



# inside **HIGHLANDS**

Fall 2020

**HIGHLANDS SCHOOL DISTRICT PARENT & COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER**

## Forging Ahead

### Highlands Implements Learning Options, Safety Measures to Reopen During Covid-19 Pandemic



*Dear Highlands Families & Community,*

When we reopened schools in August, I have never been more excited to say, "Welcome Back!" The end of last year was quite an event for all of us as we experienced a part of history that will be talked about for years; the Covid-19 pandemic. Since the school closure in

March 2020, the administration has worked tirelessly to assure that our buildings and classrooms meet the social distancing guidelines and are thoroughly and frequently sanitized in order to keep our students and staff safe. We also thoughtfully implemented hybrid and full-time virtual learning options for the 2020-21 school year.

While ultimately maintaining the health and safety of our students and staff, the time had come for Highlands to forge ahead put our focus back on education and the continued implementation of the district's 2019-2024 **Framing the Future** goals: Student Achievement & Growth, Teaching & Learning; Operational Efficiency; Safety & Security; and Collaborative Community & Culture.

Although it's a significant task to teach in a hybrid model, Highlands teachers continue to design creative instruction for both in-person and remote learning days. The district supports them by providing the technology and the professional development they need to be successful. Each academic classroom has a moveable camera and bluetooth speaker so that the students at home can receive real-time, simultaneous instruction. Highlands teachers also monitor, assist and communicate with our students in our full-time remote learning model, Highlands Virtual Academy (HVA).



To even the technology playing field for our students, Highlands expedited a 1:1 technology initiative for the 2020-21 school year. All students were given a district Chromebook or iPad so that instruction can remain fluid regardless of where it is taking place. This allows students the opportunity to connect virtually with their teachers on the remote learning days. It also provides a seamless transition to a full five-day remote schedule as the need arises throughout the school year.

Now more than ever, schools and families need to work together for our students. We need to be patient with each other as we navigate this new way of teaching and learning. Communication amongst the students, parents, teachers and administrators is critical in order for our students to learn and master the curriculum in this new educational environment.

As we move forward, I have the utmost faith in our Highlands teachers, staff, administrators, parents, and especially our students! If any group of people can excel through this challenging time, it is our Highlands School District Community. I have never been prouder to be the Superintendent of the Highlands School District, and I am grateful to be sharing this adventure with all of you.

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

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# Highlands Welcomes New Staff in 2020

## Dr. Stanley B. Whiteman III Highlands Elem. Principal

Highlands officially welcomed Dr. Stanley B. Whiteman III as the new principal of Highlands Elementary School in February. Dr. Whiteman was the Director of Innovation, Instructional Technology, Facilities and LEA for the Duquesne City School District. He has been successfully involved in the education field for nearly 20 years as a teacher, a coach, administrator and mentor.



Despite the challenges of starting a new role during the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Whiteman has been able to successfully establish relationships and have a positive impact on the staff, students and families of HES. "I am an energetic leader who will make decisions grounded in the best interest of kids. I am passionate about STEAM and Maker Learning and I will work diligently to ensure that students gain these experiences in my school," he said.

Born and raised in Plum Borough, Dr. Whiteman lives in Allison Park with his wife Karen and sons Blake, Bradyn and Brett.

### WELCOME!

- Dr. Amy Filipowski** - Student Services Co-Director
- Kate Rich** - Confidential Secretary to Superintendent
- Jason Palazzi** - Accounts Payable & Worker's Comp.
- Kristin Baker** - Math Teacher, High School
- Regina Duckstein** - Art Teacher, Middle School
- Christine Wagner** - Math Teacher, Middle School
- Marcie Wallace** - STEM/Computers Teacher, Middle School
- Andrew Jacobs** - Technology Ed Teacher, Middle School
- Kate Hanlon** - School Nurse, Elementary
- Kate Huskey** - Speech & Language Pathologist, Elem.

### STAFF TRANSITIONS

- Rebecca Bragan** - MS Principal (formerly HS Dean of Students)
- Nam Pham** - Dean of Students, HS (formerly MS Dean)
- Michael Toole** - Dean of Students, MS (formerly HS Math)

# District Awarded Over \$1.5M in Grants

Through the leadership and coordination of Assistant Superintendent **Dr. Cathleen Cubelic**, Highlands School District was recently awarded **\$1,587,937** in grants to significantly enhance student education and technology, teacher professional development, and overall health and safety measures. These grants provided the funds to support the integration of technology with hardware, software, instructional materials and tools for connectivity, enabling families and caregivers to access the learning environment. Funds from these grants also supported training and equipment that facilitate safety and security preparedness, as well as enrichment programs and transformative learning experiences.

