

FAMILY HANDBOOK



HIGHLAND COMMUNITY SCHOOL

2026-2027



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 families 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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Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/highlandcommunityschool>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/hcsmke/>

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About Highland

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 2026–2027 academic year is approximately 420 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.

Highland is a **non-instrumentality charter school of Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS)**. This means we are part of the MPS system and receive public funding, but we operate independently with our own curriculum, leadership, and staff. This structure allows us to remain rooted in Montessori philosophy while meeting accountability requirements as a public school.

Our Toddler Program (for children 14 months to 3 years old) and the CHECK Program (Children’s House Extended Care Kids) are offered through our licensed childcare program. These programs follow Montessori principles and are aligned with our school mission but operate separately from the public K3–8th grade program.

As a parent-directed school, we aim to foster a nurturing environment for our children and their families while empowering families to become responsible for and involved in their children’s education. Family involvement drives the school, with Highland families delivering over 10,000 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 families 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 offering a high-quality Montessori education to one of Milwaukee's most racially, economically, and socially diverse communities for over fifty years.

Founded in 1968 by parents and neighborhood residents on Milwaukee's near west side, Highland began as a grassroots effort to create a school rooted in community and child-centered learning. One of the founding teachers was a certified Montessori guide, and under her leadership, the school adopted the Montessori method as its foundation.

From the start, Highland has used the Montessori approach to ensure that children receive a strong early educational foundation that supports lifelong success. Our story was chronicled in *The Parent-Centered Early School* by Dr. Mike Williams, published in 1997.

In 1996, Highland became the first charter school authorized by Milwaukee Public Schools. As a parent-directed, student-centered school, Highland has embraced its charter status as an opportunity to implement innovative educational practices—especially those that might not otherwise be accessible in traditional public school settings.

Highland's mission remains rooted in our founding values: community voice, educational equity, and a belief in the potential of every child.

Highland Community School: Our Pillars, Our Values

At its best, a Montessori education is an agent of personal growth and social transformation. At Highland, our mission is grounded in five core pillars that shape our daily work with students, families, and each other. These pillars guide how we teach, learn, lead, and live together as a community.

A Montessori Approach

We nurture children's compassion, curiosity, and sense of personal power. Our classrooms are designed to support the whole child—academically, emotionally, socially, and developmentally. Multi-age communities, uninterrupted work cycles, hands-on materials, and freedom within structure allow students to engage deeply and grow at their own pace. Our approach to discipline is rooted in care, reflection, and respect, with an emphasis on helping students learn from their experiences and build lasting self-esteem.

Social Justice

Highland was founded on the principles of educational equity and social justice. We believe all children deserve access to a high-quality, inclusive education—and that schools must play an active role in building a more just and compassionate world. We actively seek to create a community that reflects the diversity of our city, and we engage students in conversations and projects that promote empathy, civic responsibility, and advocacy.

Community

Highland is a school built by families, for families. Since 1968, we have maintained a culture of deep connection between children, parents, teachers, and staff. Family involvement isn't an add-on here—it's the foundation. Parents serve on our Board of Directors, volunteer in classrooms, organize events, and show up for each other in meaningful ways. We strive to be a warm, welcoming place where everyone feels they belong and are invited to contribute.

Arts

Our rich arts program helps students make meaning, express themselves, and build community. From sing-alongs in Children's House to visual arts, performance, and creative writing in Upper Elementary and Adolescent, the arts are woven into daily life at Highland. We believe that creative expression is essential to understanding the world and ourselves—and that all children are artists, thinkers, and makers.

Care of the Environment

Children learn to love and respect the earth by getting their hands dirty. Whether it's growing vegetables in our garden, composting food scraps, or studying local ecosystems, students develop a deep appreciation for the natural world. This hands-on connection fosters environmental stewardship, responsibility, and a sense of wonder that stays with them for life.

2026-2027 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.

2026-2027 Board of Directors

Mikaya Clark, President
Ben Correia-Harker, VP
Brenda Simonis, Treasurer
Kia Green, Secretary
derria byrd
Rashonda Jones
Suave Kyles
Brittiny Qualls
Timothy Vargo
Lakita Wells
Melvin Guyton
Kara Coleman
Stephanie Copeland
Priscilla Haynes

Educational Philosophy

Who was Maria Montessori?

Dr. Maria Montessori (1870–1952) was the first female physician in Italy and a global pioneer in education, child development, and human rights. Her deep observations of children led to a philosophy that sees learning as an active, self-driven process. She believed the goal of education is not to fill a child with facts, but to nurture their natural curiosity and desire to learn.

The Montessori Classroom

Walk into a Montessori classroom and you'll see:

- A calm, inviting space designed to feel like a home, not a traditional school
- Hands-on materials arranged on low, open shelves, designed to teach one concept at a time
- Children working independently or in small groups, choosing work that matches their interest and developmental stage
- A three-year age mix that encourages leadership, mentoring, and collaboration

Each Montessori material has a built-in “control of error,” allowing children to learn through trial and discovery. They gain independence, confidence, and a love of learning that lasts beyond the classroom.

Structure + Freedom

Montessori education balances freedom with responsibility. Children are free to choose their work—but within a carefully prepared environment, full of beautiful materials and clear expectations. They work for as long as they are engaged, allowing for deep focus and personal growth.

Social Learning

Montessori classrooms are also social communities. With multiple age levels learning together, older students model leadership and care, while younger ones learn by observing and aspiring. There's no competition—just cooperation, mutual respect, and personal responsibility.

The Classroom Guide

Montessori teachers are called Guides because they do more than instruct—they observe, prepare, and connect. A Guide introduces materials when a child is ready and steps back to let them explore. They also serve as the bridge between the classroom and home, helping families understand their child's growth.

Great Guides are calm, consistent, and deeply respectful of each child. Their job is to help children grow into independent, capable, and kind people.

Teacher Qualifications

As a Title I school, Highland receives additional federal funding, and families have the right to know about the qualifications of their child's teachers and classroom assistants. This includes:

- Whether the teacher is licensed or certified by the state
- If the teacher is working under emergency or provisional status
- The teacher's educational background

We're proud that our Guides are Montessori-certified (through AMI or AMS), and supported by professional development and coaching to ensure academic excellence.

The Toddler Program: 14 months to 3 years old

"Let me do it myself!" That famous toddler cry reflects a deep developmental need—and it's something we honor every day. In our fast-paced world, young children are often rushed through routines. In a Montessori environment, they're given time, space, and trust to do things for themselves.

From dressing and toileting to pouring water and sweeping up spills, toddlers are supported as they learn to care for themselves and their environment. This builds independence, coordination, and confidence.

A Thoughtfully Prepared Environment

Everything in our toddler classrooms is intentionally designed for the developmental needs of children aged 14 months to 3 years:

- Low shelves and child-sized furniture
- Materials that support motor development and language acquisition
- A warm, safe, and inviting space for exploration

Children are free to imitate adult activities in ways that are developmentally appropriate, leading to meaningful, hands-on learning.

Daily Rhythm & Activities

Each day includes:

- **Practical life** activities (pouring, sweeping, dressing, toileting)
- **Language-rich experiences** (songs, stories, naming, conversation)
- **Art and music**
- **Indoor and outdoor movement**
- **Time for rest, snacks, and meals**, aligned with each child's natural routine

Transitions are gentle and predictable, with lots of songs, finger plays, and movement woven throughout the day.

Children's House: 3 to 6 years old

Dr. Maria Montessori called this stage of life the period of the **absorbent mind**—when children soak up information from the world around them with ease and intensity. In Highland's Children's House program, we nurture this natural drive by fostering independence, concentration, and a sense of responsibility.

A Hands-On Foundation

The Children's House classroom is a carefully prepared environment where children explore:

- **Practical life:** pouring, buttoning, sweeping, and more—activities that build focus, coordination, and self-esteem
- **Sensorial materials:** sharpening the senses while laying the groundwork for math and science
- **Language:** hands-on experiences with reading, writing, and grammar
- **Mathematics:** concrete tools for understanding the decimal system and operations
- **Cultural studies:** maps, artifacts, stories, and art to introduce geography, history, and the diversity of human life
- **Creative expression:** music, movement, and visual arts woven throughout the curriculum

Children also receive daily **Grace and Courtesy** lessons, which help them navigate social situations, practice empathy, and solve conflicts with peers.

Freedom Within Structure

In the Montessori classroom, children have freedom of movement and choice within a structured environment. They may work alone, with a partner, or in a small group, using materials that match their developmental stage. The classroom is calm, focused, and purposeful—what Dr. Montessori called “an aid to life.”

