

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**2020 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program**

---

[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [ ] Title I      [X] Charter      [ ] Magnet[X] Choice

Name of Principal Ms. Sarah Verni-Lau  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Highline Academy Southeast  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 2170 South Dahlia Street  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Denver      State CO      Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 80222-5106

County Denver

Telephone (303) 759-7808      Fax \_\_\_\_\_

Web site/URL https://www.highlineacademy.org      E-mail sverni-lau@highlineacademy.org

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\* Mrs. Susana Cordova      E-mail superintendent@dpsk12.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Denver Public Schools      Tel. (720) 423-3200

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board  
President/Chairperson Mr. Brent Baribeau  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

*\*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.*

## **PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION**

---

The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school’s eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. All nominated public schools must meet the state’s performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2020 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
3. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2014 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, or 2019.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution’s equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

---

Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2019-2020) unless otherwise stated.

**DISTRICT** (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools)

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 115 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 31 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 59 High schools
  - 2 K-12 schools
- 207 TOTAL

**SCHOOL** (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

- Urban (city or town)  
 Suburban  
 Rural

3. Number of students as of October 1, 2019 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	27	20	47
1	33	20	53
2	21	30	51
3	26	26	52
4	26	30	56
5	32	25	57
6	40	39	79
7	46	30	76
8	31	23	54
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	282	243	525

\*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 4.2 % Asian
  - 22.3 % Black or African American
  - 21.9 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 47.3 % White
  - 4.3 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2018 - 2019 school year: 2%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain:

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	13
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	13
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2018	526
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.02
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	2

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):

Tigrigna, Spanish, Filipino, Portuguese, Russian, Arabic, Amharic, Susu, Farsi (Western), Farsi (Eastern), Somali, Burmese, Ganda, French, Tajiki, Nepali

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 28 %  
147 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 43 %

Total number students who qualify: 224

8. Students receiving special education services: 7 %

35 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>2</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>3</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>1</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>33</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>9</u> Speech or Language Impairment         |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 4

10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	3
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	30
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	14
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	6
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	4

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 17:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

<b>Required Information</b>	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015
Daily student attendance	95%	95%	95%	96%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2019.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes  No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school’s mission or vision statement.

Highline Academy exists to foster a diverse and equitable community of youth and adults striving together for academic, personal, and civic excellence.

16. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

Highline Academy is authorized by Denver Public Schools and participates in the DPS choice process. All schools in Denver Public Schools are choice schools; while some schools do have boundaries; all families participate in choice. Highline Academy is not a boundary school, all families choice in. Each family in the district can rank up to 12 schools for their student. Families are empowered to attend school tours to help them determine how to rank schools. Highline conducts tours twice a month November - February. There are two rounds of choice, the first window opens mid January and closes Mid February; the second opens in March and extends until the next school year begins. Families are admitted to one of their 12 schools. If they are not admitted to their first choice school, they are on the waitlist for any school that they ranked higher until October 1st of the new school year.

## **PART III - SUMMARY**

---

Highline Academy Southeast brings together families from a wide array of ethnic, religious, national, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds and was founded on a very simple principle: these many groups could not only co-exist, and not only live and work together, but also could thrive together academically. Highline's vision was to create a charter school that set a high standard for all students in an integrated setting, and to provide each student with the tools needed to reach high levels of academic, civic and personal excellence. In 2004, founders of the school and our Board of Directors hoped to accomplish this through a content-rich liberal arts curriculum that recognized the value of a well-rounded education, differentiated instruction in core subjects, small class sizes, a safe and disciplined environment, and a strong focus on character development and respect for diversity. Today, Highline serves 525 students from over 30 different countries speaking 16 different home languages. We serve students from across metro Denver from the wealthiest areas to some of the poorest neighborhoods in the city. All of our staff participate in extensive diversity, equity, and inclusion training to help them develop the tools to be effective educators in our diverse community.

