

PARENT & FAMILY HANDBOOK



HIGHLAND COMMUNITY SCHOOL

2023-2024



Welcome to Highland Community School!

This handbook was designed to acquaint you with our school's policies, procedures, and programs. It is given to all parents at the time of enrollment. Extra copies are always available in the Main Office. If the information you need is not in this book, call or stop in, and we will be glad to assist you.

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About Highland

Introduction

Highland Community School (HCS) is a parent-directed, public charter school on Milwaukee's west side. Founded in 1968 by a small group of socially conscious parents in a church basement just a few blocks from its present location, Highland has grown to include over 300 families. Enrollment for the 2023-2024 academic year is approximately 422 students drawn from a socially and economically diverse population of families all over the city. The educational program is based on a child's inborn desire to learn and is specifically designed to complement the natural interests and strengths unique to each stage of development.

As a parent-directed school, we aim to foster a nurturing environment for our children and their families while empowering parents to become responsible for and involved in their children's education. Family involvement drives the school, with Highland families delivering over 15,000 hours of service each year and a Board of Directors overseeing our programs and guaranteeing a quality Montessori education for every child. As a community-based school, we seek to support the entire family and the surrounding community.

Our Mission

We are a community of diverse families and educators working together to offer quality Montessori education in a nurturing environment that enriches, empowers, and inspires children to reach their potential and encourages parents to become responsible for and involved with their children's education.

Our Vision

We are changing the world by nurturing children and their families to be informed, compassionate, lifelong learners who are a force for change in education, the community, and society.

History

Highland Community School has been providing a Montessori education for one of the most racially, economically, and socially diverse populations in Milwaukee for over fifty years. Highland is fortunate to have a well-established parent Board of Directors of current parents interested in advancing educational opportunities for children.

Highland Community School was founded in 1968 by parents and residents of the near-west side of Milwaukee. One of the first teachers at Highland was a certified Montessori Directress, and with her leadership, the school selected this student-centered curriculum as its own. From its inception, Highland has sought to utilize the Montessori philosophy to ensure that the vital early educational foundation will prepare all its students for success throughout their lives. Highland's success has been chronicled in a book, *The Parent-Centered Early School*, by Professor Mike Williams, PhD., first published in 1997.

In 1996, Highland applied for and was awarded "charter school status" for our parent-directed model by the Milwaukee Public Schools' Board of School Directors. As the first charter school in Milwaukee, Highland has taken seriously the philosophy that charter schools offer an opportunity to implement innovative educational strategies that can impact other schools, particularly the Milwaukee Public School system, improving education for all Milwaukee children. Such strategies are not traditionally available in public school settings and often are financially prohibitive for populations such as Highland's. Charter school status assures the residents of our neighborhood that parent-directed, student-centered educational opportunities will continue for them.

Highland Community School -- Our Values, Our Commitment

"Children learn more from what you are than what you teach." W.E.B. DuBois

At its best, a Montessori education is an agent for dynamic personal development and social change. For Highland Community School to be at its best, we all must embody the core values central to our school's mission. These core values guide the progressive development of the school's future and are fundamental in establishing the school's culture and climate.

Our goal at Highland Community School is to uphold being a warm, welcoming school known for its nurturing environment. The critical component of this environment is a spirit of involvement and the close interaction of parents with students, teachers, and other team members.

Children

Highland nurtures its children now and for their future. Over the years, Highland has reworked schooling traditions by removing the negatives (school

as a place, for example, where you can't do things) and replacing them with positives. In the eyes of Highland's children, school is where you can learn about yourself and others through experience; where you can build a dream; where you can be safe and laugh and talk and play and eat good food and have good playmates; where the adults, different as they may be from one another, all like you and speak to you, instead of threatening or yelling; and, where you're likely to see your mom and dad because they like being here, too.

Respect

The Montessori philosophy places a high value on respect for the individual. This philosophy manifests daily as children shake hands, hold doors for each other, and are courteous and helpful to each other and staff. The same is expected of all staff and parents in their dealings with each other and how they relate to the children.

Family

Parents founded Highland Community School and continue to get its long-term direction from an elected Board of Directors made up of parents. We aim to help families become members of a caring community and to prepare their children to become the people they are meant to be. We strongly believe parents must be partners and resources in their child's education. We work hard to support parents so they, in turn, can support their children. While we emphasize the children, faculty and staff become a center of support for all family members because we understand that what helps the family helps the child.

Community

A strong sense of community permeates the Highland environment. This sense of community is demonstrated in how the classrooms reflect a home environment, how the staff communicates with and respect parents and students, and how parents and staff work together to help build a better educational environment. Highland Community School is a place to be at home and to experience membership in an extended family where the comfort of belonging is expected and enjoyed.

Diversity

Highland Community School actively seeks students, faculty, and staff to reflect the diverse backgrounds in our community. Highland strives to provide an enriching curriculum and educational experience for all students, recognizing that global teaching and learning help form strong, positive self-concepts and

develop respect for human differences. The school's curriculum and philosophy encourage understanding and respect for these differences while affirming fundamental similarities of humankind.

Inclusiveness

All school community members are valued for their contributions, talents, and opinions. We celebrate the natural diversity of human beings, be it in learning style, interests, or definition of what makes a happy and successful life. Our programs' philosophy, curriculum, and administration aim to create an inclusive learning environment with respect to economic background, gender, race, national and ethnic origin, cultural heritage, religion, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, and political beliefs. This means we exclude no child but seek to ensure we can meet their needs as much as possible. Highland integrates diversity and character education in each learning opportunity to empower students to approach each new experience with gracious and open minds.

Nurturing Environment

Children develop best in a caring environment where they can express themselves and when learning experiences interest them and are part of their world. We recognize that children need a safe and supportive environment to take risks and learn. HCS creates an environment that encourages children to explore and grow. We consciously encourage our students not to be afraid of taking risks but rather to learn from their experiences, both successes and failures, as non-threatening and constructive feedback on their progress and personal growth.

At Highland Community School, the best approach to discipline is a proactive approach. At Highland Community School, teachers and staff look beyond a child's negative behavior to the underlying cause. We believe that poor behavior and lack of motivation usually result from an unmet need, and we focus on finding a way to meet that need in a positive, supportive manner.

Self-esteem

We affirm that healthy self-esteem is the crucial ingredient for the full expression of a person's potential. This is the very fabric of our community and our educational methods. As we recognize the beauty within each child through our actions, verbal references, display of work, and provision of

opportunities for them to show what they can do, we add to their positive sense of self.

Cooperative Learning

Highland Community School strives to promote and sustain a school culture and climate that instills and imparts dignity and a sense of shared responsibility for the well-being of each other and our larger community. The students take pride in giving lessons and assistance to those younger than they are and look to older students with an expectation of being treated well by them and learning from them. In a Montessori environment, each child is on his or her educational journey and is not in competition with other children. Our focus on diligence and respect applies to every facet of this journey.

Community Service

Highland promotes social awareness and responsibility to the community and society. Each student learns and develops a sense of social responsibility through actively participating in thoughtfully organized projects that reach the immediate and greater communities. By applying their skills and knowledge to authentic and practical objectives, the students develop a deeper understanding of the community's needs and reflect on the positive impact of their work.

Democracy

Our job is to create an environment where children's needs and preferences matter -where their voices are heard and valued. We provide them with classrooms where they are encouraged and helped to make decisions. Our goal is to teach students to make good decisions by weighing all arguments carefully, anticipating long-term consequences, and taking others' needs into account.

Egalitarianism

Egalitarianism at Highland blurs roles in the organization; no one's position is too important to exclude the most menial (though necessary) of labors. This spirit has lived on through the years at Highland, prompted by a radical sense of democracy that requires that everyone pitch in whether it's their job or not. Egalitarianism does not say that everyone is equal; however, it says that everyone is to be equally respected and that to the extent they are able, everyone is to contribute in whatever way they can to the enterprise of the school.

Quality Cosmic Education

All our teachers are certified by AMI (Association Montessori Internationale) or AMS (American Montessori Society). Highland Community School uses both AMI and AMS instruction in the classroom, along with compatible curricula, approaches, and materials, to provide opportunities for enrichment beyond the primary curriculum.

Highland Community School is committed to high academic standards. Highland Community School's Montessori Coach ensures teachers are supported in Montessori Method and academic rigor. HCS is also a member school of Public Montessori in Action, a national organization committed to creating excellent public Montessori education. Further, all Highland children are expected to meet or exceed all Wisconsin state learning standards.

About Montessori at Highland Community School

The Montessori Classroom

Dr. Maria Montessori lived from 1870 to 1952. Her lifetime accomplishments include being the first female doctor in Italy and a world-famous author, educator, and spokesperson for human rights. As a result of her work, she was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Dr. Montessori used her talents to observe children's development, providing learning opportunities appropriate to their readiness and needs. Her acute observations of children led to the evolution of her philosophy of natural child development and the designing of materials to promote learning. She believed another person does not educate the human, rather; genuine learning must be done internally by each individual. A truly educated person continues learning long after the classroom experience has ended because there is motivation from within fueled by a natural curiosity and a love of learning. Dr. Montessori felt that the goal of early education should not be to inundate children with facts from a direct course of study. Instead, the education process aims to cultivate a child's natural desire to learn.

Intellectual Materials

The Montessori materials are beautifully handcrafted and are displayed on low, open shelves. These unique materials are tools to stimulate the child into logical thought and discovery. Each piece of material has a specific purpose and is presented in a manner that will enable the children to direct their learning. Each piece presents one concept or idea at a time and has what is

known as a “control of error.” If the child has done something incorrectly, it will be self-evident. The geometric shape, for example, won’t fit the hole; or the last label will not match the last picture. In this way, children learn to work with increasing independence, taking control and responsibility for their learning.

Structure and Freedom

The classroom is ordered and well-planned, allowing for physical, intellectual, and social freedom. The curriculum and teaching materials are carefully selected and presented to each child. When children choose a material, they are free to work with it for as long as it provides a challenge. This creates a structure for their learning. Everything is child-sized, and all the activities are within reach to allow free choice.

Social Interaction

The Montessori classroom is not only a place for individual learning. It is a vibrant community of children learning to interact socially in various ways. The three-year age range in classes enables older children to teach the younger children, learning much themselves from this experience. In comparison, the younger children are inspired to do more complex work by observing the older ones. With such a variety of levels in the classroom, each child can work at their own pace, unhindered by competition and encouraged by cooperation.

The Director/Directress

In a Montessori classroom, the place of the traditional teacher is held by a fully trained Montessori Director or Directress. The Director/Directress is a guide or facilitator whose task is to support the young child in their process of self-development. They are primarily observers, unobtrusively yet carefully monitoring each child’s development, recognizing and interpreting each child’s needs.

The Director/Directress links the child and the prepared environment, introducing the child to each learning tool when they are ready in a precise, clear, and enticing way. On a broader level, the Director/Directress provides a link between the classroom and the parent, meeting with each child’s parents to discuss progress. They must exemplify the values we seek to instill in our children by being calm, consistent, courteous, and caring. The most important attribute of a Director/Directress is the love and respect they hold for each child’s total being.

Because Highland Community School is a Title 1 school (we receive additional federal funding based on specific criteria), parents have the right to

know the qualifications of the teachers and paraprofessionals. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Completion of state license and certification requirements.
- Emergency or provisional licensing status.
- Educational background.