Three-Year Cycle

Children remain in the same classroom community for three years. This allows them to build deep relationships, revisit materials at different levels of complexity, and eventually serve as mentors to younger peers. It's a powerful model that reinforces leadership, confidence, and continuity.

Children's House Daily Schedule

- **Morning Session:** 8:30 am – 11:30 am
At 11:30 am, three-year-olds may be picked up or enrolled in our extended care program, CHECK.
-

CHECK Program: Extended Day for 3-Year-Olds

Children's House Extended Care Kids (CHECK) is a fee-based afternoon program available to three-year-olds who are ready for a longer school day.

To qualify, children must be **three years old on the first day of school**.

Children enrolled in CHECK stay after the morning session for:

- Lunch
- Rest time
- Individual or small group activities in a calm and supportive setting

CHECK ends at **3:30 pm**, along with the regular school day.

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

Dr. Montessori described the elementary years as a time of “**reasoning minds**”—a phase of explosive intellectual growth, moral awareness, and deep curiosity. Children in this stage:

- Ask **big questions**: Why? How? What if?
- Crave **fairness, justice, and rules**
- Seek **independence with responsibility**
- Thrive on **collaboration and social learning**

We nurture these instincts with lessons that spark imagination, encourage big thinking, and support both academic and emotional growth.

Curriculum and Learning Approach

The Montessori Elementary curriculum includes:

- Language and grammar
- Mathematics and geometry
- Cultural studies (geography, history, science, ecology)
- Practical life and community responsibility

- Visual and performing arts
- Social-emotional learning through Grace and Courtesy

Rather than following a rigid curriculum, students are introduced to key lessons and themes and then given the freedom to explore topics in greater depth according to their interests. This approach supports both state standards and a deeper kind of learning—one that values curiosity, critical thinking, and creativity.

As children move through the Elementary program, they are expected to take increasing responsibility for their education and their place in the school community. Hallmarks of success at this stage include:

- A continued joy in learning
- Self-discipline and time management
- Respect for others
- Initiative and independence
- Active participation in the classroom and beyond

While every student is expected to meet or exceed Wisconsin State Standards, we do not “teach to the test.” Instead, our approach prepares students to think deeply, work collaboratively, and take pride in their progress.

Cosmic Education & The Great Lessons

In the Montessori Elementary years, children begin to ask not just *what* things are, but *why* they exist and *how* they came to be. This is where Cosmic Education comes in—a cornerstone of Montessori philosophy that invites children to explore their place in the universe and their interconnectedness with all living things.

What is Cosmic Education?

Cosmic Education presents a unified vision of knowledge. It helps children see the relationships between science, history, language, math, and the natural world—encouraging a deep sense of awe, gratitude, and responsibility for the world around them.

Rather than learning in isolated subjects, children are encouraged to explore big ideas across disciplines. For example, a lesson on volcanoes might lead into geography, then chemistry, then mythology, then creative writing. The learning is layered, expansive, and child-led.

The Great Lessons

Each year begins with a series of dramatic and imaginative stories called The Great Lessons. These foundational stories are designed to awaken the child’s imagination and curiosity. They include:

1. **The Coming of the Universe** – a dramatic story of the Big Bang, stars, planets, and Earth’s formation
2. **The Coming of Life** – the evolution of life on Earth, from single-celled organisms to human beings
3. **The Coming of Humans** – early humans and the development of tools, language, and culture
4. **The Story of Writing** – how human beings learned to communicate ideas across time and distance
5. **The Story of Numbers** – the history and power of mathematics in human civilization

Each Great Lesson acts as a springboard into deeper study—of biology, geology, history, language, art, and more. Students are invited to follow their interests, ask big questions, and see themselves as part of a much larger story.

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.

Admissions and Enrollment

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 Guide will also set up a visit to the classroom for a special introduction between the child and the Guide. 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.

Classroom Placement

Each spring, our academic team engages in a thoughtful, multi-step process to place students in classrooms for the following school year. Our goal is to create balanced learning communities that support strong academic growth and healthy social development for *all* children.

Classroom placement is a complex process that considers many factors. Our priority is to build communities where students can thrive—socially, emotionally, and academically. This means creating a mix of learners in each room, rather than placing children based on specific friendships or teacher preferences.

Some of the factors we consider include:

- Program needs of individual students
- Balanced class sizes
- A range of achievement levels in literacy and math

- Student independence and social-emotional development
- Peer dynamics and compatibility
- Equitable consideration of each child

We take this process very seriously and invest significant time in getting to know each student throughout the year—through academic work, social interactions, teacher observations, and ongoing collaboration across our team.

If your family has information you believe is *essential* for us to consider, you are welcome to submit it in writing. Helpful examples include:

- “Please separate my twins, James and Jamal.”
- “My child was recently diagnosed with anxiety, and I’d like to share that context with the team.”

Requests for specific teachers or classroom placements based on friendships will not be considered. At Highland, students join a learning community—not just a classroom with a specific adult—and our multi-age model ensures plenty of opportunities to build new relationships and grow in independence over time.

If you have unique information to share about your child that may not be visible in their daily classroom experience, please email Tracy Williams, School Leader, before the placement process begins.

Annual Registration Process

Each year, Highland holds **Annual Registration** in **late July or early August**. This is a required step for all returning and newly enrolled families and ensures that we have updated information and all necessary paperwork in place before the school year begins.

During Registration, families will:

- Confirm or update emergency contact information, address, and health records
- Sign required forms and school policies
- Enroll in paid programs (such as before/after school care, CHECK)
- Provide up-to-date immunization records or waivers
- Pay applicable school supply and activity fees
- Receive important start-of-year dates

Registration is typically offered online through ProCare and Transparent Classroom, with reminders and instructions sent via email and posted on the Highland website. Completing registration on time helps ensure a smooth and prepared start for your child—and our staff!

If you’re unsure whether your registration is complete, or if your family will be away during that time, please contact the Main Office so we can support you in finalizing everything.

Daily Life at Highland

Each day at Highland is intentionally structured to support independence, curiosity, and connection. From arrival routines to recess, meals, and classroom rhythms, this section outlines what families can expect in the day-to-day flow of school life—and how we work together to support a smooth and joyful experience for every child.

Toddler Program Daily Schedule

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

Children's House, Elementary & Adolescent Programs (AP) Daily Schedule

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 (k3- 6 th only)
3:30 pm – 6:00 pm	After School Program (k3-6 th only)

Arrival & Dismissal

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.

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

- 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.

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.

Afternoon Pick-up

All families are invited in to pickup their children at the end of the day. Beginning in 1st grade, families can utilize the pick up lane on 17th street, though registration with the school is required to dismiss your student from that location. All 7th and 8th grade students are automatically dismissed to 17th Street. cell

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.

Attendance Policy

Wisconsin law requires all children between the ages of six and 18 to attend school full time. The state of Wisconsin and Highland Community School set policies for student absences. They are summarized below.

Excused Absences

It is the responsibility of parents/guardians to notify the school as soon as possible when your child will be absent. Parents/guardians have the right to excuse a child from school for up to ten (10) days per year. Any absences beyond ten (10) days will be considered unexcused, unless a note is presented from a service provider.

It is expected that parents/guardians will make every effort to schedule medical, dental, and other healthcare appointments for students outside of the hours of the school day. In instances where that is not possible, parents/guardians should present the school with a note from the provider. Notes may be presented following any appointment. A parent/guardian may provide documentation for an appointment-related absence within two days (48 hours) of return.

Unexcused Days

At HCS, we cherish our partnership with families. We will be seeking your help in the event that your child becomes Habitually Truant. Wisconsin State Statute requires compulsory school attendance and defines Habitual Truancy as *“a pupil who is absent without an acceptable excuse for part or all of 5 or more days on which school is held during a school semester”*.

You can take steps to prevent your child from becoming Habitually Truant by:

- Contacting the HCS main office every time your child is not in attendance.
- Working with your school when they contact you by phone, email or letter regarding your child's attendance.
- Reaching out to Ms. Alexis, School Social Worker, if you have concerns about your child's attendance.

In the event your child does become Habitually Truant, Highland is required to begin the Habitual Truancy Process.

This process consists of four parts:

- A notification will be sent, by first class mail, when your child becomes Habitually Truant.
- A conference will be arranged that requires your involvement, during which your child's attendance will be discussed, and we will work together to find solutions that address the truancy.
- An Attendance Improvement Plan will be developed at the conference focusing on those solutions.
- Your child's attendance will be monitored for improvement, and a 4-6 week Review Conference will be arranged that requires your involvement.