Below is a list of grants, award amounts and what the funds were used for:

<b>Elementary/Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER)</b>	<b>\$682,789</b>
iPads, Chromebooks and software to create 1:1 technology, replacement materials from school closure, PPE and sanitizing equipment and supplies, plexiglass, signage, WiFi hotspots, transportation and food services expenses	
<b>Continuity of Education Grants for A-TSI Schools</b>	<b>\$45,713</b>
Classroom technology - Promethean Boards to support interactive instruction	
<b>Special Education COVID-19 Impact Mitigation Grant</b>	<b>\$25,171</b>
After-school tutoring and instructional support	
<b>Continuity of Education Equity Grant</b>	<b>\$79,000</b>
Additional classroom technology, document cameras, additional laptops, training and professional development for delivery of instruction in a virtual environment.	
<b>Safety &amp; Security Grant - Competitive</b>	<b>\$444,264</b>
Digital phone system (hardware, connectivity, software) metal detectors, door controls, fencing, lighting, captured vestibule	
<b>Safety &amp; Security Grant - Meritorious</b>	<b>\$40,000</b>
Radios, Walkies, Raptor System upgrade, licensing, COMPLY tracking software	
<b>Highlands Health &amp; Safety - CARES Act</b>	<b>\$219,000</b>
Classroom cameras, masks, shields, air purification system, PPE, Accelerate Education, Second Step SEL curriculum	
<b>Chevron Grant - Project Lead the Way</b>	<b>\$30,000</b>
(over 2 years) PLTW Launch & Gateway programs	
<b>Inventionland</b>	<b>\$1,000</b>
(each of 2 years) Technology grant to support hands-on learning at grade 6	
<b>Pathway to Graduation (P2G)</b>	<b>\$10,000</b>
(each of 2 years) Evidence-based training and resources that will address barriers to graduation	



# Highlands Elementary Strives to Improve Attendance, Achievement, PBIS Program

As a state-designated Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) school for 2020-21, Highlands Elementary is targeting its support and improvement on school attendance, positive behavior interventions and support (PBIS) and increasing achievement on the PSSA. The following were identified as goals for this school year:

- Increase average daily attendance to at least 86%
- Re-establish a PBIS program that supports all students and focuses on positive support and interventions
- Increase achievement on the PSSA by at least 10% in the areas of Math, ELA and Science

Highlands Elementary has already seen improvements in all areas during the first grading period. Through the 9-week period, the school's Hybrid and HVA students have obtained an average daily attendance of 91.25%. While this percentage is above the goal, the school is aiming to decrease the amount of illegal absences. To assist this effort, parents are reminded to submit excuses for absences within three days of their child's return to school.

Since the first day of school, hundreds of students have received a Golden Rams ticket for following the behavior expectations of Highlands Elementary. At the end of each month, five winners from each homeroom are recognized with an additional prize from the PBIS team. Another PBIS initiative that started in October is the Stellar Student Awards (see above photo). Two students are chosen in each grade level for following the expectations of being Respectful, Accountable, Motivated and Safe. Students are recognized by Principal **Dr. Stan Whiteman** and Assistant Principal **Mrs. Kristie Gizienski** and have their pictures displayed in the Highlands Elementary School showcase.

Finally, all students have taken the Star 360 benchmark assessment in both English/Language Arts and Math to gather a beginning of the year baseline. Each month, all students will take a progress monitoring assessment to measure monthly growth in ELA and Math. In January, all students in grades 1-4 will take a mid-year benchmark assessment. PSSA testing will occur in April 2021 for students in grades 3 and 4. Keep up the GREAT work, GOLDEN RAMS!



*In Our Schools...* For MORE school news and photos, visit [www.goldenrams.com](http://www.goldenrams.com) and our social media pages!



## Greek Mythology Escape Room

Highlands High School English teacher Mr. Kurt Landsberg, with the help of High School library media specialist Mrs. Kristen Gettens, designed and monitored a competitive Escape Room in the library as an evaluation activity for his students, who recently finished a unit on Greek Mythology. Student teams utilized their knowledge and comprehension of the unit by solving various puzzles within a 30-minute timeframe to "escape" the room.