The Toddler Program: 14 months to 3 years old

The Toddler program aims to provide young children with a learning experience away from home and parents, foster self-confidence and a good self-image, and develop a positive attitude toward learning. Toddlers focus on learning to move their bodies, using language, and taking care of themselves: eating, dressing, and using the toilet.

We've all heard the famous cry of the toddler, "*Let me do it myself!*" In our fast-paced world, we as parents rarely have the time to provide a toddler with the freedom of independence that is so critical to their development at this stage in their life. What makes a Montessori Toddler Program unique is that the prepared environment allows toddlers to exert their need for independence. From low shelving and toddler-sized furniture to materials designed to entice each child's developmental needs, the toddler community is intended to be warm and inviting to these tiny explorers. Toddlers are allowed to imitate adult activity in a controlled and safe setting, which leads to the ability to be independent and builds self-esteem. Time for learning the skills of independence is offered daily. It includes self-care, meal preparation, care of the environment, practical life, language exploration, fine and gross motor activities, daily living exercises, art, and music. Significant time is also devoted to getting the fresh air and outdoor exercise critical to toddlers' development.

A natural progression of sleeping and eating is provided for each child, and redirection is used in their guidance. Engagement with finger plays, songs, movement, and other creative activities creates a day of gentle rhythms and smooth transitions.

The Children's House: 3 to 6 years old

Dr. Montessori called this first plane of development the period of the "absorbent mind." Young children are exploding into learning, gaining independence, and wanting to master skills by themselves. This level focuses on

aiding the child's development of personal responsibility and self-esteem through practical, concrete materials.

Children begin learning practical life skills that develop concentration, independence, fine and gross motor skills, and personal and community responsibility. As students move through the three-year cycle, they engage in hands-on activities which provide them with the fundamentals of reading, writing, and grammar. By manipulating concrete materials, they learn the decimal system and mathematical operations.

Children are introduced to physical and cultural geography through puzzle maps, pictures, books, and special presentations by parents and teachers. The arts are woven throughout the curriculum to support our creative and interdisciplinary approach. Social skills and the ability to make appropriate choices are taught through Grace and Courtesy lessons and peer problem-solving.

In the Montessori class, freedom of movement enables the child to work alone at a table or on the floor, or in a group with one or two others at any given time. In this environment, learning continues through discovery, exploration, and cooperation. In these ways, the classroom can truly become "an aid to life," as described by Dr. Montessori.

The morning session of the Children's House program begins at 8:30 am and ends at 11:30 am. At that time, parents of three-year-olds can pick up their children or enroll them in the CHECK program.

Children's House Extended Care Kids (CHECK): 3-year-olds

Parents of three-year-old children can enroll their children in this fee-based afternoon program. A child must be three years old on the first school day to qualify for this program. Children enrolled will join the CHECK Program at 11:30 am for lunch, napping, and small group or individual activities. The program ends at 3:30 pm in conjunction with the end of the school day.

Elementary Program: 6 to 12 years old (1st – 6th grade)

Highland Community School currently has four Lower Elementary classes of children in first through third grade and four Upper Elementary classrooms for fourth, fifth, and sixth-grade students. In both the Lower and Upper Elementary classrooms, Montessori-trained adults can integrate the teaching of all subjects, not as isolated disciplines but as a part of a whole intellectual tradition.

When children are ready to enter the elementary program, they begin to work with more significant intellectual considerations. It is an age of social awakening and social responsibility. They insist on justice and fair play and need to have exact rules. They search for the why, the how, and the when of things. Dr. Montessori described the child at the elementary stage as having unlimited interests in our universe and their place in it. Therefore, we present students with all subject areas and allow them the freedom to explore the things that spark their imagination in as much depth as they desire. At least as important as the facts learned is developing a rigorous questioning and investigative process within the child. Students learn what questions must be asked, how to think through problems, analyze situations, and find answers for themselves.

Students in the elementary classroom are expected to become increasingly responsible for their own education. Continued joy in learning, self-discipline in one's work, organization of one's time, respect for classmates, and participation in the classroom community, the wider school, and the larger community are hallmarks of success in the Montessori elementary age.

While every child is required to meet the minimum standards the State sets, no boundaries are set on the breadth or depth of their study. Our children consistently meet standards without teachers having to teach to the test.

Adolescent Program: 12 – 14 years old (7th – 8th grade)

In 2013-2014, Highland welcomed its first class of adolescent students. Students are expected to bring a high level of independence and self-direction, comfort with collaborative work, and a love of learning for learning's sake. They treat each other respectfully and are comfortable knowing each person has different strengths and challenges. The manipulative materials of the elementary level are rarely present, as adolescents have moved beyond their applications and are now solidly comfortable with the more adult learning techniques of reading, discussion, and application to a task. Lessons are presented in seminar-style or small groups. Community service and social entrepreneurship are critical to the adolescent program. Students learn in a state-of-the-art, purposefully built environment encouraging independent and group work. The urban agriculture curriculum is an impressive pillar of the program.

Adolescent students lead the school in developing sustainable and environmental initiatives, serving as role models for Highland's younger students. Adolescent students are also encouraged to organize Going Outs and to serve

as mentors. All adolescent students complete a capstone project at the end of their last year, highlighting individual strengths and interests.

Daily Schedule

Children’s House, Elementary & Adolescent Programs (AP)

7:00 am – 8:15 am	Before School Program
8:00 am – 8:15 am	
	Teacher/Assistant set-up
8:15 am – 8:30 am	Students arrive in their classrooms (8:00 am – 8:10 am for AP)
8:30 am	School Day begins (8:10 am for AP). Students arriving late will be marked tardy.
11:30 am	Dismissal of 3-year-old students not attending the CHECK program
11:30 am – 1:00 pm	Lunch and recess
11:30 am – 3:30 pm	K3 CHECK (Children’s House Extended Care Kids) program
3:30 pm	School Day ends
3:30 pm – 4:15 pm	After School early pickup program
3:30 pm – 6:00 pm	After School Program

Daily Schedule – Toddler Program

7:00 am – 8:15 am	Before School Program
8:00 am	School Day begins
12:00 pm – 2:30 pm	Lunch and napping
3:30 pm	School Day ends
3:30 pm – 6:00 pm	After School Program

Admissions

Highland Community School admits students of any gender, race, color, creed, ethnicity, and national origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. The Highland Community School policy of nondiscrimination due to disability complies with U.S. Department of Education regulations for implementing Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

All children K3 through eighth grade are eligible for admission, subject to openings for appropriate age groups. Priority admission status is granted to siblings of HCS students, children of HCS employees, children with previous Montessori experience, and residents of the City of Milwaukee.

The Admissions Process

The school highly encourages interested parents to make an appointment to visit the school and observe classrooms in session.

Applications will be available on the Highland website for the 2024-2025 school year beginning February 1st, 2024, and must be completed between February 1st and February 28th. Applications will be accepted after February 28th, but the child will either be added to the wait list or assigned an open seat after the lottery if one exists. **Note:** All K3 applicants must be 3 years old on or before September 1.

The K3 Lottery

If the number of applications exceeds the seats available, a random drawing will be held to fill the available seats on or after March 1st. Siblings of currently enrolled students will be given preference. Each applicant will be assigned a number, and then the numbers will be drawn to determine placement order. If an applicant with siblings is drawn, the older siblings will be immediately placed at the top of the waitlists for their respective grade(s) if a seat becomes available. Letters will be sent to all applicants, informing them of their acceptance or their number on the waitlist.

The Wait List

The lottery drawing continues until all names have been pulled. Applicants whose names are pulled after all the seats are filled will

remain on a waitlist in the order they were pulled. If a seat becomes available, we will contact the family. If the family cannot be reached, we will take the next student on the waitlist. Wait lists will not be carried over from one year to the next.

The K4- 8th Grade Lottery and Waitlist

Beginning at K4, seats only open due to attrition. Initial applications are accepted beginning February 1st through February 28th. All applications are then pooled and sorted in March. The first enrollment priority goes to siblings of current HCS students; the next priority goes to students with previous Montessori experience. All remaining applications are randomly a waitlist position.

The lottery pool is only valid until September 30th of the coming school year. Applications will not be carried over to the following year. New applications must be submitted.

Approximately one month before the start of the new school year, online school registration opens on Transparent Classroom. All new and returning families are required to complete or update their records and pay their first month's program fees.

Out-of-District and Open Enrollment

Wisconsin's open enrollment process for schools allows students to attend public schools outside of their resident school district. However, specific rules and priorities are in place to ensure that students living within a district get first preference. Please see below for more information regarding out-of-district enrollment.

In-District Priority:

Students living within the district have priority over non-resident students. In-district students (i.e., City of Milwaukee residents) are given preference for enrollment before considering students from other areas.

Limited Openings and Capacity:

In the case of a school lottery, when the number of applicants exceeds the number of seats, non-resident students will only receive a seat after all resident applicants have been accepted.

Availability of Program in Resident District:

Highland Community School may only accept an out-of-district student for K3 or K4 if a comparable program exists in the student's resident district. This

state-specified condition ensures that students are not enrolling in programs that are unavailable in their resident district.

Exceptions:

Siblings

One exception to the priority system is when a sibling of a current open-enrolled student also applies for open enrollment. In this case, the sibling will be granted enrollment even if there are capacity limitations, provided the initial open-enrolled student is still enrolled.

Currently Enrolled, In-District Students Who Move Out of District

Students enrolled and attending Highland within the district but later moved to a different district receive priority in open enrollment. The exception allows currently established students who move out of the district to maintain continuity in their education and ensure that students who have already established themselves within Highland remain part of our community.

Applying for Out-of-District Open Enrollment

If accepted into Highland as an out-of-district student, before attending you must apply for open enrollment through MPS and complete any requirements outlined by the MPS District Enrollment Office, including but not limited to additional registration paperwork, tuition, or additional fees. MPS District Enrollment Office in the Department of Student Services: (414) 475-8159.

Toddler Admissions

Toddler admission occurs annually for the academic school year. Seats are available for the year-round or school-year program. If space becomes available throughout the year, we notify families on the waiting list. Once accepted, toddler families must attend the new parent orientation or an individual interview. The Toddler Directress will also set up a visit to the classroom for a special introduction between the child and the Directress. This helps the child have a smoother transition when the student begins school. Toddler admission is not made through the lottery. It is based on the age and gender of the child. This ensures classroom balance and that child-to-adult ratios follow state licensing rules. Applications are available on the school website or in the Main Office.

Probationary Policy for Toddler Program

Children enrolled in the toddler program will be accepted on a one-month probationary basis. During that time, the program staff, the Director, and the parents will be able to determine if the program is appropriate for the current individual needs of the child.

Placement of Students at All Levels – (New Students, Classroom Changes, or Retention)

All classroom placement concerns must be discussed with the Program Director or Executive Director to discuss established policies and procedures. The Program Director or Executive Director will collaborate with the appropriate staff to determine (if necessary) a course of action.

Your Child Inside the Classroom

Observing

We encourage you to observe the classrooms. To schedule an observation, please get in touch with your student's teacher. In a Montessori classroom, we ask that you follow simple guidelines to minimize interference in the children's environment. These guidelines are available from your child's teacher. Seeing the children at work is to experience the Montessori philosophy in action. To make your observation more meaningful: look around the room and notice the amount and diversity of activity; the range of ages; the types of materials; the individual and group activity; and the interaction of the children. As you focus on the teacher, notice their demeanor and the teacher's respect for each child. Also, focus your attention on your child and the succession of activities they engage in; look for signs of concentration, critical thinking, enthusiasm, and self-satisfaction in each activity. As you focus on the classroom community, look for evidence of respect and cooperation. Our goal at HCS is for each classroom to be a vibrant, caring, and engaging environment where individuals thrive and a sense of community flourishes.