The purpose of the Habitual Truancy Process is to identify the cause(s) of attendance problems and identify supports within the school and community that can assist your student and family.

IMPORTANT: All students who are classified as being Habitually Truant are in violation of Wisconsin law, and as such the student, and their parent(s)/guardian(s), may be required to appear in court. Depending upon the age of the student and circumstances related to the absences, the court may levy sanctions and require that the parent/guardian cause the child to attend school. In addition, the court may order sanctions requiring that the student receive counseling and/or perform community service.

You must contact the school every day that your child will not be in school.

Families must contact the school office by 8:00 AM if your child is going to be absent. You can call the student absence line, (414) 342-1412 option 1, at any hour and leave a voicemail containing: student's name, parent/guardian name, teacher's name, reason for the absence including symptoms (if applicable).

Any unreported absences are considered unexcused.

Truancy

Truancy is defined as any absence from school for part or all of one or more days without contacting the school in writing or by phone to explain the absence. Absences beyond the ten (10) excused allowable by Wisconsin §118.15 are considered "unexcused" and may be viewed in the same manner as a truancy when pertaining to attendance expectations and legal requirements.

School Hours

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
- 7th-8th: 8:10am-3:35pm

Late Arrivals

All students arriving more than 5 minutes after the school day start time should be brought to the main entrance by an adult. Students will be given a tardy slip and marked tardy in our attendance system. If you know you will be tardy and your student needs a hot lunch, you must call the school by 8:15am. You must contact the school every day that a child will be tardy. If you do not notify the school by 8:15am, please bring your child a cold lunch.

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.

Early Pick-ups

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. If you will be picking your student up early, you must notify the school by calling the student absence line, 414-342-1412 option 1. Students picked up more than 5 minutes before dismissal will be signed out of the school's attendance system, and it will be included on your child's 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.

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.

Snacks at Highland

We know that growing minds and bodies need fuel! Families are welcome to send individual snacks with their child each day, and we also encourage families to contribute to classroom snack when possible.

You'll hear from your child's teacher or Room Parent about **classroom-level snack sign-ups**. These shared snacks help build community and ensure that all children have something to eat during the school day.

We encourage snacks that are nutritious and easy to serve. Some great options include:

- Fresh or dried fruit
- Cheese sticks
- Pretzels and hummus
- Hard-boiled eggs
- Whole grain crackers
- Yogurt tubes or pouches

Please avoid sending candy or sugary treats.

While Highland is *not* a nut-free school, **some classrooms may have specific allergy-related snack restrictions**. Be sure to check with your child's teacher or Room Parent about any ingredient limits in their environment.

For students enrolled in afterschool care, snacks are provided through the MPS meal program and meet federal nutrition guidelines.

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.

Clothing, Toileting, and Daily Routines

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.*

Toileting Guidelines

Children in Children's House (K3-K5) are expected to be toilet-trained before beginning the program. Because accidents at this age are common, children 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 Children's House.

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 Classroom Guide if you have any questions.

School Environment and Cleanliness

School Cleanliness

Highland is cleaned daily by a professional cleaning service. Restrooms are cleaned and disinfected at least once a day, and lunch tables are cleaned before and after meals. Classroom cots and large equipment are cleaned weekly, and small toys and materials are sanitized in the school's dishwasher at least once per week. Preventative pest control is also conducted regularly. If you notice something that needs additional cleaning or maintenance, please let a staff member know.

School Temperature

We aim to maintain indoor temperatures between 67°F and 80°F. During periods of extreme weather, Highland follows MPS weather closure guidelines. We do our best to keep the learning environment safe and comfortable for everyone.

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.

Daily Recess

Recess is a vital part of every child's day. All students—Toddler through Adolescent—participate in **daily outdoor play** whenever possible. Recess supports physical activity, social development, emotional regulation, and opportunities for unstructured play and peer connection.

- **Toddlers and Children's House** students typically have at least **one outdoor play period per day**

- **Lower and Upper Elementary** students receive **at least 30 minutes of recess daily**
- **Adolescent Program** students have daily outdoor time and movement integrated into their schedule

Additional outdoor time may be provided during PE, environmental education, or at the discretion of the Classroom Guide.

We believe outdoor play is essential to healthy development and learning—not something to be earned or withheld. While recess is not used as a general punishment, students may occasionally have their recess time adjusted to allow for follow-up conversations, restorative work, or a cool-down period after a conflict. In some cases, students may participate in an alternative recess activity, such as assisting with outdoor tasks or joining a younger peer group, as part of a restorative approach to rebuilding community and responsibility.

Weather & Outdoor Clothing Policy

We go outside in most weather! To keep students comfortable and healthy, the following outerwear is required:

- **50°F or below (including wind chill):** Students must wear long sleeves or a jacket
- **32°F or below (including wind chill):** Students must wear a coat

Please send your child to school with appropriate clothing for the season, including hats, gloves, and boots during the winter months. If your family needs support accessing cold-weather gear, please reach out to the Family Engagement Manager or School Social Worker—we're happy to help.

Indoor Recess Guidelines

We prioritize outdoor play whenever possible, but students will remain indoors for recess under certain weather conditions to ensure safety and comfort.

- Toddlers and K3 stay indoors if the wind chill is below 20°F, the temperature is above 90°F, or there is heavy rain or very wet conditions.
- K4–K5 students stay indoors if the wind chill is below 10°F.
- 1st–8th grade students stay indoors if the wind chill is below 0°F, the temperature is above 90°F, or there is heavy rain or wet conditions.

When indoors, students will engage in **quiet, cooperative games and movement activities** in their classrooms or designated indoor spaces.

Junior Coaches

Upper Elementary students may be invited to serve as **Junior Coaches**—student leaders who help organize games, resolve minor peer conflicts, and make recess more inclusive and fun. Junior Coaches are trained in cooperation, conflict resolution, and positive communication, and they work closely with staff to promote a safe, welcoming recess experience for all.

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 Classroom Guide 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.

Going Outs and Field Trips

Field trips are an important part of our curriculum, offering students the chance to engage with the rich cultural, environmental, and educational resources throughout the Milwaukee area. These trips are organized by classroom teachers to extend learning beyond the classroom and into the real world.

Families will receive a permission slip for each field trip—please complete and return it promptly. Personal vehicles will not be used to transport Children's House or Elementary students on field trips.

Please note: this process does not apply to "Going Outs," which are student-initiated, small-group excursions unique to the Elementary and Adolescent Programs.

No child will be excluded from a field trip due to financial need. If your family needs support, we encourage you to reach out—we are committed to ensuring all students can participate fully in these experiences.

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 Classroom Guide.
- 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.

What is a “Going Out”?

An important element of the Montessori elementary and adolescent experience is the *Going Out*—a student-planned excursion tied to a particular interest, project, or area of study. These are not field trips led by adults, but purposeful, small-group outings initiated and organized by students.

When a student becomes curious about a topic and wishes to extend their research, they may plan a Going Out with support from their teacher. Students are responsible for every step of the process: deciding where to go, contacting the location to schedule a visit, arranging transportation, preparing questions or materials, and writing a thank-you note afterward.

- Only Upper Elementary and Adolescent students participate in Going Outs.
- Permission slips or parent notifications will be provided in advance of each trip.
- A 1:4 adult-to-child ratio must be maintained during a Going Out. If only one adult is present, no more than four students may attend.
- Public transportation is the preferred mode of travel when possible.

Camping

Camping is a beloved Highland tradition and a core part of our commitment to experiential learning. Each year, students in K5, Elementary, and Adolescent programs participate in overnight camping trips that build independence, strengthen community bonds, and deepen their connection to nature.

This year’s camping plans are as follows:

- K5 and Lower Elementary: Overnight at Camp Edwards YMCA in East Troy, WI
- Upper Elementary: Tent camping at Devil’s Lake State Park in Baraboo, WI
- Adolescent Program: Camping at Kohler-Andrae State Park in Sheboygan and/or Starved Rock State Park in Illinois

Detailed information—including dates, packing lists, and chaperone needs—will be shared with families as each trip approaches. Participation in camping is considered a key part of the student experience, and we work to ensure all students can attend, regardless of financial need.

Chaperone Policy

At Highland, field trips are a vital extension of our Montessori program, designed to enrich classroom learning through real-world experiences. We are grateful for the involvement of parents and guardians and rely on family volunteers for many of these outings. However, not all trips are open to chaperones. Some are intentionally structured to promote student independence or have limited capacity. This policy outlines when chaperones are welcome, when they are not permitted, and the requirements for participation.

