



inside **HIGHLANDS**

Fall 2019

HIGHLANDS SCHOOL DISTRICT PARENT & COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

Framing the Future of Highlands School District

Dear Highlands Family Community,

Last school year, as the Highlands Assistant and Substitute Superintendent, I had the opportunity to get to know the school board members, administrators, principals, teachers, secretaries, paraprofessionals, custodians, maintenance, food service, and several parents and community members. *The one thing that all of these people have in common is their care for our students and our community.* This quality is one of the reasons that made me want to become the next Highlands Superintendent.

This past summer, I worked with district administration and the board of school directors to establish district goals for the next 5 years, themed **"Framing the Future"**. *The ultimate goal is for every Highlands student to gain the knowledge and skills needed in order to be successful after high school graduation.* Our students will be equipped with the necessary skills required to be successful in any chosen career path. To accomplish this, we will continue to utilize

the Understanding by Design Framework for teaching in order to enhance the district's curriculum, instruction

and assessment. We plan to improve the Multi-Tiered Supports System (MTSS) Framework for students in grades K-8 who need remediation or enrichment in English, language arts and/or math. We will also utilize the MTSS Framework to provide additional supports for students experiencing emotional or behavioral difficulties. Principals will be instructional leaders, increasing their presence in the classrooms and providing the necessary resources and tools for our teachers. In turn, teachers will provide rigorous and meaningful instruction to our students.

Another significant goal for the Highlands School District this year is to increase student attendance. It is crucial that children attend school on a regular basis to receive the best education possible. If students do not come to school, then we can't educate them, and they won't learn. Parents and guardians, please help us accomplish this goal!

Communication is the key to any successful relationship. This school year, I implemented Superintendent Coffee Talks, Student Cabinets at each building and a district-wide Parent Cabinet, all of which are designed to encourage important conversations with me about the positive things happening in the school buildings and things that may need reviewed.

Finally, fiscal responsibility will remain a top priority in the 2019-2020 school year. It is my duty to make decisions in the best interest of our students while being fiscally responsible. *Every decision I make will be based on what I believe is best for our students, and I will never waver from that. The students are at the heart of everything we do.* Let's continue to work together as a team for the betterment of our students and the Highlands School District.



Superintendent Dr. Monique Mawhinney looks on as Highlands Elementary students engage in a STEM coding activity with Bee Bots.

~ Dr. Monique Mawhinney, Superintendent

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Dr. Monique Mawhinney
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District Welcomes New Administrators to Team



Dr. Cathleen Cubelic, Assistant Superintendent

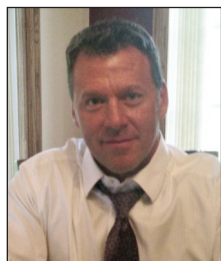
Serving the district as the new Assistant Superintendent is **Dr. Cathleen Cubelic**, who held the same position for the past two years at Wilkinsburg School District prior to joining the Highlands administrative team in August.

Dr. Cubelic began her impressive educational career as a teacher and assistant principal at North Allegheny. She was a former assistant principal at Chartiers Valley, elementary principal at Hampton and the Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment at the Midwestern Intermediate Unit. A graduate of Duquesne University with a B.S. in Elementary Education and M.S. in Administration, Dr. Cubelic earned her Superintendent Letter of Eligibility from Gannon University and her Doctorate in Organizational Leadership from Youngstown State University. She received numerous awards and recognition throughout her career, including the Pennsylvania Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (PASCD) President's Award for Distinguished Contributions to Education in 2017. Dr. Cubelic worked in partnership with Edulink Inc. in the development of the Pennsylvania Electronic Teacher Evaluation Portal (PA-ETEP), supported the implementation of standards-aligned reporting, and led the development of PA Core-aligned Common Assessments.

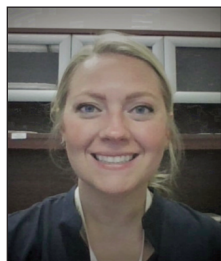
Some of Dr. Cubelic's responsibilities include grant writing, staff professional development, teacher induction and teacher tenure evaluations. She works closely with Curriculum Coordinator Cathy Russo to oversee curriculum, instruction, reporting academic progress, MTSS and standardized assessment. Dr. Cubelic also serves as the district's homeschool/homeless coordinator and the safety and security coordinator.