All parents are allowed to visit or observe their children at any time during our operating hours, EXCEPT if a court order prevents or denies the parent access to the child. Please, contact your classroom teacher to set up a time for your visit or observation. It is crucial that you give your child time to adjust to their new environment before your first visit; therefore, we ask that you wait until at least October, when the class is in full swing, before visiting. When visiting the school for any reason, please abide by the COVID policies (masking, appointments, etc.) at that time.

School Cleanliness

Our school is cleaned daily by a contracted professional cleaning service. In addition, the restrooms are cleaned and disinfected at least once a day, lunch tables are cleaned and disinfected before and after eating, and cots and large classroom equipment are cleaned weekly. Small classroom toys are sanitized in the school's dishwasher at least once weekly. Preventative pest control is also conducted. If you see anything needing additional attention, please immediately share your concern with a staff member.

School Temperature

We will always attempt to maintain an inside temperature between 67 and 80 degrees. In the event of extreme temperatures, Highland Community School will follow the MPS weather closure guidelines.

Clothing: Label Everything

Please dress your child in comfortable clothing that is weather appropriate, and that is easy for them to manage independently. While aprons are worn for messy jobs, spills still happen! Clothes too good to risk staining should not be worn to school. Soft-soled shoes are also advised. Children may keep slippers at school.

Children in the Children's House and Toddler classrooms should have an extra set of clothing available. This change will include a seasonally appropriate shirt, pants or shorts, underwear, and socks. Please send them to school in a labeled zip-lock plastic bag. If this clothing is sent home used, please send back replacements the next day. Children are not to wear pull-ups or other training wear in programs other than the toddler program. Each classroom has slightly different requirements, so please watch for additional information from your child's teacher.

Remember, we try to spend time outside every day, so please provide warm clothing in the winter, such as hats, mittens, and boots. In general, children not well enough to go outside should stay home.

Anything that can become detached from your child and which you would like returned must be labeled. Because we emphasize independence, our children are responsible for their things at an earlier age than in many other places. This results in more misplaced articles of clothing, so please help us by labeling everything! There is a lost and found on the first floor and a second one

in the Toddler classrooms. **The lost and found will be cleaned out and donated to a local charity quarterly.**

Nap Time

All toddlers and Children's House children who still require a nap will be provided with a rest period after lunch. Please bring a small blanket for your child to use at naptime. It must be labeled with your child's name and must be taken home weekly for laundering. Toddler staff will launder the toddler bedding.

Sharing

Students can occasionally bring meaningful "show and tell" items to share with the class. These may include shells, rocks, something they have made, books, other items of interest, or a personal treasure. Please discourage them from bringing dolls, cars, trucks, stuffed animals, toy guns, etc. If a child brings non-educational playthings into the classroom, the teacher will store these items until dismissal. Please check with the Director/Directress if you have any questions.

Bathrooms

Highland strives to create a safe and inclusive environment for all students. Our multi-stall children's bathrooms ("boys" and "girls") are intended for use by children. There is a set located on each floor. Adult staff, parents, and visitors are asked to use the adult single-stall bathrooms instead. Some students, those who identify as transgender, nonbinary, or gender nonconforming, may feel more comfortable using gender-neutral facilities. Therefore, single-stall restrooms are labeled for gender-neutral use on each floor. Ensuring the privacy and dignity of all students is of utmost importance, and we encourage open communication and respect for individual choices regarding restroom usage.

Classroom Discipline: Nautilus Approach

Highland Community School employs the Nautilus Approach, a Montessori-specific discipline program developed by Public Montessori in Action. Like the Montessori method, it is a constructivist approach, focuses on the whole-human (rather than other discipline policies or systems which use a behaviorist approach), and aims to reconnect the child to their environment.

The school will not tolerate or permit the use of abusive disciplinary methods such as but not limited to hitting/spanking, slapping, yelling, withholding food or curriculum enhancements, ridicule, embarrassment, or humiliation of a child by anyone in our school. These punishments are prohibited

by school policy, even if a specific parent's philosophy may differ. Children may not be punished for lapses in toilet training, and time-outs may not be used for children under three. Confer to the Nautilus Approach and Method section for more information.

Conflict Resolution

The students are introduced to active listening and conflict resolution skills as essential to Montessori Grace and Courtesy lessons. Age-appropriate skills are demonstrated, and examples practiced that give students appropriate choices in social situations that require taking turns, reacting to problem situations, understanding another's point of view, communicating that understanding, stating one's feelings and needs, creating win-win solutions to conflicting needs, and acting as a third-party mediator for others with conflicting needs. The goal is for children to experience problem-solving, mediation, and resolutions amongst themselves. Adults will intervene when the students need assistance or guidance.

Holiday Celebrations

Holidays are recognized from a cultural point of view. If your child comes from a cultural background with a different New Year or holiday, please tell the Director/Directress and allow the child to share the event with the class. If, for any reason, you don't want your child to participate in any celebration, please inform the school ahead of time so other arrangements can be made for your child. Parents are encouraged to participate in all programs and celebrations.

Birthdays

In the Children's House, each child is honored in a special celebration that is an international Montessori tradition. Parents share in this momentous occasion by helping their children select photographs from each year of their life. These photos are shared as the child walks "around the sun" once each year celebrated. Parents should try to participate in this beautiful ceremony with their children. In the Toddler and Elementary classrooms, birthday celebrations are observed slightly differently. Parents may also bring in a special *healthy* treat to share with the children and teachers in the class. Please honor the Montessori environment by refraining from the use of cartoon characters, sugary sweet treats, and other things that will distract from learning. Your child's teacher will discuss this with you before the celebration.

Your Child Outside the Classroom

Field Trips

Field trips, which teachers organize, offer enrichment opportunities beyond the classroom setting. Exploration and utilization of many fine resources throughout the area is an integral part of our curriculum. Please fill out and return the provided permission slip for each trip. The blanket permission slip that each family signs with the registration material is used only as a last resort when the permission slip for the current field trip has yet to be received. This field trip procedure does not apply to the "Going Outs" in the elementary and adolescent classes or "Walks" through the neighborhood for all classes. Parent involvement is always welcome on field trips. Transportation, if necessary, is provided by a bonded carrier. Personal automobiles will not be used to transport children from Children's House or Elementary on field trips. Toddlers and their parents will carpool together for field trips and utilize appropriate car seats. All students will be allowed to accompany their class on field trips. No child will be denied a field trip because of a lack of financial resources.

The following guidelines apply to all field trips:

- At no time will fewer than two adults accompany a group of children leaving the school.
- Staff will have a cell phone, all emergency contact forms, an attendance sheet, and a first aid kit in an emergency.
- Adult-child ratio for the Children's House will be at least 1:8.
- Adult-child ratio for toddlers is 1:2.
- Toddlers not accompanying their parents will only travel with the toddler Director/Directress.
- Individual drivers must provide a copy of their driver's license and insurance policy and a background check will be processed.
- No Children's House child will be in a public restroom without an adult supervising.
- Adult-child ratio for the elementary classroom will be at least 1:10.

- Elementary children will use the buddy system. Each child will be paired with a partner and coached on responsibility to and for others.
- No Elementary child will be alone in a public restroom. All children will be with their buddies or in a small group.
- Volunteers (non-Highland Staff) must have a background check to supervise children.
- Each volunteer will be assigned a specific group of children they are responsible for supervising while on the field trip.
- Attendance sheets will be used to document that all children are accounted for before departing the school, at all transition times, before leaving the site, and upon arrival back at the school.

Going Outs

An important aspect of the elementary Montessori curriculum is participation in small group explorations called Going Outs. Frequently elementary students get excited about a particular topic and wish to do more extended research on it. In a Going Out, the children plan the entire trip. They are responsible for deciding where to go, calling and making the appointment, confirming the appointment, arranging the transportation, and following up with a thank-you note. Permission slips or parent notifications will be provided. During a Going Out, if there is only one adult accompanying the children the adult-to-child ratio cannot exceed 1:4. Public transportation is always the preferable option. If a parent or staff member is asked to drive, a copy of the individual's driver's license, insurance policy, background check, and a completed travel request form must be on file in the Main Office. No child will be transported in a personal vehicle without a signed permission slip, including the driver's name, the date of travel, the destination, and the purpose of the trip. Only Elementary and Adolescent students will participate in Going Outs.

Walks

Throughout the week Directors/Directresses and children take walks through the neighborhood. The buddy system or a walking rope is used to guide children along the paths. The blanket permission slip each family signs at registration gives permission for these short excursions.

Community Service

The Elementary and Adolescent classes plan community service projects throughout the year that extends beyond the school campus may include such things as visiting and working with the elderly at a local nursing home, cleaning up litter around the school, and helping to organize a food drive.

Camping

Every year, the K5, Elementary and Adolescent level school children go camping. This is an excellent opportunity for our students to experience nature in a whole new way and to be a part of a long-standing HCS tradition. This year the K5 students will continue the tradition of camping at Camp Edwards YMCA Camp in East Troy. The Lower Elementary students will also spend the night at the Edwards YMCA Camp in East Troy, WI. Upper Elementary will tent camp again this year at Devil's Lake State Park in Baraboo and the Adolescent students will camp at Kohler-Andrae State Park and/or Starved Rock State Park in Illinois.

School Procedures

Arriving at School

School starts promptly at **8:30 am (8:10 am for AP)**. In a Montessori environment, students need three hours of open, uninterrupted time to choose independent work, become deeply engaged, and repeat this work to their own satisfaction; therefore, it is essential that your children arrive at school on time. Being five or ten minutes late may seem like a minor issue, but it disrupts the rhythm and flow of the entire Montessori classroom. If your child needs to arrive before 8:15 am, they must join the Before School program or participate in the breakfast program that begins at 8:00 am.

Parking

Because our parking lot is so busy, patience and caution are required. Please drive slowly and be very careful when entering and exiting the parking lot. There is also street parking on 18th St. and Juneau Ave.

Morning Drop-Off

All Toddlers and Children's House (K3-K5) students must walk into the building during morning drop-off. **This means that parents will need to park in the**

parking lot or on the street to bring their students to their classrooms where they will then sign them in with their teachers.

Lower Elementary (grades 1-3), Upper Elementary (grades 4-6), and Adolescent (grades 7-8) students should be dropped off on 17th St. by the playground. A staff person will greet them and make sure they enter the building safely. *Please do not park on 17th Street. **This is for drop-off only.***

Morning drop-off and afternoon pickup are very busy times for HCS. To keep everyone safe and on time, we have set the following rules:

General Rules

- If you are escorting your child into the building, use the 18th St. main entrance. Park in the parking lot, on 18th street, Highland Ave., or Juneau Ave.
- Do not park on or in front of the loading dock located just south of the Main Entrance on 18th St.
- Handicapped Spaces are limited; please do not use these spaces if you don't rightfully have permission to do so.

Parking Tips

- Parking Maps are available on the website.
- Arrive early in winter! Snow build-up limits parking spaces and narrows the street. Parking during the winter months will take extra patience and time. Plus, you will need extra time to help your child remove winter attire once in the building.

Gate Hours

The East Gate 17th Street: Open and staffed mornings from 8:05 am to 8:30 am for the car drop offline. If you are late for drop-off, proceed to the main entrance on 18th street.