Located in Southeast Denver, Highline Academy is at the intersection of Interstate 25 and Evans, a main industrial corridor running throughout Denver. We sit in the middle of one of the most affluent neighborhoods in Denver, University Park, more working-class neighborhoods, several multifamily housing units border our school. Our building was once a post office, then a mechanic training facility, and in 2010 was converted to be a school. We have 25 classrooms including an art room, music room, library, and gymnasium. Space is a precious commodity. Many of our teachers share classrooms and teach off of carts in other spaces. Highline is an inclusion model school; whenever possible all services for exceptional needs students are provide via push supports.

Visit Highline Academy on any given day, and you'll see students engaged in small-group work, independent research, classroom presentations, hands-on activities, technology-based activities and note-taking during lecture. Visit the same classroom over a weeklong period, and you'll see a similarly diverse range of activities. Not every child learns the same way, and, for this reason, our teachers do not teach in exactly the same way day after day. Our middle school is a one-to-one school, where each student uses a school-provided Chromebook in their class. We use several curriculums as foundational pieces at Highline, including EngageNY, Eureka math, TCI, and Amplify; however, we believe that teachers are not just implementors but practitioners. We encourage teachers to make the curriculum their own and to focus more on teaching the students in their classroom than prescribed content. This has resulted in highly engaged students, responsive classroom environments, and teachers who are partners in the work of education.

Student achievement is taken very seriously at Highline, and progress is monitored through module assessments built around a 6-8 week cycle. Highline Academy uses module assessments, interim assessments and STAR data to identify the academic needs of our students. Students who have been identified as performing significantly below grade level receive remediation through our intervention program. Core subject teachers engage in coaching and data analysis each week to monitor student growth, measure the effectiveness of their teaching and alter planning to ensure all student needs are met.

Not only do our students participate in rigorous, personalized academic content each day, but students also experience a true liberal arts education. Students attend library, music, art, physical education, Spanish, and social emotional classes multiple times a week. Our students participate in musical performances and "informances" (classroom performances), art showcases, Spanish language presentations, book talks, and sporting events multiple times a year. At Highline we recognize that diversity is not just in the demographics of our population, but in the programming that we can provide to students. Some of our students shine their brightest when they are in these creative environments.

In addition to regular classes, Highline sponsors two day-long celebrations each year: Literacy Day and Health and Wellness Day. For both days we pause regular instruction across the school for students to participate in sessions with a specific focus. On literacy day, teachers prepare sessions for students at a variety of grade levels to develop a love of literacy. Students are encouraged to wear pajamas and bring their

favorite books as we also include time for students to share their favorite books with their classmates. On Health and Wellness Day, experts from around the city run sessions for students on physical, mental, and emotional health. Presentations range from boot camps to cooking lessons to meditation.

As a community we recognize that the needs of our students extend beyond academics. We have two full-time mental health professionals on staff who serve families and students daily. We have a community garden and a food pantry that are both maintained by students. Each week and over extended breaks, we send food bags home with families experiencing food insecurity. At the holidays we run a family sponsorship program where food and gift are provided to families in need. This year we had over 50 families who gave to over 35 receiving families.

## **PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

---

### **1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.**

**1a.** Overall approach, which may include overarching philosophy or approaches common across subject areas

At Highline Academy Southeast, we believe that all students can demonstrate proficiency through strategic use of differentiated teaching, data analysis, scaffolds, and intervention. We use the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) to guide our instruction. We are a standards-based teaching and grading school. Teachers spend time weekly in collaborative grade level and vertical teams to identify priority standards, design standards aligned rubrics, and identify common data points for grading. We use a performance grouping model for literacy and math. All students at a grade level receive the same curriculum but the depth and pacing is different depending on student need. Performance grouping is an essential tool that allows us to identify needs and meet them quickly. In our middle school, the one-to-one model allows us to provide differentiated assignments to students through Google classroom and conduct checks for understanding multiple times during a lesson through a variety of platforms which leads to in the moment responsive teaching.

We measure student progress on priority standards through triangulated data point - STAR assessments in reading and math, in-house created interim assessments, and classroom data. Non-curriculum assessments are given approximately every six weeks and compared to classroom data. Teachers participate in six-week data cycles for priority standards where weekly work samples are used to determine students who are or are not meeting the standard. Whole class and individual re-teach instruction is created and implemented weekly based on data teams. We have three full time interventionists who provide small group intervention in reading and math. Students who do not grow for several rounds of intervention may be referred to our multi-tiered student support team for additional intervention.

