held on Thursdays from 3:15-4:15 pm. The club's purpose is to extend the STEM curriculum through robotics and innovation projects and introduce students to creative thinking and problem solving through science, math, engineering and technology. The Art Club is held on Tuesdays from 3:15-4:15 pm. Art curriculum is expanded through ongoing projects and introduces the creation of art for an audience, statement or purpose. Both clubs run through December and will resume in February.

Jr. Safety Officer Program - Highlands Elementary

Highlands Elementary is partnering with the AAA in supporting and implementing a Jr. Safety Officer Program for students. The Jr. Safety Officers will be leaders in the school by modeling and reinforcing RAMS behaviors (especially safety) around the building and on the school busses. This program will help encourage all students to follow the RAMS behaviors of Respectful, Accountable, Motivated and Safe. The building's Security Officer **Lee McIntire** will meet with the Jr. Safety Officers on a regular basis to talk about safety and how to advocate for all students to be safe.

Staff Shortage Challenges

Like many school districts across the nation, Highlands has experienced a shortage of teachers and staff in recent years, and the COVID pandemic triggered a spike in retirements and resignations. In addition, the district is also facing a nationwide substitute teacher shortage.

To help alleviate some of the issues securing daily substitute teachers, Highlands hired five permanent building substitutes at the beginning of the 2021-22 school year. However, due to open teaching positions and absences, the building subs are currently working in those open positions and long-term absence capacities.

Assistant Superintendent **Dr. Cathleen Cubelic** hopes that re-establishing our partnerships with colleges and universities will help with teacher shortages. "We are continuing to reach out to area universities to engage with pre-service and student teachers so that we can build a pipeline for future hires," she said. Currently, Highlands has student teachers from the University of Pittsburgh, Point Park and IUP, as well as a Social Studies field experience student.

The district also partners with Kelly Services for Education for daily substitute teachers and paraeducators. A Bachelor's degree in any concentration is required for all teacher roles, and a high school diploma is required for paraeducator roles. **Anyone interested in applying and becoming eligible for assignment at Highlands should visit www.kellyeducationjobs.com.**

Welcome, New Staff!

Since the Spring of 2021, Highlands has welcomed many new faces to the district staff. In addition, some familiar faces have different roles within the district. Please join us in welcoming all of the following new/familiar staff!

DISTRICT

Dr. Amber Dean – Director of Student Services

Dr. Angela Kennedy – School Psychologist

Dr. Rebecca Keenan – School Psychologist

Jaclyn Walker – Food Services Director

Lori Welsh-Nury – Accounts Payable / Worker's Comp.

HIGHLANDS HIGH SCHOOL (HS)

Dr. Laura Burns – High School Co-Principal

Jefrie Funtal – Dean of Students

Melissa Lentz – School Nurse (formerly MS Nurse)

Walt Hanzlik – Physics Teacher (formerly MS 8th Gr. Science)

Jacob Bosiljevac – Long-term Sub. Teacher - English

Robin Davis – Paraeducator (formerly at MS)

HIGHLANDS MIDDLE SCHOOL (MS)

Michael Toole – Asst. Principal (formerly MS Dean of Students)

Cory Sakolsky – Dean of Students

Natalie Rich – School Nurse

Dr. Bobbi Hammill – Long-term Sub. Teacher - 5th ELA

Julie Hiester – School Counselor 7/8

(currently MS 6th Gr. ELA/Social Studies Teacher)

Megan McKenna – 7th Grade ELA Teacher

Rebecca Sue – Long-term Sub. Teacher - 8th Gr. Science

HIGHLANDS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (HES)

Isabella Beabout – Art Teacher

Abbie Neff – Building Sub. Teacher

Meghan Grantz – Building Sub. Teacher

Kelsey Wolfe – Paraeducator

Mary Frey – Paraeducator

Jody Snebold – Café



HIGHLANDS EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER (HECC)

Dr. Jo Welter – Interim Principal

Marilyn Skwortz – School Counselor (shared time with HS)

Samantha Eiler – School Nurse

Terri Artman – Paraeducator (formerly at MS)

In Our Schools . . .

For MORE school news and photos, visit goldenrams.com and our social media pages!

Summer Programs Offer Project-Based Enrichment, STEM Opportunities

Camp Creativity: This past summer, approximately 230 students in grades K-8 participated in the district's free "Camp Creativity" summer program that provided enrichment opportunities through project-based learning. Highlands teachers taught lessons and prepared activities for the two sessions of the 8-day summer camps that were offered in June and July.

At HECC, the camp focused on revitalizing the outdoor classroom space at the school. Kindergarten students imagined what the space could look like and worked in groups to create drawings of their ideas. After learning about plants and animals native to PA, each student was provided with the tools they needed to contribute to the clean-up and redesign of the space, such as gloves, shovels, seeds, etc. They planted flowers and vegetables, created a bird seed cookie, and monitored plant growth. Students also reviewed letters and sounds, counted and sorted objects, created learning journals and participated in field trips to the Community Library and Harrison Hills Park. **At HES,** students in each grade level worked on projects such as designing an aquarium, creating a campsite, building a food truck business and writing a book. Teachers designed the lessons to incorporate focus standards in both English/language arts and math as students engaged in rich learning opportunities.