Absences

It is your responsibility to contact the school as early as possible if your child is going to be absent. Please provide us with whatever information

concerning the absence is available at that time. If your child is not in school and you have not called in, the school will contact you within two hours of the beginning of the school day.

For all Children's House, Elementary, and Adolescent students, a student absence becomes excused when a written statement by the parent/guardian is submitted to the school. The written excuse must be presented within forty-eight (48) hours after the student's return to school or the absence is considered truancy.

The following are excused absences. All other absences are truanancies.

- Personal illness
- COVID-19 quarantine and isolation
- Funerals
- Required legal appearances
- Designated religious holidays
- Medical or dental appointments
- Family emergencies – student absences that contribute to health, safety, or financial well-being of the family.
- Educationally beneficial activities approved by the Executive Director
- Parent-excused absences – Parents or guardians may excuse an absence by submitting written notification to the school for any or no reason before the student's absence. A student may be excused for up to ten (10) days per year under this provision.

Student absences without contact to the school or response to school inquiry within 48 hours after student return will be considered unexcused. The absence protocol will be as follows:

- **0 to 4 Unexcused Absences:** Calls will be made to the student's parent/guardian by the Classroom Teacher, School Secretary, and/or School Social Worker to inform parent of attendance policy and problem-solve.
- **5 Unexcused Absences:** A Habitual truancy letter will be sent home notifying the parent/guardian that their student has 5 unexcused absences, and a meeting will be scheduled with the School Social Worker to discuss attendance support.

- **8 Unexcused Absences:** Another letter will be sent home with student's attendance record, notifying parent/guardian that the student has reached eight unexcused absences.
- **12-15 Unexcused Absences:** A letter will be sent home and/or the parent/guardian will be contacted via phone call to schedule a second meeting with the School Social Worker and the Classroom Teacher to further discuss attendance and create an Attendance Support Plan.
- **15 + Days Missed:** When a student's attendance reaches this point, the student's case may be referred to the Truancy Abatement Program or the District Attorney's office for further action.

Late Arrivals

Our school is charged with the task of teaching grace and courtesy to our students, as well as personal responsibility. At Highland Community School, we want our students to learn that being good work partners and community members requires regular classroom attendance and being on time. ***If your student has excessive tardies, you will be contacted by the School Social Worker and a conference may be scheduled to problem-solve and create an attendance support plan for your child.***

All children who arrive after 8:30 am should be brought to the main entrance by an adult. If you will be tardy and you want your child to receive a hot lunch for the day, **you must call and let the school know by 8:30 am.** If you do not notify the school by then, please bring your child a cold lunch.

End of the School Day

The school day hours for each program/age group are as follows:

- **Toddlers:** 8:00 am-3:30 pm
- **K3:** 8:30 am-11:30 am
- **K4-6th:** 8:30am-3:30pm
- **Adolescent:** 8:10am-3:35pm

Departure

Children's House through Adolescent program can be picked up from inside the building beginning at 3:30 pm.

Pick-up Time

Pick-up time for 3-year-old children is 11:30 am unless your child is enrolled in the CHECK program. The all-school pick-up for students is at 3:30 pm unless your child is in the Afterschool Program. Students in K4-8th grade should be picked up no earlier than 5 minutes before dismissal unless an excuse is provided to school staff at the time of pickup. Picking your child up early may impact their attendance record.

If your student is missing school due to frequent early pick-ups, you may be contacted by the School Social Worker and a conference may be scheduled to discuss your child's attendance record and problem-solve.

Late Pickups

Please arrange to have your child picked up promptly at dismissal time. Your cooperation in this is vital because we do not have the staff available to supervise late pickups. In the event you are late for pick-up, a late fee will be assessed.

Visiting the School

We welcome and encourage visits to the school from parents, outside teachers, prospective families, and the larger community. When you visit the school, please first sign in at the Main Office. For safety reasons, we ask that you wear a visitor's badge to indicate you are a visitor at the school. Every effort is made to not disrupt teachers while they are teaching and students while they are learning. Therefore, if you need to discuss issues with a teacher/staff, please, set up an appointment beforehand with your classroom teacher. If you are observing in a classroom, please, contact your classroom teachers for observation guidelines prior to the observation. All visitors to the school are required to comply with the COVID policies and procedures in place at the time of visit.

Confidentiality

HCS stresses the importance of protecting the rights and privacy of children, their families, and our teachers. No information about students will be given to any person unless a written request from a parent, a guardian, or an authorized agency has been received.

Student Records

Legal parents and guardians have the right to inspect and review all records, files, and data directly related to their children. Parents and guardians who desire to review these records are requested to call the Executive Director to schedule an appointment to do so.

Food Program and Nutrition

Lunch Meal Program

Nutrition is an everyday part of our program. All children must inform their teacher upon arrival in the morning if they are participating in the hot lunch program for that day. **If your child is going to be tardy, please call the school before 8:30 am to order a meal.** If you do not notify the school before that time, you will be required to bring a cold lunch for your child. All meals provided by HCS follow USDA guidelines. Lunch is served in the classroom. Menus are provided to cover the four basic food groups and varieties of food are served to enhance and develop a wide sense of taste. Currently, our hot lunch program is provided through a contract with Milwaukee Public Schools. A monthly menu is available in the school office and posted outside of the kitchen and the toddler program's classroom door.

We encourage parents who send lunch with their children to only have nutritional food items in their lunch each day. Please try to eliminate junk food from your child's diet. We ask if you are going to send a snack or treat to school with your child that it not be sweets, candy, or junk food. Foods that are overly sweetened or salted might not be served.

Breakfast at Highland

Our school participates in the MPS Universal Free Breakfast program. Breakfast from this program will be served in the gym free of charge to all children who want it from 8:00-8:15. We will not serve a full breakfast after this time, so please be sure your child has breakfast if they are going to be arriving after 8:15.

In addition to breakfast, parents are invited to send a healthy morning snack for their child. Parents who would like to provide snacks for their class should reach out to their classroom teacher for snack requests (fruits, vegetables, crackers, etc.).

Allergies

If your child is allergic to any food or requires a specially prepared diet, please let us know. This information is shared with your child's teachers and the lunch staff to ensure that your child does not have contact with any of those items and that they are eating only the things that their special diet allows. If your child participates in any meal programs at Highland, you will be asked to complete a Special Dietary Needs form so that appropriate food items can be provided for your child. Allergies of individual children shall be posted in a prominent place in the food preparation areas and classroom.

Food will not be used as a punishment or reward. Please see the school's Wellness Policy for further information.

Toddlers are served well-balanced nutritious items for breakfast, as well as morning and afternoon snacks each day. Parents are encouraged to bring a healthy bag lunch for their toddlers. However, participation in the hot lunch program is available if needed. Because toddlers are not yet considered MPS students, only those receiving Wisconsin Shares funding are eligible to receive lunch at no charge.

Health Policy

Children who are sick require the special attention that being at home provides. Children cannot be permitted at school with any of the following: can we say they must be symptom free for 24 hours without medication before returning to school in this section as well?

- Fever of 100 degrees Fahrenheit or higher
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea – within the previous 24-hour period
- Draining rash
- Eye discharge or pink eye
- Sore throat
- Communicable diseases, such as head lice, ringworm, etc., which require treatment (see Main Office for exact details and processes)

Children who are not well enough to go outside for playtime are not well enough to come to school. If illness occurs while your child is at school, the office staff will notify you. Your child will be sent to the administrative office and cared for by the administrative staff until he or she is picked up. You are responsible for arranging for or picking up your child from school as soon as possible. Children may return to school when:

- Symptoms are decreasing
- There is no discharge from rash
- They have a fever of less than 100 degrees (without medication) for 24 hours
- They have had no vomiting or diarrhea for 24 hours
- They can tolerate full activities, including recess

Communicable Disease Policy

In the event of communicable disease, notices will be sent home with children who have been exposed. A doctor's release may be requested upon the return of students who were absent due to a communicable disease and/or head louse. All communicable diseases will be posted on the bulletin board within the classroom for parents' review.

COVID-19 Policies and Procedures

If your child tests positive for COVID-19, please report it to the school by emailing info@hcsmkc.org. Positive students and staff are required to quarantine at home for a minimum of 5 days. Students/staff can return on day 6 if their symptoms have resolved (reduced respiratory symptoms, fever-free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medicines) and must always mask around others for an additional 5 days.

In the event of a positive case in your child's classroom or another participating program, an exposure letter will be sent home with the children. This letter will include information on COVID-19 symptoms, testing, and treatment.

Highland Community School tracks positive cases of students & staff reported to the school and reports those cases to the Milwaukee Health

Department. Please adhere to the HCS Health Policy and keep symptomatic students' home until they are feeling well enough to participate in school activities. Our policies are subject to change based on the current COVID case rates and transmission levels. Please see the school's website for our current policies. Please refer to the CDC for the most up-to-date information regarding isolation and quarantine.

Administration of Medications at School

Whenever possible the administration of prescription medication should be scheduled during non-school hours. However, when necessary, prescription medication will be administered to a student by HCS personnel if you have submitted a completed **Medication Permission and Instruction Form**. This form can be obtained from the Main Office. This form includes clear instructions from the doctor, including but not limited to the type of medication to be given, the dosage required, the doctor's signature, and your written consent. This form is good from the date of the doctor's signature to the end of the current school year. Also note that:

- If prescribed medication is to be discontinued, the parent must bring in the medical order signed by the child's physician.
- You are responsible for ensuring that the medication is delivered to the school safely and that there is enough medication to follow the doctor's orders. Medications classified as "controlled substances" must be delivered by an adult.
- All prescription medication must be in an original pharmacy container identifying the pharmacy, the date the prescription for the medication was filled, the child's name, medication name, dosage, time of day the medication is to be taken, and doctor's name. In addition, side effects as a result of the medication may be listed. **Medications in any other container will not be accepted.**

The school has the right to refuse prescribed medications for your child or to stop providing your child with prescription medications if you do not follow the regulations and policy of the school. Call the Executive Director if you have concerns.

Your child can be given **a non-prescription medication**, such as cough syrup or over-the-counter medication, **only if you have given written permission**. These medications must be given to the teacher and kept in the office in a

designated safe storage place. Over-the-counter medications must be in the original container labeled with the child's name and dosage.

If your child needs to carry an inhaler, a **Medication Permission and Instruction Form** must be provided to the school, and you must sign and submit a **Release Form for Inhaler Use** stating that the child knows how to use the inhaler. Children must show that they are properly trained and understand the importance of proper handling/use of the inhaler. Inhalers will be always kept in the designated classroom first aid storage space.

EpiPens are kept in the classroom with the teacher. PLEASE NOTE – If your child is also in paid programs, an EpiPen MUST be provided for that classroom as well.

Special Needs

To ensure the safety of all our children with special needs including allergies and other medical concerns, all classrooms are equipped with a binder containing pertinent information on how to best serve each child with a special need.

Injury

If your child is injured while attending HCS, first aid will be administered. An accident report will be completed by the staff member who was present at the time the incident occurred. You will be provided with a copy of this and one copy will be kept at the school. If treatment by a doctor is needed, we will make every effort to contact you and we will make sure your child receives the necessary emergency treatment until we can reach you.

Emergency Medical Treatment

All staff members are trained bi-annually in CPR and first aid. In addition, a Heartstart Defibrillator is installed in the hall by the Main Office, and all staff members are trained in its use. When a child needs emergency treatment while at school or off-site at a school-sponsored event, every effort is made to contact the parents or the emergency contacts. If such cannot be reached, the paramedics will be called, and the child and a staff member will be transported to Sinai/Samaritan for medical help. To ensure that we can contact you, please keep the offices up to date on any telephone numbers and emergency contact changes.