## Elements of Science

After studying the elements and the periodic table, Highlands Middle School 8th grade students in Mrs. Wendy Hutchison's science class engaged in a project that included creating their own element models and researching its properties and uses. Students presented their element models during in-person school days and in front of the classroom camera for the students who were "Zooming" into the class remotely to see as well.



## Kindergarten Gets Out the Vote!

In recognition of Election Day, Kindergarten students in Mrs. Melodi Cochran's class and Miss Carly Hines' class participated in a lesson about voting. Students learned what it means to VOTE and that voting is to make your choice. They each received a ballot and voted for their favorite things in three categories: Cat or Dog, Pizza or Spaghetti and Cookie or Cake. They reviewed the results together and had a discussion about being respectful of everyone's choices.



## Highlands Offers Two School-Based Mental Health Services

**School-Based Mental Health** (SBMH) is an outpatient therapy program for children grades K-12 provided by Family Behavioral Resources (FBR). The SBMH program requires the family to participate in the intake process with FBR and provide insurance information before the child is able to meet with an outpatient therapist at the child's school during the school day. For more information about referrals or the program, please contact your child's School Counselor or FBR directly at 724-335-9733.

**Community School-Based Behavioral Health** (CSBBH) is an intensive therapeutic program for children grades 1-4 with serious behavioral and/or emotional challenges at school or at home. This program is based out of Highlands Elementary and is provided by Every Child Inc. (ECI). The child must have Medical Assistance (MA) and the family needs to participate in the intake or enrollment process with ECI before the child can begin. This program provides flexible supports to the child, the school, and the family during school hours, evenings, weekends, and over non-school times including the summer months. Additionally, CSBBH includes crisis response support. For more information, please contact your child's School Counselor.



Photo: Chad Callen

### Soccer

The Boys and Girls Soccer program enjoyed their first season playing home games at Golden Rams Stadium. Junior **Jess Cekada** was named All-Section for the second time in as many seasons for the girls, while senior **Gabe Norris** was named to the All-Section team for the fourth consecutive season! Freshman **Sam Norris** earned an honorable mention nod.

### Girls Volleyball

After playing as a club team last year, the Girls Volleyball program finished its first season as a WPIAL program, competing in a very tough Class 3A section. Sophomore **Eve Johnson** represented the Golden Rams in the post-season award category, earning Third Team All-Section.

### Girls Tennis

Under first year head coach **Katie Conlon**, the Girls Tennis program made strides in the right direction, including wins against Riverview and Winchester Thurston, as well as competing in the WPIAL singles and doubles tournament.

### Golf

The Varsity Golf Team made progress all season long, including stellar play from seniors **Callen Ritchie, Colin Gorman, Ethan Bernat** and **Sara Karns**, juniors **Ethan Hewitt** and **Seth Gorney** and sophomore **Grace Fennell**. The Golf team members continued to post his or her best scores of the season each match.

### Cross Country

Despite not competing in invitationals this season, the Boys and Girls Cross Country team still continued to compete all the way through the WPIAL championships this season, with each runner posting a personal best time by the end of the season.

We also recognize the **Middle School** football, soccer and girls basketball teams for completing successful Fall Sport seasons! Visit [www.goldenramsathletics.org](http://www.goldenramsathletics.org) for more highlights and game schedules and find Highlands Athletics on Facebook & Twitter!

## Fall Sports *highlights*

**Drew Karpen, Athletic Director**

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The 2020 Fall Sports season was one like no other. After being pushed back a few weeks due to COVID-19, each fall sport was able to complete their sport seasons under the new guidelines and protocols. Congratulations to our student athletes and coaches for their success!

### Football

Despite a shortened season, the Varsity Football team was able to finish with a winning record, 4-3. The Golden Rams ended the season on a 3-game win streak, including a 35-0 win against Greensburg Salem on Senior Night. Four seniors were named to the All-Conference First Team: defensive end **Wahkeem Roman**, defensive tackle **Jeremiah Nelson**, inside linebacker **Jeremiah Saunders**, and wide receiver **DJ Loveland**. Making Second Team was junior running back **Brock White**, senior defensive back **Kaeleb White**, junior center **Dan Thimons**, sophomore quarterback **Chandler Thimons**, senior inside linebacker **Tyrus Kerr** and freshman wide receiver **Elijah Coleman**.