When Chaperones Are Invited

Family volunteers are an important part of the following field trips and may be invited to chaperone based on need:

- Urban Ecology Center (Children’s House – self-transport required)
- Milwaukee Public Museum
- Milwaukee Art Museum & Junior Docent Program
- Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra
- Central Library visits
- JA Biztown
- Pumpkin Farm & Zoo Trips
- LE & UE Camping Trips

Important: Some trips limit the number of chaperones due to space, transportation, or program structure. In these cases, staff will select chaperones based on the specific roles and support needed. Not all interested volunteers will be invited to attend.

When Chaperones Are Not Permitted

For the following **Upper Elementary and Adolescent Capstone Trips**, chaperones are **strictly not allowed**:

- Montessori Model United Nations (New York)
- Adolescent Camping Trips
- Costa Rica Trip

These trips are intentionally designed as formative, independence-building experiences. Family participation undermines the developmental goals of these programs. Furthermore, our staff cannot accommodate additional adults on these trips, and allowing only those who can afford to join would create issues of equity and access. This policy is non-negotiable and applies to all families.

Background Check Requirements

To ensure student safety and compliance with district guidelines, any individual serving as a chaperone must complete a background check **in advance** if they:

- Will supervise students without direct staff oversight
- Will volunteer regularly or for more than three hours
- Will attend any **overnight camping** trip

Background check forms are available in the main office. Families must plan ahead. Failure to complete a background check in time will result in ineligibility to chaperone.

Transporting Highland Students

When travel by personal vehicle is necessary, the following requirements must be met *before* the trip:

A signed permission slip that includes:

- The name of the driver
- Date of travel
- Destination and purpose of the trip
- Mode of transportation (e.g., personal vehicle)

The driver (parent or staff member) must submit to the main office:

- A copy of their valid driver's license
- A copy of their car insurance card showing current coverage dates
- A copy of their insurance declarations page showing coverage limits
- A completed travel request form
- A cleared background check on file

No student may travel in a personal vehicle (other than their own parent's) unless all of these requirements are met in advance. This policy helps ensure student safety and complies with our insurance and district guidelines.

Neighborhood Walks and Trips to King Park

Throughout the week teachers and children take walks through the neighborhood. The buddy system or a walking rope is used to guide children along the paths. Older classrooms will utilize King Park when weather permits. The blanket permission slip each family signs at registration gives permission for these short excursions.

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 Guide. If you are observing in a classroom, please, contact your classroom Guides for observation guidelines prior to the observation.

Student/Alumni Visitor Policy

We welcome HCS alumni to return to Highland and give back to their community. If a former student is interested in visiting, we will place them in a classroom to do service during the work period. Depending on the situation, the student may be able to spend time in their previous classroom during non-instructional time. The visit should be planned at least 2 days in advance by contacting the School Leader and former classroom teacher(s).

Supporting Your Child

Observing the Classroom

We welcome and encourage families to observe their child's classroom. Observations offer a unique window into Montessori education and help deepen your understanding of your child's day-to-day experience.

To schedule an observation, please contact your child's teacher directly. All parents are permitted to visit or observe their child during school hours unless a court order restricts access.

Because the beginning of the school year is a period of adjustment, we ask that families **wait until at least October**—when the classroom community is more fully established—before scheduling a visit.

Guidelines for a Meaningful Observation

Montessori classrooms are designed to promote independence, focus, and collaboration. To maintain the integrity of the learning environment, we ask that you follow a few simple guidelines, which your child's teacher will provide in advance.

As you observe, consider the following:

- Notice the diversity of activity, the range of ages, and the types of materials in use.
- Watch the children working individually, in pairs, and in small groups.
- Pay attention to the guide's demeanor and their respectful interactions with each child.
- Observe your child: What are they choosing to work on? Do you notice concentration, enthusiasm, or self-direction?
- Take in the broader classroom community: Look for signs of cooperation, respect, and mutual support.

Our goal at Highland is for each classroom to be a vibrant, caring, and engaging environment where every child can thrive and the classroom community can flourish.

Please note: When visiting, we ask all families to follow the school's current health and safety protocols, which may include masking or scheduled appointments depending on public health guidance.

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 Main 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.

Requesting a Family Meeting

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 School Leader, 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.

Classroom Communication

You can expect to receive regular email updates from both your child's Classroom Guide and Room Parent throughout the school year. These messages will include classroom news, reminders, event sign-ups, and ways to get involved.

Some classrooms may also use private Facebook groups or other tools to help families stay connected. Participation in these groups is optional and managed by Room Parents in partnership with teachers.

If you're ever unsure where to find information or how to stay in the loop, don't hesitate to reach out to your child's teacher or Room Parent—they're happy to help!

School-Wide 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 Manager if you would like a paper copy.

If you are looking for more information about parent and family involvement, please see the Family Engagement Manager. 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.

Student Support Services

At Highland, we believe every child deserves the support they need to thrive—academically, socially, and emotionally. We are committed to creating inclusive learning environments and providing services that meet the needs of a wide range of learners.

Special Education

If you believe your child may need special education services, you have the right to request an evaluation. Evaluations are conducted in partnership with Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) and follow district and state guidelines.

To begin the process, contact your child's teacher or another trusted staff member. You may also reach out directly to our Special Education Coordinator or School Leader. Once a request is made, a team will work with you to determine next steps and keep you informed throughout the evaluation process.

If your child qualifies for services, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) will be developed with your input and implemented in collaboration with our support staff and MPS specialists. Services may include academic interventions, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, or other supports tailored to your child's needs.

Academic & Behavioral Support

In addition to special education, Highland offers a range of supports for students who may benefit from intervention in reading, writing, or math. These supports may be short-term or ongoing and are delivered in coordination with classroom instruction.

We also use a positive, relationship-based approach to behavior support, rooted in our Montessori and Nautilus philosophies. When a student is struggling socially or emotionally, our staff may work with families to create a personalized support plan that includes consistent communication, restorative practices, and additional resources as needed.

If you're concerned about your child's development, behavior, or academic progress, we encourage you to connect with your child's teacher.

Classroom Change Requests

At Highland, thoughtful classroom placement is central to our Montessori model. Our multi-age classrooms foster strong, trusting relationships over a 3-year cycle. As outlined in our [Classroom Placement Approach](#), we consider multiple factors—academic, social-emotional, and developmental—when determining a student's classroom placement. We believe stability and long-term relationships with peers and guides are essential to student success.

However, we also understand that sometimes concerns arise that may prompt families to inquire about a change in classroom placement. These requests are handled with care and with the goal of understanding and supporting the student's needs within our established structure.

Process for Requesting a Classroom Change

1. **Start with a Conversation**

Families should first speak directly with their child's current guide to discuss concerns. Often, questions or misunderstandings can be resolved through open communication.

2. **Family Meeting**

If concerns persist, the family may request a meeting that includes an administrator, the child's guide, and any relevant support staff. During this meeting, we will:

- Review the specific concerns raised by the family
- Gather insight from the classroom team
- Identify supports or adjustments that may help the student succeed in their current environment

3. **Review and Follow-Up**

In most cases, changes in classroom placement are **not** made immediately. Our goal is to support the student in their current placement first, as continuity and relationship-building are key to success in a Montessori setting.

If, after interventions and further review, a change is deemed necessary by the school team, we will work with the family on next steps.

Important Notes

- Classroom changes are rare and only considered after careful evaluation.
- Requests for specific teachers or classmates cannot be guaranteed.
- Any change must be developmentally appropriate and in the best interest of **all** students involved.

Progressive Discipline Policy

Classroom Discipline

Highland Community School employs the **Nautilus Approach**, a Montessori-specific discipline program developed by *Public Montessori in Action*. Like the Montessori method itself, it is a **constructivist**, whole-child approach that focuses on reconnecting the child with their environment. It stands in contrast to more behaviorist systems that rely on external rewards or punishments.

Highland Community School does not permit the use of abusive disciplinary methods, including but not limited to hitting/spanking, slapping, yelling, withholding food or learning opportunities, ridicule, embarrassment, or humiliation. These practices are strictly prohibited—even if a family's personal philosophy differs. Children may not be punished for lapses in toilet training, and time-outs are not permitted for children under age three.

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.

What Is Child Study?