Building Safety Procedures

A Fire Safety inspection is completed annually. HCS conducts fire drills monthly throughout the year and inspects fire extinguishers and emergency lights monthly. The school has a written Crisis Management Plan that is reviewed annually and contains standard procedures for various emergency situations. All staff members are required to be familiar with these procedures. A copy of the Crisis Management Plan is available in the Main Office upon request.

A copy of the Wisconsin State Daycare licensing rules, our current license, and notice of any violations are also available. They are in the Main Office and in the entranceway of the Toddler program.

Annual Asbestos Notification

In compliance with the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act of 1986, the school must inform you of the results of our compliance with AHERA. In 2012, the required inspection for asbestos-containing building materials was completed in our school building, and in 2017, the required three-year inspection was done. During the course of the initial inspections, it was found that asbestos-containing materials and asbestos-containing building materials were used in the building. The specific type of material and the location are further identified in the Inspection Report. We continue to have professional inspections done every three years and perform six-month surveillance.

The initial findings and management plans, along with re-inspections, periodic surveillance, and response actions are available for inspection upon request in the Main Office. The school will continue to take whatever steps are necessary to remain in compliance with Federal state and local laws and regulations thereby providing a safe and healthy environment in which our community can learn and work.

Weather-Related School Closings

Highland Community School will be closed whenever Milwaukee Public Schools are closed due to inclement weather. Watch or listen to local news channels for information; also, check HCS's website or the MPS website for immediate updates.

Inclement Weather Procedures

The Program Director will check weather conditions to determine the appropriateness of early school entry or indoor recess. If the wind chill is below

20 °F, the temperature is above 90 °F, or there is excessive rain (very wet conditions), then the toddlers and K3 children will not be taken outdoors. Students K4-K5 will not go outside for recess if the wind chill is below 10 °F. Students in 1st – 8th grade will not go outside if the wind chill is below 0 °F or above 90 °F, or excessively wet conditions to remain indoors for recess.

If students must stay indoors for recess, they will be asked to play appropriate indoor games in their classrooms.

When there is inclement weather at pick-up time, children will prepare to go home and remain indoors with their teacher and assistant until their parents pick them up from the classroom.

School Communication

Every week, the school newsletter, *Notes Home*, will be e-mailed to parents who provide us with an e-mail address, and it is also posted on our website. The aim of *Notes Home* is to help parents stay connected to the happenings at the school and to keep them up to date on changing policies and special events. Please take time each week to read your *Notes Home* and note upcoming events on your calendar. See the Family Engagement Coordinator if you would like a paper copy.

If you are looking for more information about parent and family involvement, please see the Family Engagement Coordinator. That office is on the first floor, near the main office. There are also several bulletin boards in the hallway on the first floor with updated school information regarding events, volunteer opportunities, and additional Montessori educational materials.

HCS staff members also communicate via the school website, www.highlandcommunityschool.org, the school's Facebook page, and Instagram account, as well as several teacher websites/Facebook groups (ask your child's teacher for more information).

Communicating Student Progress

Progress Reports and Assessments

Progress reports are published through Transparent Classroom, the school's online record-keeping system. A parent can request a printed copy of the report at the Front Office. The report cards are published twice yearly for all

students in February and at the end of the school year. In addition, parents and teachers are encouraged to have frequent communication throughout the school year. Parents are encouraged to chat with the teachers routinely.

Each teacher records all Montessori lessons and presentations given to each child in Transparent Classroom. These records are kept so that the teacher can track where the children are and if they have mastered certain areas of the work in the environment.

All K5 through 8th-grade students must take all district and state assessments. These assessments are given in the fall and spring of the year. If you have any questions regarding what assessments are given to your child, please see your child's teacher.

Transparent Classroom Access

Transparent Classroom is an online platform designed for Montessori educators to track and share student progress and classroom activities with parents and administrators. Highland uses this platform to create a comprehensive overview of a child's learning journey, fostering better communication and collaboration between all stakeholders in the education process. Transparent Classroom also has a class directory so that families can connect with one another, and photos shared with parents. New families will receive an invitation to join Transparent Classroom during school registration. Please reach out to the Main Office with questions regarding your family's account.

Conferences

Parent/Teacher conferences are held two times a year (see calendar). Other conferences requested by staff or parents will be arranged as needed. Conferences are an excellent opportunity for the teacher and the parents to have a good conversation about the student's work in the classroom, areas identified for growth, and communication around areas for improvement. Parents are highly expected to participate in all conferences and make every effort to reschedule if they are unavailable during the suggested conference times.

Family Meetings

A Family Meeting is an opportunity for parents/guardians, teachers and other support personnel to meet about a child outside of regular parent-teacher conferences. Family meetings can be called by **anyone** connected to the child's education: the teacher, the executive director, a SPED teacher,

specialist **or** the parent. Family meetings are intended to address concerns related to social/emotional, behavioral or academic concerns. If you would like to hold a family meeting, you can reach out to your classroom teacher or the Montessori Coach.

Special Education

If you suspect that your child has special education needs, you have the right to have them evaluated. Request an evaluation by contacting your child's teacher or other staff member.

Keeping Contact Information Current

To ensure effective communication and support, families should promptly notify the school of any changes in their contact information, addresses, or family living situation. Examples include relocation, obtaining a new work phone number, or experiencing changes in co-parenting where contact information or mode of communication may have changed. This information should be updated with the school's administration to facilitate seamless communication and ensure the well-being of the students.

Please advise the school's Main Office in writing as soon as possible if any changes occur in the following:

1. Phone numbers where you can be reached at home and at work.
2. Email addresses where you receive classroom and school-wide information.
3. Addresses at home or at work.
4. Name of authorized person with phone numbers and relationship, who may be contacted in case of your child's illness or injury should you be unavailable.
5. Name of person(s) authorized to pick up your child and their phone numbers.

Programs, Billing and School Fees

Paid Programs for School-Age Children

At Highland, we understand that families have unique schedules, so we have developed a series of Before and After School options for families to choose from. Below is a brief overview of what we offer.

For more detailed information regarding policies, billing and payments, and other useful information for families, please see the Highland Community School Program Handbook.

Before School Program

The Before School program is available for families needing early care. This is a paid program that must be signed up for in advance. The before-school program does not apply to toddlers. Parents can take toddlers directly to their classrooms any time after 7:00 am.

Children can be dropped off anytime between 7 am and 8:15 am. Parents must bring their children into the Before School area if they arrive before 8:15 am and sign them in each day. Dropping children off at the outside door or anywhere else in the building is not acceptable. Children arriving after 8:15 am should go directly to their classrooms and will be supervised by school staff.

After School Program

Games, crafts, stories, toys, outdoor time, and an afternoon snack are all a part of the After-School program. All Highland Community School children are welcome to enroll in this paid program. However, seats are limited. This program begins at 3:30 pm and runs until 6:00 pm. Parents can also enroll children until 4:15 pm at a reduced rate. Parents must enter the building and sign their children out of the program.

Children's House Extended Day (CHECK)

The Children's House Extended Care Kids Program, or CHECK Program, provides extended care for our K-3 students when their primary classroom day ends at 11:30am. Students enrolled in the CHECK Program are picked up from their primary classrooms by program staff and lead to their afternoon activities. They enjoy recess, lunch, a nap, and classroom activities. At 3:30 pm, when the school day ends for all HCS students, children in CHECK have the option to participate in the Children's House After School Programs.

Fun Days

The school calendar provides the dates for all non-attendance days of the school year. Many student non-attendance days are offered as Fun Days, which are \$30 per child per day. Before and After School fees apply (unless the child is contracted for these paid programs). Our program director coordinates these days and is staffed according to need. Sign-up and payment in advance of the Fun Day are required for admittance. Please note that the Toddler program is in session on these days.

For further questions about any paid programs, please see the Program Handbook in the Main Office.

School and Activity Fees

Supply Fee

All families are asked to contribute \$25.00 per child (maximum of \$50 per family) to be used for Montessori classroom supplies.

Activity Fee

Children in K4 – 8th grade are assessed a \$30 fee per child to help cover field trips, transportation, and special events. Highland does not charge for individual field trips except those listed below.

Meal Program Fee

This year MPS will provide free universal lunch to all MPS students. If you do not wish your child to participate in this program, please send your child with a cold lunch. In addition, Breakfast is provided free and is served before school from 8:00 am to 8:15 am (7:45 am to 8:00 am for students in before school).
Toddlers: Toddlers do not qualify to receive free universal lunch. Students who do not qualify for free or reduced lunch will be charged \$4.50 per meal.

Camping Fee

All students in grades K5 – 7 are given the opportunity to go on a camping trip in the spring. AP students in grades 7 & 8 also go on a camping trip in the fall. Camping fees vary by grade based on the location & length of the trip. Fees are listed on the permission slip sent home from the classroom in advance of the trip.

MMUN 6th Grade Trip

Annually in March 6th graders travel to New York for the Montessori Model United Nations (MMUN) Conference as their Upper Elementary capstone experience. This trip is the culmination of a year-long curriculum focused on international collaboration & real global issues. The fee for the trip is approximately \$800. This fee may vary slightly year to year based on current pricing of the conference & travel rates. A deposit of at least \$150 is due by October 1st. The full payment is due by March 1st. We encourage families to set up an automatic payment to pay for the trip in installments. Speak to your child's teacher for more information or to the bookkeeper to set up payment arrangements.

Costa Rica 8th Grade Trip

HCS 8th graders embark on a trip to Costa Rica in the Spring as the capstone experience of the Adolescent Program and their years at Highland. The trip includes international travel, an opportunity to practice their Spanish language skills in a homestay, a service component, and much more. The full cost of the trip is approximately \$2,800 per student. Full details, including form & payment due dates will be shared directly by the Adolescent Program. Highland AP students & parents are tasked with fundraising to support the cost of the trip. At Highland, we utilize the pay it forward method and ask parents of incoming 7th & 8th graders to help fundraise throughout the year. This trip is not possible without parent commitment to fundraising. Due to the cost & other school needs, this trip is not supported by fundraising efforts of the school or the school's annual budget.

Program Fees & Billing

HCS offers monthly billing for all school-year extended care programs. Semi-annual and annual billing options are also offered at discounted rates. Late fees will be assessed to any child who is picked up after the scheduled program end time. Wisconsin Shares is accepted for qualifying families. Please contact the Bookkeeper for additional information on the Wisconsin Shares program. All program fees are due before the service is provided. Please see a copy of your Tuition Contract and Payment Schedule for additional information.

Attendance & Billing in ProCare

HCS uses ProCare for billing and attendance for children participating in programs (i.e. Toddlers, CHECK, Before & Aftercare). All parents and authorized pick-ups must be registered in ProCare to sign students in and out of programs and to see open balances on their accounts. For access to ProCare, all first-time users must register in the Main Office. Parents must clock their child in and out of

any paid program via the kiosk or app. Students who are not clocked out at the end of the day on the kiosk or ProCare app may be assessed an aftercare and/or late pick-up fee. Parents will receive a monthly statement via email showing all activity for the prior month.