**1b.** Reading/English language arts

In our elementary school language arts is split in to two blocks, differentiated learning and literacy. The 45 minute differentiated learning block is taught in small groups with students rotating through four centers - teacher directed, blended learning, writing, and independent reading. Students are performance grouped for guided reading. The classroom with struggling learners has an additional teacher who replaces one of the independent centers with more targeted, gap filling instruction. Assessments are used at least every six weeks, more frequently in some places, to adjust instructional focus. English Learners attend English Language Development (ELD) class during this time. We use the EL Achieve curriculum to provide instruction in the four domains of language development - listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

In the language arts block, we use National Geographic's Reach for Reading curriculum in kindergarten through second grade and EngageNY's curriculum in 3rd through 8th grade. Teachers use these curriculums as a tool for developing their own responsive curriculum based on the Common Core State Standards. We have enhanced the novel selection from EngageNY to include more culturally responsive texts. The reading block is provided through a combination of whole group and small group instruction. In the primary grades, the focus is on foundational reading skills. Phonics skills are explicitly taught and then applied through texts. For 3rd grade and up we focus on teaching critical thinking through reading and writing. Over the course of a unit students are exposed to a variety of texts, images, podcasts, and media connected to the topic of study. Students build their own understanding using sources and their guide. Students progress is regularly measured through classrooms assessments, STAR assessments, and the developmental reading assessment (DRA).

**1c.** Mathematics

Students in kindergarten through 8th grade use the Eureka Math program to support the instruction of the Common Core State Standards. Within each module provided by the curriculum, teachers have selected priority standards to guide their teaching. Extension activities and interventions are used to support student

understanding of priority standards. Additionally, the mathematical practices standards are woven into all math classes. Math is taught in a variety of developmentally appropriate ways - manipulatives, modeling, student guided small group, direct instruction, and technology are used throughout classroom to teach math. Our math teachers are focused on students being able to explain their answers. We expect that students can write number sentences to show their answer but also explain via a narrative response. We focus on assessing for reasonableness as a skill that helps develop mastery. Student progress is measured by end-of-module assessments and the STAR assessment, which is given every six weeks.

Similar to reading, we use a performance group model is used for math. While all grade level classrooms are using the same curriculum and priority standards, the pacing and reteaching of foundational skills differs across classrooms. Classrooms with struggling mathematicians have additional intervention teachers in the room to focus specifically on reteaching foundational skills connected to the current priority standard.

#### **1d. Science**

All science classes at Highline Academy Southeast are aligned to the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). In the elementary school we use TCI's Science Alive! curriculum, in middle school we use the Amplify curriculum. Both curriculums are hands-on, experiment-based curriculums. Science Alive! provides students foundational exposure to a wide range of scientific topics. Students read about concepts, watch videos about them, and conduct experiments related to each concept. Teachers often enhance the curriculum by creating additional experiments beyond what is provided by the curriculum. In middle school, the Amplify curriculum is rooted in bringing the "real world" of science into the classroom. Students learn about topics, participate in simulations, and apply their newly gained knowledge to solve current, real world issues. All of Amplify's curriculum is online which supports the one to one model in our middle school.

Writing is also a key feature in all science classes. At Highline, we believe that strong writers are developed when they have rich topics to write about, like those covered in science class. Each science unit is enhanced by teachers to include writing assignments connected to the content that allow students to practice the CCSS writing standards.

#### **1e. Social studies/history/civic learning and engagement**

Social Studies classes are aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards and use TCI's History Alive! curriculum. In middle school we also use the Document Based Questioning (DBQ) project to extend student learning. Social studies units in elementary school are focused on developing a student understanding of that it means to be a member of a community a variety of levels - home, school, city, state, and country. Within each of these levels students learn about government, economics, and geography. In middle school, our students participate in US and World history courses as well as an Economics and Geography course. Classes in the middle school are mixed grade level. The middle school content is focused on providing multiple viewpoints of key historic events through first- and second-hand documents. Students are taught to think critically about the information that is presented and draw their own conclusions about fault, impact, responsibility, and lessons learned. Our goal in all our social studies classes in kindergarten through 8th grade is that students understand social responsibility and their role in building a strong community.