Child Study is a collaborative process for understanding and supporting students who may need extra help—academically, socially, emotionally, or behaviorally. The Child Study Team is made up of Classroom Guides, administrators and other educational support staff who work together to observe, reflect, and develop strategies that meet the needs of the whole child.

Child Study isn't about labels or punishments—it's about asking, *What's really going on here?* and *How can we support this child with compassion and consistency?* Families are key partners in this process and are invited to share insights and collaborate on plans for their child's growth.

What Is Nautilus?

The **Nautilus Approach** is a Montessori-based framework for discipline and behavior support, created by Public Montessori in Action. It emphasizes restoration over punishment and sees behavior as communication rather than something to be "managed" with rewards or consequences.

Nautilus helps students reconnect with their environment, regulate emotions, and rebuild trust with peers and adults. It's built on phases of support—beginning in the classroom with proactive guidance and, if needed, extending to the Child Study Team and family partnerships. The ultimate goal is to help each child return to calm, independence, and belonging in the learning community.

Nautilus Approach: Mindset & Method

Nautilus is considered a progressive **discipline policy** that brings together parents, staff, and community to support children in resolving behavioral challenges and includes several phases of intervention and restoration.

The phases of restoration are as follows:

Phases 1–4

Classroom Guides address early signs of behavioral disruption—such as anxiety, emotional dysregulation, or withdrawal—through proactive strategies. These include:

- Redirection
- Peer mediation or restorative conversations
- Reminders about class agreements and the HCS Bill of Rights
- Praise and reinforcement of respectful behavior
- Emotional coaching and modeling by adults

During these phases, Guides are encouraged to build strong family partnerships, discuss concerns, and learn what strategies work at home. No formal documentation is required at this level.

Phase 5

If behavior escalates despite classroom strategies, the student may be temporarily separated from classmates. This might include working alone, observing in another classroom (buddy class), or having limited in-class freedom of choice.

At this point:

- The Classroom Guide may consult the Child Study/Nautilus Team to assess underlying needs
 - A Child Study Team member may observe the student
 - Replacement behaviors and support strategies are identified
-

Phase 6

If a child's behavior significantly disrupts the learning environment—e.g., yelling, persistent disengagement, or ongoing interpersonal conflict—the Classroom Guide will request immediate Nautilus Team support.

At this level:

- A mandatory parent conference is triggered
- Families receive written notice
- The conference includes the Guide(s), parent(s), and Child Study Team
- Parents may bring a mentor or staff member for support
- Incident reports will be made available upon request

The team will create or review a plan to support the student, including the possible pairing with a mentor for regular check-ins. Highland's suspension policies will be shared at this stage, though the goal remains prevention and restoration.

Phase 7

Phase 7 is reserved for serious or extreme behaviors, such as:

- Dangerous: intentional physical aggression or throwing harmful objects
- Destructive: damaging school property or materials
- Demeaning: repeated bullying or verbal harassment
- Extreme: threats of violence, suicidal or homicidal ideation, weapons possession, or running out of the building

At this phase:

- The School Leader, Child Study Team, and MPS are involved
- The student's Action Plan is reviewed
- Outcomes, supports, and timelines are evaluated

- Severe cases may be referred to MPS Student Services for intervention or disciplinary action, including possible expulsion

*In cases of immediate threat to students or staff, the Crisis Team will be activated and the School Leader will escalate to MPS 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 School Leader 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.

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, Families

“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.

Student Records & Contact Information

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 School Leader to schedule an appointment to do so.

Verification Letters for Student Enrollment Information

Highland at times receives requests from families to provide verification of enrollment & residency letters for their student(s). Our policy on these requests is that we can provide a printout from the student information system that reflects the child's current enrollment at HCS. School staff will not create or certify individual letters for families. If residency is at question, school staff may provide a printout of the student's household record from our Student information System that shows what address(es) the student has on record. The request must come from the parent/guardian on record and the reports will be provided only to the parent/guardian. For questions or further clarification on this policy, parents or guardians may contact the School Leader.

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.

Health and Safety

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:

- 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.

If your child tests positive for COVID-19 or other respiratory illnesses (Flu, RSV, etc.) Students may go back to your normal activities when, for at least 24 hours, both are true:

- Your symptoms are getting better overall, and
- You have not had a fever (and are not using fever-reducing medication).

Please refer to the CDC for the most up-to-date [Respiratory Virus Guidance](#).

For all illnesses, please refer to the WI Department of Health Service's Communicable Disease Chart.

Communicable Disease Chart

Illness	Criteria for Return to School
Abdominal pain which is persistent and continues two or more hours	When symptoms are no longer present
Boil, abscess or cellulitis	When lesion(s) are covered and drainage is contained in covering/bandage
Chicken Pox/Varicella	When all sores have dried and crusted
Conjunctivitis (eye discharge) or pink eye accompanied by a fever, behavioral changes, or a recommendation for exclusion from the health department	When fever is no longer present and medicated drops have been applied
Coughing (severe) including Croup	When symptoms are no longer present
COVID-19 (coronavirus)	When fever has resolved for 24 hours without fever-reducing medications and major symptoms are improving
Diarrhea , defined as 1 or more loose stools in 24-hour period, not associated with changes in diet.	When symptoms are no longer present for at least 24 hours
Diarrhea if bloody or caused by Cryptosporidium	Health Care Provider clearance required
Diphtheria	Health Care Provider clearance required
E-coli (O157:H7)	Health Care Provider and Public Health Authority clearance required
Fever ≥ 100°F (armpit or ear) accompanied by signs or symptoms of illness or behavior change.	When fever is below 100°F (armpit or ear) for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicines
Fifth Disease (Human Parvovirus) accompanied by fever or behavior change or the child has an underlying blood disorder, such as sickle cell disease, or compromised immune system.	When fever has been resolved for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication
Hand-Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Coxsackievirus) accompanied by mouth ulcers or blisters and no control of drooling or fever or behavior change	When the child has stopped drooling, does not have exposed open sores, and fever has been resolved for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication
Head Lice/Nits or other infestation	Return after treatment to eliminate live lice and ongoing home treatment as necessary. If possible, wear hair pulled back or a hat until all signs of lice have been resolved
Hepatitis A virus	Health Care Provider clearance required
Hepatitis B virus	Health Care Provider clearance required and skin lesions, if any, are dry or able to be completely covered by a bandage
Herpes Simplex accompanied by mouth ulcers or blisters and no control of drooling or fever or behavior change	When the child has stopped drooling and does not have exposed open sores
Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV/AIDS)	Health Care Provider clearance required and skin lesions, if any, are dry or able to be completely covered by a bandage

Impetigo	After treatment has been started, if the sores can be kept clean and dry and if they can be completely covered
Influenza/Flu	Child's fever must be resolved for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications
Lyme Disease (or other tick-borne diseases) accompanied by fever	When fever is no longer present for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications
Measles	Health Care Provider clearance required
Meningitis (bacterial)	At least 24 hours after appropriate antibiotic treatment has started
Meningitis (viral)	When fever is no longer present for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications
Mononucleosis accompanied by fever and/or behavior change	When fever is no longer present
MRSA (Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus)	Health Care Provider clearance required
Mumps	Health Care Provider clearance required
Pertussis (whooping cough)	Health Care Provider clearance required
Pneumonia if accompanied by fever, severe coughing, rapid breathing, or behavior change	When symptoms are no longer present and fever has been resolved for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication
Ringworm (Tinea)	After treatment has been started and fever, if present, has been resolved for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication
Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)	Child's fever must be resolved for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication
Roseola (Human Herpesvirus 6) accompanied by fever	When fever has been resolved for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication
Rubella	Health Care Provider clearance required
Salmonella	When symptoms are no longer present for at least 24 hours
Scabies	After treatment has been completed, if the sores can be kept clean and dry and if they can be completely covered
Shigella	Health Care Provider clearance required

Strep Throat or other streptococcal infection	At least 12 hours after initial antibiotic treatment and fever, if present, must be resolved for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications
Tuberculosis	Health Care Provider clearance required
Vomiting more than one time in a 24-hour period or accompanied by fever, green or bloody vomit, no urine output in eight hours, recent history of head injury or looks/acts very ill	When symptoms are no longer present for at least 24 hours

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 School Leader 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 always be kept in the designated classroom first aid storage space. When possible, a second inhaler should be provided and stored in the school's main office for universal access.

EpiPens are kept in the classroom with the teacher. We ask that students with a prescribed EpiPen bring a 2nd EpiPen that will be securely stored in the main office. If a student is in paid programs or at recess, the main office EpiPen may be more quickly accessible. If only one can be provided, it will be stored in the main office for universal access.