Termination of Paid Program Services

On rare occasions, we have found it necessary to ask parents to make other arrangements for childcare because we are unable to meet the needs of their children in the Toddler program or other program outside of the normal school day. Possible reasons for termination may be a child's unacceptable behavior that is harmful to other children, or the parent's failure to complete required forms or pay program fees on a timely basis. Any child for whom an outstanding balance exists from the prior school year shall not be permitted to enroll in any fee-based program for the current school year unless a payment arrangement has been set up with the HCS Office Assistant and such plan is being honored. Further, we request at least a two-week notice from parents if they will be canceling a paid program service.

Commitment to Community

Family Involvement at Highland

Our school's continued success depends to a large extent on our families' contribution of their time and talents. Parent and family participation is taken as seriously as tuition payments at other schools, and each parent is required to sign and adhere to an individual Commitment to the Community. This commitment sets forth the way parents choose to fulfill their parent hours each school year. We believe that Family Engagement strengthens the family, lowers the operational cost for the school; and establishes a strong parental role in governing policies and practices to reflect the goals and concerns of the families participating.

HCS welcomes parents with special skills and interests to share in the classroom. Parents and grandparents have visited the school to share cultural experiences, professional skills, and information, objects of art, musical abilities, etc. We appreciate this participation not only for its educational value but also for the joy it brings the children when they see their parents actively involved in their educational process. Please discuss and schedule these events with your child's teacher.

Several times a year, HCS asks parents to participate in fundraising activities. These have included sales of items such as coffee, Fiserv Forum concession stands, and special events such as the Bike Walk Eat. There have also been bake sales and T-shirt sales. Please try to be as active as possible – your participation goes a long way in helping with school expenses.

HCS considers each student, parent, grandparent, and sibling as a part of the larger HCS family, and it is in this spirit that the school sponsors events to help create a sense of closeness among its members. Watch announcements of potlucks, picnics, celebrations, and festivals throughout the year. In addition, various opportunities for adult camaraderie are available. Our Family Engagement Coordinator is always open to facilitating new opportunities. Come to her with your ideas.

The school also needs your participation in diverse areas of work throughout the year. Your help in these areas saves us many dollars and provides functions that would otherwise not be possible. Here are a few ways that you can help:

- Childcare during parent events
- Bulletin board creation
- Grounds maintenance
- Lost and found maintenance
- Field Trip Chaperones
- Library maintenance
- Room parents
- Community outreach projects
- Materials making
- Laundry
- Building maintenance
- Special events planning (Craft Day, graduation, Bike Walk Eat, Book Fair, etc.)

In addition to helping in the above areas, there are several committees that meet regularly to organize projects and events in support of the school. These work groups are always open to new team members who can commit the time necessary to accomplish the groups' objectives. *Our current parent committees are:*

- **Facilities Committee:** Helps plan major projects to the campus and its building
- **Natural Grounds Committee:** Plans and maintains playground and landscaping
- **Fund Development Committee:** Determine and organize fundraising projects and support our fund development manager and grant writer in identifying new revenue for the school.
- **Finance Committee:** Supports the Finance Director with budgeting and other financial needs to advance Highland's fiscal health.
- **Creative Committee:** Plans and coordinates art and creative projects for our students and families including Family Craft Day and fostering community partnerships with local artists.
- **Turbo Team:** Skilled Laborers (electric, plumbing, carpentry) who are called on as special projects arise.
- **Social Justice Committee:** Ensures that social justice is integrated in our curricula, family education, enrichment, and community culture.
- **Library Team:** Includes a team of volunteer library clerks who check out books and help students with research. This committee also coordinates the school's annual book fair.
- **Strike Squad:** Highland loves to party. This team is at the ready to set up and take down at any of our school-wide events.
- **Bike Walk Eat:** Our largest school fundraiser, this committee plans and executes this event that is focused on exercise, healthy eating, and Milwaukee's beautiful bike trails.

"Parent" Committees are open to any involved family members including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other guardians.

Parent work hours should be recorded as they are performed. Contact the Family Engagement Coordinator to learn more and to make a commitment to these dynamic work groups.

Parent Education

Parents are the child's first and most important educators. HCS emphasizes the importance of the family in the child's development and seeks to create a partnership with parents. Parent Education programs will be scheduled throughout the year to share information about our school and the Montessori methods and materials. Your attendance is highly encouraged. Please watch your weekly *Notes Home* for specific offerings and check our website for additional resources.

2023-2024 Family-School Governance

Highland Community School is an independent non-profit educational corporation chartered by the Wisconsin State Board of Regents. All parents and legal guardians of current HCS students are members of the corporation.

Representatives from the parent body are elected to serve on the HCS Board of Directors.

The Board of Directors is charged with the ultimate responsibility for financial, legal, and strategic planning and policy issues. The Board ensures the school's core values and mission are followed and the integrity of the Montessori philosophy within the school is upheld.

The HCS Board holds regular monthly meetings throughout the school year. All regular meetings of the Board are open to members, apart from executive sessions for confidential matters. Parents are welcome to attend and participate. Approved minutes are sent home via *Notes Home* and are on the Highland website for access by any school member.

2023-2024 Board of Directors

Brian Litzsey, President

Amy Nelson Christensen, Vice President

Brenda Simonis, Treasurer

Melissa Gibson, Secretary

Patrick Bader

Dolores Brown

derria byrd

Mikaya Clark

Jason Evans

Latisha Franklin

Kia Green

Ali Kopyt

Kantara Souffrant

Erika White

HCS Child Study and Nautilus Approach Mindset & Method

HCS follows a progressive discipline policy called the Nautilus Approach that works with the parent(s), staff, and the community in solving discipline problems at the school. This discipline policy is set forward by the Parent Board of Directors and implemented by support staff, including but not limited to, classroom teacher(s), Child Study Team members, Executive Director and MPS. The phases of restoration are as follows:

Phase 1-4: In these phases, the classroom teachers handle disciplinary issues with students. Students are observed for signs of anxiety, “big feelings” or other disruptions. The goal is to resolve with proactive strategies. Mechanisms in place include mediated conferences between students, redirection, peer mediation, reminders about agreed-upon rules and the HCS Bill of Rights, use of praise for following directions and respectful interactions, and emotional coaching and modeling by adults of positive communication and behavior.

Classroom teachers are encouraged to develop family partnerships that include soliciting successful guidance techniques used by families and discussions of ongoing behavior concerns. At this level, no documentation is needed.

Phase 5: A student's behavior reaches phase 5 if the behavior continues to escalate (increased frustration, ceasing work, defensive behavior, blaming) even after the teacher employs earlier interventions and prevention strategies. At this phase, there will be a temporary separation from classmates (the student may be asked to work alone, observe in another class, buddy class, or a temporary loss of in-class freedom of choice), or additional limits will be set for the student. For Phase 5 interactions, the classroom teacher may consult with the Child Study/Nautilus Team to determine the needs that drive undesirable behavior(s) and choose target replacement behaviors. A member of the Child Study Team will discuss the incident with the child and may assign a designee to observe the student in the classroom (if necessary).

Phase 6: If a child's behavior has significantly disrupted the learning environment, such as escalation to disruptive yelling, persistent lack of engagement in learning that disturbs the learning environment, or conflict that creates a significant interruption in the learning process or school, the teachers will call for immediate additional Nautilus support. The Child Study Team gives the parent written notice of a mandatory conference regarding a discipline issue. This step becomes necessary only when Phase 5 actions and strategies are no longer effective, or if the child's behavior is deemed so extreme or inappropriate that an immediate parent conference is necessary. The mandatory conference shall include the Child Study Team, the child's parent(s), and teacher(s) at a mutually agreed upon time. At the mandatory conference, the parent must be given access to any incident reports written about their child and may request a mentor parent or staff member to be present. During this meeting, the Child Study Team shall encourage the child is paired with a mentor/staff member to "check in" daily or weekly with the child to support a positive resolution of the problems (if it is not already in place). HCS recommends a mentor who can consistently follow up with the child and family. During this conference, HCS suspension procedures will be shared and enforced.

Phase 7: A student may reach Phase 7 when Phase 6 actions and strategies are no longer effective, or if the child's behavior is:

- Dangerous: intentional physical aggression; throwing objects that can hurt others, or

- Destructive: Damage school property (breaking/destroying materials or larger items)
- Demeaning: Harassment/bullying (when repeated and targeted toward one/particular group of students); verbally abusive/threatening language (more serious threats of aggression)
- Extreme intentional physical aggression*
- Weapons possession*
- Suicidal threat or ideation*
- Homicidal threat or ideation*
- Running out of school building*

At this level, the classroom teacher(s), Child Study Team, the parent(s) or legal guardians, and the Executive Director will review the implementation of the Child Study Action Plan including the outcomes, measures, and deadlines of the plan. Serious breaches of discipline will be referred to the Department of Student Services at MPS Central Services. The resulting disciplinary action may range from intervention to expulsion.

*Real/imminent Threat to Students and Staff. Crisis Team Called. This level of discipline is reserved for the most serious violations of school rules. At this level, the Executive Director will refer discipline issues to the MPS Department of Student Services.

Suspensions: In case of extreme or repeated unsafe actions and/or non-compliance, a child may be suspended from HCS. To return to class after suspension, the Parent or Legal Guardian & Staff must meet to form a support plan for the child according to HCS Discipline Policy. In case of multiple suspensions, MPS may intervene and may result in student reassignment. Please, reference the school's Discipline Policy for more information.

Discharge Policy: HCS Executive Director and MPS Division of Parent/Student Services may approve discharge, administrative transfer, or expulsion in case of extreme or repeat cases of unsafe actions and/or non-compliance. Parents have appeal rights to the MPS Division of Parent/Student Services and the Office of State Superintendent.

HCS Discharge Policy

A child may be dropped from enrollment if in the process of a Level 5 discipline situation the Executive Director and the MPS Division of Parent /Student Services approve and agree upon a discharge, administrative transfer, or expulsion. HCS discipline procedures and documentation must be in evidence and HCS shall not discipline students protected under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. 794(sec.504), the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act, 20 U.S.C. 1400 et. seq.(IDEA), and the Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. 12101 et. seq.(ADA). If such action does not comply with these Acts, the discharge must be removed from the child's record.

In all situations regarding discharge, a parent of an HCS student has appeal rights to the MPS Division of Parent/Student Services and the Office of the State Superintendent.

Toddler Discharge Policy

1. Toddlers whose tuition payments have gone into arrears may be dropped from the program. The HCS Bookkeeper will work with parents who must make payment arrangements on past due amounts.
2. Other issues that may affect toddler enrollment are at the discretion of the Toddler Directress and are addressed in the toddler packet. Please see the Toddler Directress if you have any questions.

Parent/Student Rights Under this Policy

Disciplinary actions that require the assistance of the Executive Director must be documented on an incident report. All incident reports shall be kept in the child's cumulative file and be available to the parent on written request or at the conference called because of the incident.

HCS parents have a right to appeal all suspensions. Notice of the appeal of the suspension must be in writing and received within five days of the beginning date of the suspension. The appeal must be made to the Executive Director. The School Social Worker and Executive Director shall review the

suspension appeal. If the appeal determines that the suspension is unfair or inappropriate, such action must be removed from the child's record.

Parents are encouraged to identify concerns and/or make a formal complaint, as they deem necessary, about the implementation of this policy according to the procedures described in the HCS conflict resolution plan.

HCS Shared Responsibilities

This is our Shared Responsibilities Contract for Children, Parents, and Staff at HCS. Please read with your child.

Working Statement: *We are a community of diverse families and educators working together to offer quality Montessori education in a nurturing environment that enriches, empowers, and inspires children to reach their potential, and encourages parents to become responsible for and involved with their children's education.*

Children

"All other factors sink into insignificance besides the importance of feeding the hungry intelligence and opening vast fields of knowledge to eager exploration."