At the Middle School, students learned writing skills while exploring anti-bullying themes related to the Salem Witch Trials. NASA became a regular acronym as older students designed a trip to a planet in our solar system using math, science and communication skills. Younger students practiced fractions and learned Spanish as they planned, baked and presented a mid-day fiesta for parents.

STEM Camp: Over last summer, Highlands Middle School also hosted a STEM Camp, during which 18 students explored the nature of the Internet, developed cyphers while working with internet security concepts and created their own digital programs. Students also took a field trip to the Pittsburgh Technical College to learn about the different programs technical colleges offer. Students were amazed that a student could attend a PTI program for two years and make \$60,000 a year! **We appreciate all of the teachers and paraeducators who led and assisted with the summer camps, and are proud of the students who attended these unique experiences to enrich their education!**



POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH: Highlands High School Counselors and Student Assistance Program Team have partnered with the University of Pittsburgh MAPS Program and Animal Friends to offer therapy dog visits to allow students the opportunity to smile and de-stress as they interact with the dogs. A goal of the MAPS program is to support the emotional needs and well-being of all students.



Download the Highlands School District mobile app!

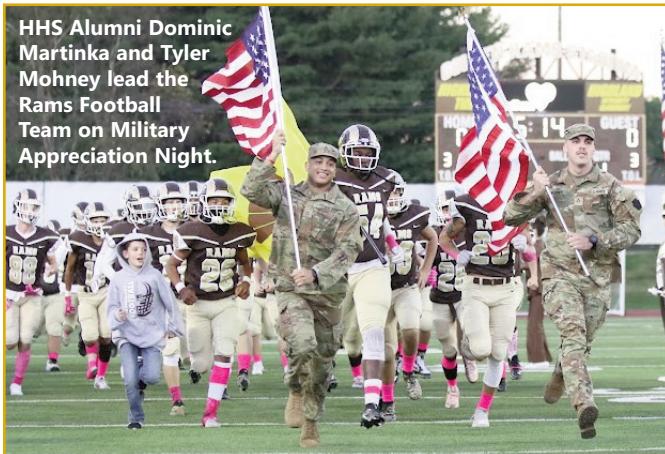
School Board Spotlight

Two Directors Bid Farewell

Highlands School District will recognize two School Board Directors for their service and dedication to our students, staff and community at the School Board Meeting on Nov. 15. Directors **Debbie Beale** and **Robert Betts** have both chosen to leave the Board when their terms expire in November. Beale served 26 years as a Board Director; 14 of which were as President and 4 as VP. Betts has served on the Board for 4 years. Thank you both for your service, dedication and commitment in this voluntary capacity!

Fall Sports *highlights*

The **Varsity Football Team** finished the regular season with a 7-3 record and qualified for the WPIAL playoffs for the first time since 2015. The Golden Rams earned the No. 8 seed in Class 4A and will host No. 9 New Castle in the first round. Also picking up historic wins this season was the **Varsity Golf Team** and **Girls Volleyball Team**. The **Cross Country Team** finished the season at the WPIAL Championships at California University of PA. **Fatama Shareef** and **Ava Nitowski** led the **Girls Varsity Tennis Team** this season with postseason appearances in the singles and doubles tournaments. **For schedules and up-to-date info about Highlands Athletics, visit the goldenramsathletics.org website, Twitter and Facebook!**



PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2021

HECC, HES & Middle School
11:30 am-2:30 pm & 4:00-7:00 pm

High School
10:30 am-1:30 pm & 3:00-6:00 pm

*Please Note:
There is no school
for students on this
day. More info will
be shared via
email and website.*

After-School Tutoring Offered

After-school tutoring sessions are offered Monday through Thursday for Gr. 1-12 students in need of extra support with academics. The most effective tutoring programs establish strong relationships with students first, and all Highlands tutoring programs operate with teachers who know and care about our students. A bus is also available to take students home after tutoring. Elementary students need parent and teacher permission in order to attend.

High School: 2:40-3:40 pm
Room A107 & Zoom

Middle School: 3:15-4:15 pm
Library & Zoom

Elementary School: 3:50-4:50 pm
Teacher Classrooms



Happenings!

SEE MORE on goldenrams.com and social media!

Congratulations to High School teachers **Todd Bengel**, **Mindy Eckenrod**, **Kurt Landsberg**, and **Nicole White**; Middle School teachers **Shawn Hisiro** and **Tracey Neville**; and secretary **Kim Hines**, who were honored at the Staff Opening Day Program for their **25 years** of service and dedication to Highlands School District!

In October, HES & HECC celebrated **Fire Prevention Week** with visits from local fire departments and EMS. **Red Ribbon Week** was recognized with themed dress-up days, a bully prevention assembly, and age-appropriate lessons about the dangers of drug use. Students at both schools are also being rewarded monthly for **perfect attendance** and **RAMS behavior**.

STEM students in **Mrs. Marcie Wallace's** classes at the MS participated in the first quarter **Inventionland Competition** in October. Students worked individually and/or in small teams to brainstorm invention ideas, research their concepts, build prototypes and learn how to package and market their inventions.

The Highlands Cheer program, along with local non-profit Change for Cancer, raised **\$4,239.97** for this year's **Pink Out** on Oct. 15 through the support of the district's staff, students and community! The donations will help four area families who are dealing with cancer.