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.

Emergencies, Closings, and Compliance

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.

Inclement Weather Procedures

The School Leader and Recess Lead 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.

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.

Emergency Communication & Family Reunification

In the event of an emergency at Highland, our top priorities are student safety, clear communication, and a calm, organized reunification process. While we hope never to need these protocols, we want families to know what to expect.

If an emergency occurs during the school day:

- Highland will communicate with families through email, phone, and/or text alerts, depending on the situation.
- Please do not call or come to the school until directed to do so—this ensures our staff can focus on student safety and emergency coordination.
- If students are evacuated or relocated, we will provide specific instructions for where and when to reunite with your child.

In the event that a formal reunification is required, a designated parent reunion area will be established. Families will receive clear directions upon arrival, including where to check in and how to safely reconnect with their child. The **Family Engagement Manager or School Social Worker** will oversee this process and work with emergency personnel and school staff to keep families informed and supported.

Please ensure your contact information is always up to date, and be sure you're signed up to receive school-wide messages via email, phone, and text.

Assessments & Technology

We use a balanced approach to both student assessments and technology. Assessments help us understand student growth and guide instruction. Our technology use in the classroom is intentional and developmentally appropriate. As a public Montessori school, we strive to uphold Montessori principles while also meeting the state and district requirements that come with being a public school.

Standardized Testing and Assessment

Assessment helps us understand how students are growing, what support they may need, and how to guide their learning forward. Highland uses a combination of state-mandated tests and school-based tools to monitor academic progress and identify areas for support or enrichment.

Below is a summary of the assessments we administer, when they occur, and why we use them:

Forward Exam | Grades: 3rd–8th

Subjects: English Language Arts (ELA) and Math: 3rd–8th grade, Science and Social Studies: 4th and 8th grade

When: Spring (typically March–April)

Why: This is Wisconsin’s required standardized test to measure student performance against state academic standards. Results are reported to families and the state and help inform school-wide planning and accountability.

iReady | Grades: 1st–8th

Subjects: Reading and Math

When: Three times a year – Fall, Winter, and Spring

Why: iReady is a nationally normed, computer-based assessment that helps teachers track individual student growth in reading and math. It’s also used to guide small group instruction and intervention support.

CogAT (Cognitive Abilities Test) | Grades: 2nd

When: Fall

Why: CogAT measures students’ reasoning abilities in verbal, quantitative, and nonverbal areas. It is used as one part of the identification process for MPS’s Gifted & Talented (G/T) services. Families are notified of results and any next steps.

AIMSweb | Grades: K4–2nd

Subjects: Early literacy

When: Three times a year – Fall, Winter, and Spring

Why: AIMSweb provides quick, one-on-one progress checks that help teachers monitor foundational reading. It supports early intervention by identifying students who may need additional practice or support.

Student Tech Expectations

At Highland, we recognize that electronic devices are an important part of modern life and can serve as useful tools for teaching and learning. However, as a public Montessori school, we strive to ensure that technology use in the classroom is intentional, developmentally appropriate, and does not disrupt the learning environment. Our approach supports a balance between preparing students for a digital world and preserving the hands-on, low-tech experiences central to Montessori education.

Personal Communication Devices

All students are prohibited from using personal communication devices during school hours. For purposes of this policy, **personal communication devices** include portable/wearable wireless devices that have the capability to provide voice, messaging, or other data communication between 2 or more parties, and include all of the following:

- Cell phone
- Smart watch or fitness tracker that connects to the internet
- Earbuds or headphones
- Wearable devices, like smart glasses
- Tablet or laptop computer
- Gaming devices

All personal communication devices must be turned off and stored—either in backpacks or in a locked classroom case—upon arrival at school.

Students should turn in their devices to their classroom teacher at the start of the day, where they will be secured until dismissal. If your child brings a device to school to communicate after hours, please reinforce these expectations with them at home.

Note: Highland is not responsible for lost, stolen, or damaged personal devices brought to school.

Exceptions to this policy may be granted in cases of emergencies, for student health care, when allowed under an IEP/504 plan, or when a teacher authorizes use for an educational purpose.

Classroom Technology Use: Chromebooks

Highland provides Chromebooks for classroom use to students in Upper Elementary (UE), Lower Elementary (LE), and the Adolescent Program (AP). These devices are used only under the direct supervision of a teacher. Students do not need to bring personal devices such as iPads, tablets, or laptops from home.

We believe that unsupervised access to personal technology during the school day can interfere with student focus, self-regulation, and social development—particularly in the elementary years. Our technology policies are designed to uphold a respectful, distraction-free learning environment.

Consequences for Misuse of Personal Technology

Students who fail to follow the technology policy will receive the following consequences:

1. **First Offense:** Verbal warning; device is turned in to the School Leader

2. **Second Offense:** Parent/guardian is contacted; device is turned in to the School Leader; parent/guardian pickup required
3. **Third Offense:** Parent/guardian is contacted; device is turned in to the School Leader; parent/guardian pickup required; required parent conference and response plan

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.

Social Media & Technology Use by Families

At Highland, we love to celebrate the joyful moments of school life—whether it's a classroom milestone, a community event, or a quiet moment of discovery. We also ask that families use care and discretion when capturing and sharing images or information related to the school.

We offer the following guidelines to help protect student privacy and maintain a respectful, inclusive community:

You're welcome to take photos at public school events (performances, potlucks, celebrations, etc.), but we ask that you only share photos of **your own child** unless you have clear permission from other families.

Please **avoid sharing photos or videos taken inside classrooms**, during the school day, or at drop-off/pick-up without prior approval from staff.

When posting about Highland on social media, please do so in a way that reflects our shared values of respect, inclusivity, and community care. If you tag us, we may reshare your post with gratitude!

If you have concerns or questions about something you've seen shared online, we encourage you to reach out directly to a staff member rather than discussing it publicly.

Families may not use school photos, staff names, or student information for marketing or personal business promotion without written permission from the school.

We know that digital sharing is part of modern life—but at Highland, we want to ensure that every child's dignity and safety come first.

Digital Platforms Overview

To help streamline communication and keep you connected, Highland uses a few key digital platforms throughout the school year. Each one serves a specific purpose, whether it's managing program fees, sharing classroom updates, or supporting student learning.

Here's a quick guide to what we use and how families can expect to engage:

ProCare

Used for **all paid programs and school fees**. Even if your child is not enrolled in before/after school care, CHECK, or the toddler program, ProCare is used for things like **camping trips**, **school activity fees**, and other registrations. You'll receive instructions for setting up your account when needed.

Transparent Classroom

Our main tool for classroom communication. Teachers use Transparent Classroom to share **progress reports**, classroom activities, and other important updates about your child's learning. Families receive login information early in the school year.

Clever (Student Portal)

Students in 1st and up use Clever to access digital learning tools, including **DreamBox** (for math) and other educational programs supported by MPS. Students receive their login credentials from their teacher.

If you ever have trouble accessing any platform or aren't sure where to find something, please contact the main office—we're here to help!

Student Email (Grades 7–8)

Beginning in **7th grade**, students are issued a **Highland student email address**. This email is used for school-related communication, including access to online learning platforms, collaborative projects, and Google tools. Families will receive information about setup and expectations when accounts are assigned.

Policies & Expectations

Community Expectations & School Policies

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 School Leader, Guide, student, and family to resolve the issue.

Substance Abuse

HCS prohibits the use, possession, transfer, or presence of alcohol or controlled substances on school grounds or during school-sponsored events, including field trips and transportation.

No Smoking Policy

Highland is a smoke-free campus. Tobacco products, vaping devices, and electronic cigarettes are not permitted on school property or at school events. Student possession or use may result in disciplinary action.

Weapons Policy

Weapons are strictly prohibited. This includes firearms, knives, razors, and any object that could be used to inflict harm. Threats involving weapons will be taken seriously and addressed with appropriate disciplinary and legal action.

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.

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/repared/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.

Legal & Compliance

Mandated 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.

Political Campaigning

At Highland Community School, we encourage our families to actively participate in the democratic process and exercise their right to vote. As a public school, we remain non-partisan and do not endorse any political candidate or party. With social justice as one of our school's pillars, we believe civic engagement is essential and will share non-partisan educational information about upcoming elections. However, we strive to create an environment that respects the diverse political views within our community. We will never tell our families how to vote.