Maria Montessori: *To Educate Human Potential.*

HCS Student's Rights and Responsibilities

- To Respect and Honor everyone's Right to Physical and Emotional Safety.
- To Follow and Respond appropriately to HCS Staff Direction.
- To Work in Peace. CHILDREN AT HCS DO NOT HAVE THE CHOICE NOT TO WORK.
- To a Montessori Education with support for academic, social, and emotional development

If a Child does not honor the HCS Rights and Responsibilities the Child agrees:

- To accept safe/supportive direction and/or consequence from HCS Staff.
- To communicate with HCS Staff to understand our Rights and Responsibilities.
- To cooperate with HCS Staff to determine how to improve choices in the future.
- To work with HCS Staff to reach out to anyone impacted by the choice.
- To share ideas for better choices and be willing to try them next time.

If a child refuses to cooperate with HCS Staff, Parent(s) will be contacted in order to form a plan that provides greater support for the child.

Parents/Guardians

“We, as members of a school community, are connected deeply by the shared condition of being human and must value each other, not just for who we *are*, but for what we *bring* to our shared experience.” **Dr. Rob Smith**, HCS Alumni Parent

Parents/Guardians Agree to:

- Respect the HCS Rights and Responsibilities and support my child and HCS Staff by upholding them.
- Communicate concerns with HCS Staff and respond to HCS in a timely manner when contacted.
- Work as partners with HCS Staff to provide the best possible support(s) for child.
- Attempt to make time to talk and listen to my child about life, school, emotions, relationships and more.
- Schedule and attend parent/teacher conferences and, if necessary, additional conferences.
- Foster consistency in my child's life by providing routines for eating, sleeping, reading, and exercise. Research (see 1 & 2 below) has shown that consistency is beneficial to a child's emotional and psychological development.
- Consider limiting screen time to allow child to experience and learn from the world around us. Research (see 3, 4 & 5 below) has shown that limiting screen time is beneficial to a child's social and emotional development.

Research & Resources

1. Reuters - Family Routines <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kids-family-routine/kids-with-family-routines-more-emotionally-socially-advanced-idUSBREA2B1TM20140312>

2. CDC - Creating Structure & Rules <https://www.cdc.gov/parents/essentials/structure/index.html>

3. AAP - Recommendations for Children's Media Use <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/pages/american-academy-of-pediatrics-announces-new-recommendations-for-childrens-media-use.aspx>

4. Journal of Children & Media - Screen Time & Vocabulary
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17482798.2017.1365737>

5. Wiley Library - Technoference: Parent Distraction With Technology
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/cdev.12822>

HCS Staff

“Any meaningful long-term goal we might have for students requires us to attend to the climate of the school and...the extent to which children feel related as opposed to isolated.” **Alfie Kohn**

HCS Staff Agree to:

- Protect Rights and Safety of all children by devoting time and effort to develop relationships.
- Provide an environment to support all children's academic, emotional and social development.
- Inform Parents of any significant academic, behavioral, social or emotional concern.
- Make arrangements to be available for Parents to communicate and receive concerns.
- Address choices that take away Rights using best available support, including, but not limited to:
 1. Providing best practices to support each child's needs.
 2. If necessary, additional HCS Staff will provide best practices to support child's needs.
 3. If 1 or 2 don't provide necessary support for child, or if child presents physical or emotional risk to others, HCS staff will provide support in an environment outside of the classroom to address needs; HCS Staff will contact parent(s) in this case.

Code of Conduct

In keeping with the HCS mission statement, a safe and nurturing environment will be provided to promote the personal, social, and educational development of each child and adult. In the Montessori tradition, children are empowered to be responsible for their education and development. In the HCS tradition, emphasis is on teamwork: parents, staff, and community work together to support the growth and development of children in a spirit of affirmation and cooperation. The adult modeling of respect for and celebration of differing viewpoints, cultures and personal styles is integral to the ability of our children to learn and show respect for each other.

To support these goals, the following guidelines for conflict resolution and behavior guidance have been adopted by the Board of Directors:

Dress Code

Dress Code Students are expected to wear clothing that is appropriate for their daily tasks (weather-appropriate clothing that is comfortable for a full day of school activities). In addition, students are not allowed to wear clothing that advertises/prominently displays sex, drugs, alcohol, or has discriminatory or vulgar language. Students wearing inappropriate clothing will be provided with clothing that can cover or replace the specific item. If the problem persists a meeting will be set with the Executive Director, teacher, student, and family to resolve the issue.

Child Abuse/Neglect Reporting

All HCS staff persons are mandated reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect per State of Wisconsin Statutes (HSS: 48.981). As such, they are required to report all suspected child abuse and neglect that they encounter in the course of their professional duties to the Department of Social Services.

Substance Abuse

HCS prohibits the use, purchase, transfer, possession, or presence in one's system of any alcohol, or controlled substances while on school premises or engaged in HCS business such as off school premises field trips and outings or transporting HCS staff and students.

No Smoking

HCS is a smoke free environment. There is no smoking in HCS buildings or anywhere on the grounds. It is a violation of this policy for any student of

Highland Community School to possess, consume, display, or sell any tobacco products, tobacco-related devices, or electronic cigarettes at any time on school property or at off-campus, school-sponsored events. Doing so could result in disciplinary actions.

Weapons

HCS prohibits the possession and the use or threat to use a gun or other weapon on HCS premises. A weapon other than a gun is defined as a knife, razor, karate stick, metal knuckle, or any other object that, by the way it is used or intended to be used, is capable of inflicting bodily harm.

Protection of Property

HCS staff, parents, and children are expected to make reasonable efforts to safeguard HCS property and materials, and the materials of individual students. Vandalism, theft, and/or willful abuse of such property or materials are violations of this policy and may be subject to disciplinary action and/or criminal investigation. Property damage due to recklessness, poor decisions, or irresponsibility may require compensation (money or service work) to repair/replace the property. This will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

Nondiscrimination

No person shall, based on race, color, religious belief, national or ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, or disability, be excluded from participation, be denied the benefits of or subjected to discrimination under any HCS program or activity.

Title IX Coordinator

Highland Community School's Title IX Coordinator is the Executive Director. Title IX Coordinator is a designated individual responsible for overseeing and ensuring compliance with Title IX regulations in educational institutions. Their role involves addressing and preventing issues related to gender-based discrimination, harassment, and sexual misconduct, while promoting a safe and inclusive environment for all students and staff.

Gender Inclusion

Highland Community School adopts the MPS district-wide [Gender Inclusion Guidance](#) about how to best ensure the protection of students and staff in terms of gender inclusion. The topic of gender inclusion continues to be an evolving issue. The MPS Guidance is based on best practices and will be

updated regularly as the district continues to receive guidance from the courts and other government agencies.

Harassment

HCS will not tolerate any form of harassment, discrimination, bullying, joking remarks or any other abusive conduct directed at students, employees or parents because of race, color, gender, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation, or disability. Any conduct which creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment will not be tolerated.

Sexual Harassment

HCS prohibits sexual harassment of any student, employee, or parent. Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome or inappropriate sexual advance, request for sexual favors, and certain other verbal or physical conduct which is sexual or based on gender.

Adult Modeling of Respect

HCS is a nurturing zone. Physical punishment or threats of physical violence are inappropriate from any staff, parent, or child. At HCS we expect all adults to model appropriate behavior for our children.

HCS values diversity. Harassment, including sexual harassment, discrimination, bullying, or any other conduct that creates a hostile or offensive environment is not appropriate for our community.

All staff, parents, and community volunteers have an obligation to adhere to HCS standards while on HCS premises or at HCS events. Parents, staff and community volunteers are encouraged to make their complaints regarding these issues either in person or in writing to the Executive Director or President of the Board of Directors.

HCS believes young children require caring, responsible supervision. Staff, parents, or volunteers escorting children on and off HCS campus and on HCS field trips who are suspected of being under the influence of alcohol or another drug will not be permitted to escort children. Concerns about the supervision of students should be brought to the attention of HCS staff or their supervisors immediately.

Academic Integrity and Student Ethics

We believe in fostering a culture of honesty, trust, and responsibility in all academic pursuits. Students are expected to demonstrate integrity in their work, whether it involves the use of technology or traditional means, and refrain from

any form of cheating, plagiarism, or dishonesty. We encourage students to take pride in their originality, creativity, and ethical conduct, ensuring that their contributions to the learning process are genuine and reflect their true capabilities. Any violations of academic integrity will be taken seriously, and appropriate consequences will be administered to promote a fair and supportive academic environment for all.

Technology Use

Adult Cell Phone Use

If visiting parents need to use cell phones, please limit use to non-classroom environments or near groups of students that may be engaged in meaningful activity. All phones must be silenced within classrooms.

Student Technology Use: Chromebooks, Cell Phones, Smartwatches

Student use of cell phones during school hours is not allowed unless given permission by the teacher. Smartwatches are treated like cell phones and are not to be used/activated during school hours. Phones and other personal technology should be turned in to the classroom teacher on arrival to be locked away until the end of the school day.

We recognize that electronic devices are an important part of our everyday world and are increasingly being used in teaching and learning. However, we want to be sure that any devices at school are being used as an appropriate instructional tool, and their use does not interfere with our students' learning environment.

Highland provides UE, LE and AP students with Chromebooks for classroom use. Students should only use electronic devices under the teacher's direct supervision, so students do not need to bring their own devices from home. This includes cell phones, smart watches, iPad, and tablets. We believe that elementary schoolers are not equipped to handle the responsibilities of having unsupervised access to technology, and their brains are not ready to handle such distractions at school. If your child must bring a device to school to communicate with you after school hours, then please remind them of the following:

Electronic devices brought from home will be kept in the backpack or the locked classroom case, turned off during the school day and will not ring or

cause disruption to the instruction of the classroom. Highland is not responsible for personal devices that are lost, stolen, or damaged if brought to school.

Students who do not adhere by this policy, will see the following consequences:

- 1st offense: verbal warning, the device turned into the Executive Director
- 2nd offense: A call home to the parent/guardian and the device turned in to the Executive Director
- 3rd offense: Detention

Additional Expectations for Adolescent Program

Student in Good Standing:

A student in good standing is regarded as having complied with all explicit obligations (school and class rules and policies) while not being subject to any form of sanction, suspension, or any disciplinary censure in a given/specified school year. Students not in good standing will be held back from all subsequent overnight trips & (if a student is no longer in good standing during 8th-grade year) 8th grade completion ceremony (if a student is no longer in good standing during 8th grade year).

School Book(s) Policy:

Students will be provided and assigned books for specific classes. The teachers will keep track of what books are assigned and to whom. At the conclusion of the reading, the books will be collected. It is the student's responsibility to take care of the book and return it in the same condition as it was given to them. Normal wear and tear is acceptable. If a book is lost or damaged, it is the student's responsibility to replace the book. (A used book in good condition from amazon.com can suffice.) If books are not replaced by 8th grade graduation, students will not be allowed to participate in the ceremony.

Damaged School Property:

The HCS AP policy on damaged schoolbooks is adopted from the MPS Student/Parent handbook. If any HCS property was damaged intentionally or because of reckless behavior it must be replaced, repaired, or community service may be conducted in lieu of replacement cost. An Asset Damage Report will be sent home explaining what happened and the cost to repair/replace the item. If a family would like their student to conduct community service for HCS in place of the replacement cost, an agreement must be coordinated with the Head of HCS.