Dr. Robert Isherwood & Dr. Anne Rose Co-Directors of Student Services

Micalla Mikus, School Psychologist



Dr. Robert Isherwood has a M.Ed. in Special Education from the University of Pittsburgh and a Doctorate in Educational Administration and Policy Study from the University of Pittsburgh with a Superintendent's Letter of Eligibility. He is a partner in Keystone Educational Consulting Group, Keysource Educational Staffing, and KeySolutions LLC.



Dr. Anne Rose is the Co-Director of Student Services along with Dr. Isherwood. Dr. Rose earned her MAT in Elementary Education & Special Education from Chatham University and her Doctorate in Special Education School Leadership from the University of Pittsburgh.



Ms. Micalla Mikus began employment with Highlands in February of 2019 as the district's School Psychologist. She earned her B.S. in Psychology, MEd in School Psychology and her CAGS in School Psychology from Duquesne University.

Read more about our new administrators under the School News section on goldenrams.com.

Annual School Board Policies Review & Student/Parent Handbooks

Highlands parents/guardians and students are encouraged to review annually and understand **School Board Policies** that pertain to issues such as discipline, anti-bullying, attendance, etc. These policies are on the Parent Resources section of the district website:

www.goldenrams.com/parentresources

Student/Parent Handbooks for each school are posted on the district website's Parent Resources section as well as on each building's website. The Handbook provides students and families with important information regarding regulations, policies and procedures that make up the total Highlands School District educational program and specific items regarding the daily operations of the school. Students and parents should familiarize themselves with the information included in the Handbook. Printed copies are available by contacting your child's school building.

improving Academic Performance through Understanding by Design Framework

In order to align our curriculum to state standards and in an effort to improve student achievement, Highlands implemented stage 1 of the **Understanding by Design (UbD) Framework** last year.

The UbD Framework is a three-stage process that helps teachers clarify learning goals, devise assessments of student understanding, and develop effective and engaging learning activities while working within the standards-driven curriculum. Using a “backward” design, the teacher starts with classroom outcomes, creates aligned assessments and performance tasks and then plans the instruction, choosing activities and materials that help determine student ability and foster student learning.

The ultimate goal is for students to connect their skills and knowledge to *understand* the “big idea” in the material being taught so they can transfer what they learn in any situation. This philosophical application of *understanding* is more effective in preparing college and career ready students.

Under the leadership of Assistant Superintendent **Dr. Cathleen Cubelic** and Curriculum Coordinator **Cathy Russo**, Highlands educators will continue to expand on all three stages of the UbD Framework this year in an effort to reduce gaps in academic achievement and increase student growth. It is important to note that improving student achievement is a process; it may take about 3-5 years before the district sees a significant increase in achievement. However, Highlands does expect to see a steady academic growth pattern develop each year with the combined use of the UbD Framework and intervention support for students.



Launched in November 2018, the **Future Ready PA Index** is the result of discussions with thousands of educators, parents, advocates, policymakers, and business leaders across Pennsylvania about how communities should evaluate schools.

The Future Ready PA Index's user-friendly website includes the measures of academic performance and growth, along with new measures such as college and career readiness and chronic absenteeism, providing the public with a more comprehensive look at how our schools are educating students.

At the November School Board agenda planning meeting on Nov. 11, Assistant Superintendent **Dr. Cathleen Cubelic** will present the district's Future Ready PA Index data from the 2018-19 school year.

futurereadypa.org



Rams Reflection Room: An Alternative to School Suspension

Highlands Middle School and Highlands Elementary School implemented the concept of a Rams Reflection Room (RRR) this year in an effort to reduce the number of out of school suspensions and teach students a reflective approach to inappropriate behavior.

According to the Johns Hopkins Institute for Educational Policy, researchers found that years of punitive measures have produced harmful consequences for students, and suspended students are more likely to fail courses and become chronically absent. To address these issues, school districts nationwide (including Highlands) have explored the use of preventive, early response disciplinary models such as reflective practices to reform school discipline while reducing punitive measures.