Highland Community School may provide information about the election process without promoting or opposing any candidate, party, or political agenda. Examples include:

- Voter Registration Information: Providing details on how and where to register to vote, including deadlines and requirements.
- Election Dates and Polling Locations: Sharing dates of upcoming elections, hours that polls are open, and locations of polling places.
- Ballot Information: Offering non-biased summaries of what will be on the ballot, such as referendums, amendments, or propositions, without suggesting how to vote on them.
- Voting Procedures: Explaining the voting process, including how to vote by mail, early voting options, and what identification is required at the polls.
- Candidate Forums and Debates: Organizing or publicizing events where all candidates for a particular office are invited to speak, ensuring equal opportunity for all participants.

- Civic Education: Educating about the importance of voting, how elections work, and the roles of various elected officials.
- Non-Partisan Voter Guides: Distributing voter guides that provide factual, unbiased information about candidates' positions on various issues, often compiled by reputable non-partisan organizations.

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.

Babysitting Disclaimer

Highland acknowledges that staff members may occasionally provide childcare for Highland families outside of school hours. When doing so, they are acting in a **personal capacity**—not as representatives of Highland. The school is not liable for any aspect of these arrangements, including transportation.

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 School Leader. 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 School Leader 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.

Rights of Parents – Noncustodial

If you are a noncustodial parent, you have the same rights to student records, progress reports, school mailings, school visits, and parent-teacher conferences as a custodial parent unless a court order restricts such rights. If a court order is in place, the custodial parent must provide a copy to the School Leader. It is the responsibility of a noncustodial parent, if desired, to give the school his/her address and contact information, request to be consulted regarding their child, and be placed on school mailing lists. Only the custodial parent/legal guardian can remove a child from school or give permission for the child to be removed from school by another adult.

HCS Discharge Policy

A child may be dropped from enrollment if in the process of a Level 5 discipline situation the School Leader 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 Guide and are addressed in the toddler packet. Please see the Toddler Guide if you have any questions.

Parent/Student Rights Under this Policy

Disciplinary actions that require the assistance of the School Leader 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 School Leader. The School Social Worker and School Leader 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.

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.

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, School Leader, 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, School Leader, 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, School Leader.

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 School Leader 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.

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 School Leader. If you wish to make a formal complaint you must put the concern in writing and address it to the School Leader 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.

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 in K3-6th grades and \$35.00 per child in 7th-8th grades* to be used towards the cost of Montessori classroom supplies. The fee for 7th-8th grades includes a custom HCS planner for each student. Payment is due at the time of registration. **Maximum of two (2) supply fees charged per family per year.*

Activity Fee

All families are asked to contribute \$40.00 per child in K4 – 8th grade to be used towards the cost of educational activities and daytime school field trips (overnight trips excluded). Our priority is to ensure all HCS students participate in these activities, regardless of cost. With the rising cost of transportation, we are raising the fee this school year. This fee does not cover 100% of the costs associated with these activities. Payment is due at the time of registration.

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 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 \$850. 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 \$3,000 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. We ask that parents promptly review their statements for any activity posted in error. Should you notify any errors in your billing statement, please contact the bookkeeper. Generally, account corrections will not be processed for transactions exceeding 90 days.

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.

Getting Involved

Commitment to Community Contract

The **Commitment to Community Contract** reflects our belief that a strong, engaged school community enriches the educational experience for all children. Each adult in a household is asked to contribute **36 hours per school year** through volunteering, participating in events, joining committees, or supporting classroom needs. Families can choose how to fulfill these hours in ways that align with their interests, availability, and skills. This shared commitment helps build relationships, fosters a spirit of collaboration, and keeps Highland vibrant, connected, and community-driven. Reach out to the Family Engagement Manager if you need help fulfilling your hours.

Family Involvement

Highland's continued success depends deeply on the time, talents, and presence of our families. We view family participation as an essential part of your child's education—every bit as important as tuition is at other schools.

We believe family engagement:

- Strengthens the connection between school and home
- Reduces operational costs through shared efforts
- Builds shared ownership of our mission
- Elevates family voices in school policies and practices

How Families Can Get Involved

We warmly invite parents, grandparents, and caregivers to participate in a wide variety of ways. Whether you're sharing your culture or professional skills, chaperoning a field trip, or helping in the garden, your involvement makes a real impact—and brings joy to the children when they see the adults in their lives actively engaged at school.

Here are just a few ways to contribute:

- Classroom help or materials prep
- Field trip chaperoning
- Childcare during school events
- Lost & Found or laundry help
- Bulletin board or art display creation
- Room parent support
- Grounds or building maintenance
- Library organization
- Event planning (Family Nights, Book Fair, Highland Hustle, etc.)
- Community outreach or fundraising

If you have a special talent, cultural tradition, or skill you'd like to share in the classroom, please speak with your child's teacher to coordinate a visit.

Parent/Family Committees

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
- **Finance Committee:** Supports the Finance Director with budgeting and other financial needs to advance Highland's fiscal health.
- **Visual Arts Committee:** Plans and coordinates the school's Gallery Night.
- **Turbo Team:** Skilled Laborers (electric, plumbing, carpentry) who are called on as special projects arise.
- **Natural Grounds Committee:** Helps with landscaping and playground projects as needed. Plans and participates in the Spring Community Clean-up.

- **Family Experience Committee:** Ensures that equity and inclusion 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 ready to set up and take down at any of our school-wide events.
- **Hustle:** Our largest school fundraiser, this committee plans and executes this event that is focused on exercise in our beloved Washington Park.

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

Community hours should be recorded as they are performed. Contact the Family Engagement Manager to learn more.

Starting a Committee

Highland encourages family and staff collaboration through purpose-driven committees that support school culture, fundraising, equity, and more. To start a new committee:

- **Submit a proposal** to the Family Engagement Manager or School Leader outlining the committee's purpose, membership, and goals.
- Ensure that the committee is inclusive, mission-aligned, and open to all interested participants.
- Committees that organize events, fundraisers, or community initiatives must coordinate with the appropriate staff liaison.
- Committees may be asked to report updates to the Board or share information via *Notes Home*.

General Volunteering Guidelines

Volunteers are vital to Highland's community and culture. We welcome family involvement in classrooms, events, committees, and school-wide initiatives.

Volunteer expectations:

- Sign in at the Main Office and wear a visitor badge.
- Follow staff instructions and classroom norms.
- Maintain confidentiality and respect student privacy.
- Help maintain a calm, respectful tone aligned with Montessori principles.
- Record your hours toward your **Commitment to Community**.

Volunteers who work directly with students on a regular basis may be required to complete a **background check**.

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.

Clubs and Sports

Clubs and sports are a vibrant part of our community, offering students opportunities to explore interests, build friendships, and develop new skills through hands-on, joyful experiences. They are also a powerful way for families to connect with students, as these programs are almost entirely volunteer-led and supported by our incredible community of caregivers and staff.

Clubs

Clubs at Highland are led by staff, families, and approved community volunteers. They typically meet after school and are open to students based on age, interest, and space availability. Club offerings vary by year and may include:

- Chess Club
- Ultimate Frisbee
- Forensics
- GSA
- Coding Club
- Robotics
- Gardening Club
- 4H
- Girl Scouts
- and more!

Most clubs are free or low-cost, though some may include small fees to cover supplies or require a commitment to attend regularly. Proposals for new clubs are welcome—see the “Starting a Club” section for details.

Sports

Highland offers sports programs for students in **1st through 8th grade through Milwaukee Recreation**. Past offerings have included:

- Basketball (Coed & Girls')
- Volleyball
- Track

- Cheerleading

MKE Rec Youth Sports focus on teamwork, effort, and growth, not just winning. Coaches are often staff or parent volunteers and must complete an application, background check and coaching agreement through Milwaukee Recreation along with attending their seasonal mandatory Coaches Meeting. Practices are held after school or on weekends, and participation may require commitment to team expectations.

Registration & Enrollment

Enrollment for clubs and sports is announced through *Notes Home*, and direct email communication. Most clubs and teams require families to complete a sign-up form or registration link, often with a deadline to ensure rosters and materials can be prepared. Some programs may have limited space and will operate on a first-come, first-served basis, while others may prioritize students based on grade level or past participation.

If a fee is required, it will be noted at the time of registration. Financial support is available—please reach out to the office or Bookkeeper if cost is a barrier.

We strive to ensure that sports and clubs are inclusive, accessible, and mission-aligned. If your family needs support accessing a club or sport, or if your student has a new idea for one, please reach out to the Family Engagement Manager or Sports Coordinator.

Starting a Club

Highland supports the development of afterschool clubs led by staff, families, or approved volunteers.