Graduation Requirements:

Students are expected to do their best and complete all assignments. For students to participate in the HCS AP Completion Ceremony, they must have the following completed one week prior to the graduation ceremony:

- All major projects (micro/macro projects & final projects in all disciplines)
- Graduation speech (voluntary)
- All HCS books are returned or replaced
- Any damage HCS property has been replaced/repaid/or community service completed in lieu of repair/replacement cost
- Three or fewer missing daily assignments
- All personal property has been removed from locker/HCS & locker cleaned
- Must be a student in good standing

Tobacco, Alcohol, & Illegal Substances Policy:

Students may not use/distribute any tobacco products, consume/distribute alcohol, or use/distribute any illegal substances. Students caught may be subject to removal of good standing, parent/administrator conference, suspension, referral to department of student services, and/or expulsion recommendation.

Bullying Prevention

Highland Community School strives to provide a safe, secure, and respectful learning environment for all students in school, on school the playgrounds, and at all HCS school sponsored activities. Bullying has a harmful social, physical, psychological, and academic impact on bullies, victims, and bystanders. Highland consistently and vigorously addresses bullying so that there is no disruption to the learning environment and learning process.

Definition

Bullying is deliberate or intentional behavior using words or actions, intended to cause fear, intimidation, or harm. Bullying may be repeated

behavior and involves an imbalance of power. The behavior may be motivated by an actual or perceived distinguishing characteristic, such as, but not limited to age; national origin; race; ethnicity; religion; gender; gender identity; sexual orientation; physical attributes; physical or mental ability or disability; and social, economic, or family status.

Bullying behavior can be:

1. Physical (e.g. assault, hitting or punching, kicking, theft, threatening behavior)
2. Verbal (e.g. threatening or intimidating language, teasing or name-calling, racist remarks)
3. Indirect (e.g. spreading cruel rumors, intimidation through gestures, social exclusion, and sending insulting messages or pictures by mobile phone or using the internet – also known as cyber bullying)

Prohibition

Bullying behavior is prohibited in Highland, the playground, field trips, or any other educational environment. Educational environments include, but are not limited to, every activity under school supervision.

Procedure for Reporting/Retaliation

All school staff members and school officials who observe or become aware of acts of bullying are required to report these acts to the School Social Worker, Executive Director, or Montessori coach. Any other person, including a student who is either a victim of the bullying or is aware of the bullying or any other concerned individual is encouraged to report the conduct to the School Worker, Executive Director, or Montessori Coach. Reports of bullying may be made verbally or in writing and may be made confidentially. All such reports, whether verbal or in writing, will be taken seriously and a clear account of the incident is to be documented.

A written record of the report, including all pertinent details, will be made by the recipient of the report. The school official receiving a report of bullying shall immediately notify the Highland staff assigned to investigate the report.

The following Highland Community staff have been identified as the investigator: school social worker, Montessori Coach, executive director.

There shall be no retaliation against individuals making such reports. Individuals engaging in retaliatory behavior will be subject to disciplinary action.

Procedure for investigating reports of bullying

The designated staff assigned to investigate the bullying report shall, within two school days, interview the person(s) who are the victim(s) of the bullying and collect whatever other information is necessary to determine the facts and the seriousness of the report. Parents and/or guardians of each pupil involved in the bullying will be notified prior to the conclusion of the investigation. Highland staff shall maintain the confidentiality of the report and any related pupil records to the extent required by law.

Sanctions and supports

If it is determined that students participated in bullying behavior or retaliated against anyone due to the reporting of bullying behavior, the executive director and/or Montessori Coach may take disciplinary action, including educational and/or social support, suspension, expulsion, and/or referral to law enforcement officials for possible legal action as appropriate. The school social worker or school counselor will provide support for the identified victim(s). An annual summary report shall be prepared and presented to Highland's Board of Director's, at the last board meeting of the year (June) which includes trends in bullying behavior and recommendations on how to further reduce bullying behavior.

Administrative Procedures for Bullying

Bullying prevention requires a sustained effort to both prevent bullying from occurring and to respond effectively when bullying situations do occur. The following procedures shall be followed when a student is a victim and/or offender in a bullying situation. For reports of bullying involving staff, see HCS Employee Handbook pg. 9 depending on the circumstances.

(1) TIMELINE

(a) 2-day, 2-day, 10-day rule: Staff members have 2 school days to make a report once they become aware of a suspected bullying situation. The administrator has 2 school days to begin the investigation. The administrator has 10 school days from date of the written report to complete the investigation unless good cause documentation exists to extend the investigation.

(2) RECEIVING STUDENT REPORTS OF BULLYING

(a) When receiving a report of bullying, staff should utilize the 4-A Response: Affirm the reporter's feelings; Ask relevant questions to determine the situation; Assess the safety of all students involved; and Act according to steps 3-6.

(b) Questions should be asked to clarify whether the incident is potentially bullying, as defined in Administrative Policy, or is a conflict. Conflict situations

should be handled pursuant to school/classroom disciplinary procedures. Ask questions to determine the students involved, as well as the frequency and intentionality of the behaviors. Also consider any safety needs for the student who is being bullied, those who have witnessed the bullying, and the student making the report.

(3) DOCUMENTING SUSPECTED BULLYING

(a) If staff have information to suggest that an incident of bullying has occurred, as defined in Administrative Policy, staff must document the behavior as bullying on an Infinite Campus behavior referral within 2 school days.

(b) For all incidents of suspected bullying, the event must include at least 2 participants, an offender (the student engaging in bullying behavior) and a victim (the student being bullied).

(c) Document general event details on the Incident Detail Information screen; however participant names should not be used. Individual participant names should only be used on the participant details specific to that student.

(d) On the participant details screen, if the reason for bullying is suspected or known, select the appropriate event type. If it is unknown, choose Bullying – Reason Unknown.

(4) RESPONDING TO A REPORT

(a) As necessary, the administrator will take steps to promote safety after a report is made and for the duration of the investigation. Strategies that may be used to create a safer environment for the reporters, victims, offenders, and witnesses include but are not limited to:

- Increasing adult supervision at times or in locations where incidents have occurred,
- Temporarily changing the offender's class schedule and/or seating arrangements,
- Establishing a safe zone or safe person for the victim to go to when they feel vulnerable,
- Creating a personal safety plan for anyone at risk of retaliation.

(b) Within 24 hours of a report being made, the administrator will notify parents/guardians of the affected students that a report of bullying has been made and of any safety measures put in place. Documentation of this parent

contact should be included on the victim's contact log, but not on the offender's unless bullying is substantiated.

(5) INVESTIGATION OF REPORTED BULLYING

(a) The administrator will initiate an investigation within two school days of receiving a report of bullying. The administrator will complete the investigation within ten school days of receiving the report unless good cause exists to extend the investigation.

(b) As part of the investigation, the administrator will gather all available information, including but not limited to date, time, and location of the incident; individuals involved and their ages; details of the incident; and any knowledge of prior incidents. The administrator will consider all the information provided in the report, as well as gather additional information from interviews of students, staff, witnesses, parents/guardians, or others as necessary. Interviews of each party shall be conducted separately to avoid revictimization and contamination of information.

(c) The administrator will maintain a written record of the investigation.

(d) Throughout the investigation process, the administrator will remind all parties that retaliation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action. To the extent practicable, the administrator will maintain confidentiality during the investigative process.

(e) Upon completion of the investigation, the administrator will determine, based upon all of the facts and circumstances, whether or not bullying occurred in accordance with the definition of bullying outlined in Administrative Policy.

(f) The administrator will promptly notify the parents/guardians of the victim and offender, as well as other affected parties as necessary about the results of the investigation,

(g) If bullying is substantiated, communicate to parents/guardians what action is being taken to prevent further acts of bullying and/or retaliation. All notice to parents/guardians must comply with applicable state and federal privacy laws and regulations.

(h) If the allegations of bullying cannot be substantiated, the administrator will notify the parents/guardians of the alleged victim/s, through a formal letter, detailing the investigation and the inability to substantiate the allegation of bullying. The incident referral should be recoded or deleted as appropriate, and

a PLP-Behavior Allegation for Victim note should be created, documenting that an investigation could not substantiate the allegation of bullying.

(6) TAKE APPROPRIATE ACTION

(a) The administrator will consider what adjustments, if any, are needed in the school environment to enhance the victim's sense of safety and the sense of safety for others as well. As appropriate, support may include continuation of strategies implemented during the investigation.

(b) Peer mediation, repairing harm and/or restorative conferencing, group interventions composed of students who bully, and removal of the victim from their classes are NOT recommended strategies.

(c) When students are found to have engaged in bullying behavior, the school will use a range of responses that balance the need for accountability (discipline) with the need to teach appropriate behavior (supports).

(1) Discipline should be utilized in accordance with the Code of Classroom Conduct. Additional disciplinary alternatives may include awareness-raising consequences, school service activities, restricted access and/or increased supervision for specific areas of the school, and/or behavior change reflection sheet and plan. Resources are available on the MPS mConnect site for Bullying Prevention.

(2) Supports should be designed to build student skills in the areas of social communication, problem solving, relationships, social awareness, empathy, emotion management, and other skills deemed necessary. Suggested activities include re-teaching of behaviors, behavior reflection sheet, scenarios/role plays, reviewing or previewing Second Step lessons including Bullying Prevention Unit lessons, one-on-one participation in the Act Now! Tier 2 program, inclusion in a Social Academic Instructional Group (SAIG), and/or the development of a behavior intervention plan.

(d) Within five school days following the implementation of supports, safety measures, and/or disciplinary action, the administrator will contact the victim(s) to determine whether there has been a recurrence of the bullying behavior and whether additional supportive measures are needed. If so, the administrator will work with appropriate school staff to implement them. Follow-up should continue to occur at regular intervals.

(e) Retaliatory behavior or action against persons who complain, testify, assist, or otherwise participate in the complaint process established pursuant to this

procedure will not be tolerated. Any retaliatory behavior will be subject to appropriate discipline.

Procedures for Conflict Resolution and Formal Complaints

1. HCS staff is committed to building partnerships with parents. When problems arise, we urge you to attempt to work with the parties involved to solve the problem. If you have a problem regarding your child, begin by discussing it with his or her teacher. Teachers are your first resource to answer your questions and resolve your difficulties.
2. If the teacher is unable to resolve the question, please address your concern to the School Social Workers.
3. If a resolution cannot be reached or you have a concern that you feel has not been appropriately addressed by the parties involved, you are invited to speak directly to the Executive Director. If you wish to make a formal complaint you must put the concern in writing and address it to the Executive Director or the President of the Board of Directors.
4. All formal complaints must be responded to in writing within seven days of receipt. If action is still pending the response letter must describe what additional follow-up will be forthcoming.
5. If the individual bringing the complaint is not satisfied with the response they have received or the indicated follow-up action, they must request in writing within 14 days that the full Board review their complaint.
6. The full Board shall review the complaint at the next available meeting or at a special meeting called for the purpose of reviewing the complaint. The original complainant must be invited to present their complaint in person to the Board at the meeting.
7. The decision of the full Board shall be final.

HCS Solicitation Policy

Solicitation not intended for the benefit of HCS is not permitted at HCS or at HCS-sponsored events without prior approval from HCS administration. HCS will not and cannot provide information or resources for solicitation purposes and use of such information or resources for solicitation purposes is prohibited.

This does not prevent HCS staff from supporting HCS parents by purchasing materials, resources, or services that they sell, whether it is part of a business endeavor or personal effort.