Highlands Middle School Principal **Dr. Kimberly Price** and Elementary Principal **Ms. Samantha Perlik** researched the best reflective practices and put a plan in place for a Rams Reflection Room at HMS and HES. The RRR *does not replace* school suspensions; rather, based on the incident, principals have the option to assign a day or two in the reflection room as an *alternative* to suspension.

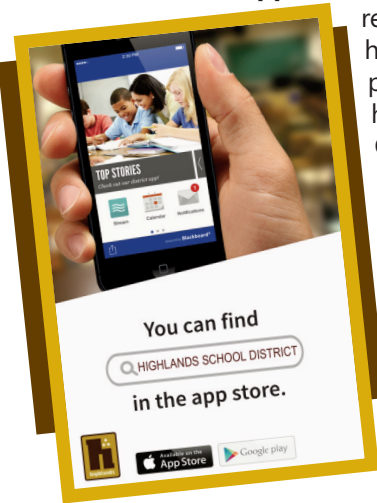
Staffed with a behavior specialist, the RRR provides the opportunity to teach students about respect, empathy, accountability, and responsibility through written reflective practices. Through direct instruction, students are taught about Conflict Resolution, Character Education and Social Emotional Learning. Students in the RRR also continue their academic school work at two intervals throughout the day.

improving Communication:

User-Friendly Website, Mobile App, Social Media

The Highlands **website**, goldenrams.com, serves as the hub of information and a primary communication tool. Parents and residents are encouraged to use the website frequently for *school news and announcements*.

As an extension of the website, Highlands School District also has a **mobile app**. New data shows one of the top requests from parents is to have school information pushed to them instead of having to search for it. Consolidating the important information into one mobile app keeps families involved, informed, and engaged.



Highlands also has a frequent social media presence on **Facebook, Twitter, Instagram** and **YouTube**. **Follow us!**

Check out this year's school accomplishments, features, photos and Upcoming Events on www.goldenrams.com



Congratulations to the 2019 Highlands Homecoming Court:

Alexandra Prill, Jacob Waner, Samantha Dutch, Matt Cekada, Alexa Marasco, Darren Hildebrand, Rachel Blackburn, Korry Myers, Kara Layhew (Queen) and Johnny Crise (King)

Fall Sports highlights



The *8th Grade Girls Basketball* team finished the season with an undefeated 14-0 record! Coaches are **Tracey Neville** and **Katie Jo Stobert**.

Varsity Football senior **Johnny Crise** continued to be a standout on the field. He caught for 620 yards and 7 TDs and broke the school record for a career 105 receptions.

Boys Varsity Soccer seniors **Gabe Anthony** and **Dan Signorella** and junior **Gabe Norris** were named to the All-Section Finest 15 in Sec. 1-AAA.

The *Girls Varsity Soccer* team qualified for the WPIAL Playoffs for the first time since 2016. Sophomore **Jess Cekada** was named to the All-Section WPIAL Sec. 2-AA.

The *Varsity Cross Country* team competed in the WPIAL championships at California University of PA. Senior **CJ Thimons** had the opportunity to qualify for state competition, and had first place finishes at the River Trail Invitational and the Quad County Invitational.

The *Girls Volleyball* program was reinstated after a four-year absence, garnering enough interest to fill both a full JV squad and Varsity squad. The teams played six matches.

Meet Our New Athletic/Transportation Director



Mr. Drew Karpen is the new Athletic and Transportation Director for Highlands School District. He received his B.S. in Mass Media Arts and Journalism Communication Studies from Clarion University and his M.S. in Sport Management from California University of PA. Prior to coming to Highlands in July 2019, Mr. Karpen was an assistant in the North Allegheny SD Athletic Department for two years, and most recently served as the interim Athletic/Transportation Director at Ambridge Area SD.

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Visit **www.goldenrams.com/athletics** for more highlights and game schedules. The Highlands Athletic Department also has its own Twitter: **@HighlandsAthl**