To propose a club:

- Identify a **staff sponsor** who will serve as a point of contact.
- Submit a **Club Proposal Form** to the Family Engagement Manager or School Leader.
- Include club goals, schedule, age group, supervision plan, and materials needed.
- Clubs may meet after school and until 6 pm.
- Any fees, field trips, or fundraising require advance approval.

All clubs must adhere to Highland's values of inclusion, respect, and safety.

Requesting Space for an Event

Anyone organizing an event at Highland—whether staff or family-led—must submit a **Facilities & Space Use Request** in advance. This includes use of the gym, kitchen, library, classrooms, or common areas outside of their regular function.

How to request a space:

- Complete the **Facilities Request Form** (linked on the school website or available from the Main Office).
- Submit your request **at least 7 business days** in advance.
- A staff sponsor is required for all non-staff-led events.
- Review the **event checklist** and cleanup procedures if your event includes the **gym** or **kitchen**.

Final approval includes:

- Calendar review for conflicts
- Confirmation with a space lead
- Fundraising approval (if applicable)
- Setup and equipment planning
- Review of after-hours protocols, if needed

Parents may not use the space for personal parties, for-profit programs, or non-school-affiliated religious or political activities without prior approval.

Reference & Resources

Family Resources & Support

In addition to academic and classroom-related support, we offer a variety of resources to help families navigate challenges, celebrate milestones, and stay connected. Whether you need school forms, community services, parenting tools, or tech support, we're here to help.

You can find helpful links and up-to-date information anytime on the [Family Resources page of our website](#).

We also understand that life can be complicated, and families may need support in moments of change, stress, or uncertainty. Our School Social Worker, Family Engagement Manager, and administrative team are available to help connect you with internal and external resources, including housing, counseling, and financial assistance.

If you're ever unsure where to turn, start with the main office—we'll make sure you're not navigating it alone.

Glossary of Highland and Montessori Terms

Adolescent Program (AP)

Highland's program for students in 7th and 8th grade. It focuses on independence, community leadership, real-world learning, and preparation for high school.

AIMSweb

A one-on-one screening tool used in early elementary grades to assess foundational literacy and math skills. Helps teachers track growth and identify students who may benefit from early support.

Assistant Classroom Guide

A trained adult who supports the Lead Guide by helping maintain the classroom environment, guiding students in their work, and assisting with transitions, materials, and classroom routines.

CAT (Comprehensive Academic Teacher)

An academic interventionist who works with students who may need additional support in reading, writing, or math. CATs provide targeted, small-group or one-on-one instruction to help students meet grade-level expectations and build confidence in core academic skills.

CHECK (Children’s House Extended Day Kids)

CHECK stands for “**Children’s House Extended Day Kids.**” It refers to **K3 students who stay beyond the half-day Montessori program, from 11:30 AM until as late as 6:00 PM.**

CHECK is part of our licensed childcare programming and includes lunch, rest time, and a mix of indoor and outdoor play, enrichment, and community-building activities designed specifically for our youngest extended-day learners.

Children’s House

Montessori term for the early childhood classroom for ages 3–6 (K3–K5). A mixed-age environment where students build independence, social skills, and foundational academic skills.

Control of Error

A Montessori concept in which materials are designed to show children when they’ve made a mistake, allowing them to correct it independently without adult intervention.

Follow the Child

A special event where students guide their families through the classroom, showing the materials they’ve been working with and sharing what they’ve learned. It’s a chance for families to experience Montessori through their child’s eyes.

Forward Exam

Wisconsin’s state-mandated standardized test, administered to students in 3rd–8th grade for ELA and math, with science and social studies included in 4th and 8th grade.

Grace and Courtesy

Montessori lessons that teach children how to interact respectfully and kindly with others—covering everything from saying “please” and “thank you” to resolving conflict and using calm voices.

IEP (Individualized Education Program)

A legal plan developed for students who qualify for special education services. It outlines goals, accommodations, and supports tailored to the student’s needs.

LE (Lower Elementary)

Refers to Highland classrooms for students in grades 1–3.

Lead Classroom Guide

A Montessori-certified teacher who serves as the primary educator in a classroom. The Guide prepares the environment, gives lessons, observes students, and partners with families to support student growth.

MMUN (Montessori Model United Nations)

A global program that gives Upper Elementary and Adolescent students the opportunity to role-play as delegates representing countries in a model United Nations. Through research, writing, and public speaking, students develop global awareness, diplomacy skills, and confidence.

Montessori Materials

Hands-on, intentionally designed tools that help students learn abstract concepts through concrete experience—like the Golden Beads for math or Moveable Alphabet for spelling.

Nautilus Approach

Highland's proactive and compassionate approach to discipline. It emphasizes relationship-building, reflection, and meeting students' underlying needs rather than punitive responses.

Occupations

Interdisciplinary, real-world projects in the Adolescent Program that integrate academic skills with practical work and social responsibility. Examples include urban agriculture, entrepreneurship, or the Community Café.

Peace Corner

A space in the classroom where students can go to calm down or reflect quietly, full of tools for practicing emotional regulation and peer mediation.

Planes of Development

A Montessori framework describing four stages of child development:

- First Plane (0–6): The Absorbent Mind
- Second Plane (6–12): Reasoning Mind
- Third Plane (12–18): Social Self and Identity
- Fourth Plane (18–24): Transition to Adulthood

Practical Life

Montessori activities that build independence and coordination through real-world tasks like pouring, buttoning, sweeping, or food preparation.

Records Day

A day set aside for teachers to complete progress reports, assessments, and family communication. There is no school for students on Records Day.

Room Parent

A parent or caregiver who helps coordinate communication between the classroom and families. Room Parents often organize snack sign-ups, field trip volunteers, reminders about school events, and teacher appreciation efforts.

SEL (Social and Emotional Learning)

A curriculum and teaching approach that helps students build skills like self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and positive relationship-building.

Star Assessments

Computer-based reading and math assessments used in 1st–8th grade to track student growth across the year. Administered in fall, winter, and spring.

Transparent Classroom

The platform used by Highland teachers to share student progress, classroom updates, and learning observations with families.

UE (Upper Elementary)

Refers to Highland classrooms for students in grades 4–6.

Work Cycle

A 2–3 hour uninterrupted block of time when students choose, complete, and repeat learning activities at their own pace. A core feature of Montessori classrooms that fosters deep engagement.

Highland FAQ

1. How do I submit my Commitment to Community hours?

You can log your hours online using the form linked in *Notes Home* or on the Highland App. If you're unsure whether something counts, reach out to the Family Engagement Manager.

2. What does it mean that Highland is a non-instrumentality charter school?

It means Highland is part of Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), but we operate independently with our own curriculum, staff, and leadership. We follow district accountability requirements but make school-level decisions locally.

3. How do I pay my programs bill or school fees?

All fees (before/after school care, CHECK, sports, camping, etc.) are paid through **ProCare**. You'll receive billing notices via email or the ProCare app.

4. Why does my child have the same teacher for three years?

Montessori education uses mixed-age classrooms so students can build strong relationships with their teacher and peers. This three-year cycle supports academic continuity, confidence, and leadership development.

5. How do I buy a Highland t-shirt or hoodie?

We offer t-shirt and spirit wear sales a few times a year—usually in fall and spring. Watch *Notes Home* or the school app for order links.

6. What's the best way to stay informed about school events and announcements?

Check your email for the weekly *Notes Home* newsletter, and look out for emails from your child's teacher and Room Parent.

7. How do I contact my child's teacher or Room Parent?

You'll receive contact information at the beginning of the school year. Teachers prefer email for most communication, and Room Parents typically reach out through email or text with sign-ups and reminders.

8. Can I observe my child's classroom?

Yes! We encourage Family observations. Contact your child's teacher to schedule a time and review classroom observation guidelines.

9. What should I do if I have concerns about my child's academic or social-emotional progress?

Start by reaching out to your child's teacher. If additional support is needed, the teacher can involve the Montessori Coach or other support staff.

10. Is Highland a nut-free school?

No, but some classrooms may have nut or food restrictions based on student allergies. You'll receive guidance from your child's teacher if restrictions apply.

11. What happens during weather-related school closures or delays?

Highland follows MPS closures. If MPS is closed due to weather, Highland will be closed. Check local news, the MPS website, or the Highland App for updates.

12. What is the role of student assessments like Forward or STAR testing in a Montessori school?

These assessments help us track student progress and meet state requirements, but they're just one piece of the picture. We always pair test data with deep knowledge of each individual child.