Similar to science, social studies is also a course where units have been modified to include writing assignments aligned to CCSS.

#### **1f. For secondary schools:**

#### **1g. For schools that offer preschool for three- and/or four-year old students:**

#### **2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

All students at Highline Academy Southeast attend a variety of specials programs which include: art, music, physical education, Spanish, library, and social emotional classes. Each of these courses have at least one dedicated, highly qualified instructor.

Art, music, and physical education are attended by elementary students on a rotation schedule. Every third day students attend each of the classes. In middle school, students attend a six-week elective course on each of these three content areas. These courses use the Colorado Academic Standards to guide instruction.

In physical education, students begin focused on movement, body awareness, and foundational skills. In upper elementary students begin units of study on specific team sports. In middle school, six-week units include basketball, hockey, soccer, and volleyball. Over these six weeks students participate in fundamental workshops and scrimmage games. Explicit instruction on sportsmanship is woven into all units at all grade levels.

Music classes are designed to provide students with exposure to a range of musical expression including vocals and instruments. Courses focus not just on practicing skills, but on application of skills. In each unit students of all ages create their own unique musical pieces. In middle school, six-week courses include drumming, choir, brass instrumentals, and drama. Students end each six-week cycle with a whole school performance.

Art courses follow a similar model to music. In elementary school students are exposed to a variety of artists and mediums. Art classes are focused on created expression. Students create at least one piece of art during each class. In middle schools, students spend a six-week course focused on a specific medium including photography, clay, drawing, and painting.

All students in elementary and middle school attend one 40-minute library class each week as a part of their language arts class. Highline Academy employs a full-time librarian who teaches these classes and maintains our library. Library class focuses on explicit reading skills through exposure to a variety of genres. A typical class includes a lesson, student work time, book check out, and reading time. Our librarian also manages the Accelerated Reader program for our school, students can take AR tests during library time.

Spanish classes begin in kindergarten at Highline Academy. Students in kindergarten through 4th grade have two 40-minute Spanish classes a week. In 5th grade students have three 40-minute classes a week, and in middle school Spanish is a core subject. All students attend Spanish for one 70-minute academic period a day. Students who graduate from Highline can fluently speak, read, and write Spanish and often test into honors level Spanish classes in high school. Highline has three full-time Spanish teachers. We use the *Descubre el Español* and *Realidades* curriculums as our foundation. Students engage in grammar, speaking, listening, and reading activities weekly.

Highline provides a social-emotional class two times a week for 40 minutes to elementary school students and daily for 20 minutes to middle school students. We have a dedicated social-emotional teacher who provides this content. We use the Second Step curriculum throughout the school as well as Zones of Regulation and Superflex in the early elementary. During social-emotional classes students learn explicit skills such as problem solving, perseverance, and meditation; additionally, students are able to bring up current issues that they are having for individual or group problem solving. In middle school social emotional time happens in advisory, small-group grade-level time. This is structured time designed to build social relationships with peers through explicit social skills instruction, community building activities, and social activities.

### **3. Academic Supports:**

#### **3a. Students performing below grade level**

At Highline Academy Southeast we have three full-time interventionists who provide reading and math intervention at all grade levels. At the start of each year we give students the STAR assessment in math and reading. Students who score in the bottom quartile are identified as students who may benefit from intervention. These students are given additional screeners which may include the CORE phonics assessment, the DRA, Bridges math intervention screener. Using multiple data points, students are put into intervention groups of no more than five. Intervention cycles are six weeks, with pre- and post-assessment

weeks at the start and end. Students can stay in intervention for multiple rounds or may just need one cycle. We use the Orton Gillingham phonics program, Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI), and Bridges math intervention as our research based intervention program.

Our interventionists also oversee our MTSS system. They serve as case managers for students who are not making growth through the intervention process and would benefit from individual intervention. MTSS meetings include parents, student, teachers, and case manager; they happen every six weeks. Students who still do not make growth after several round of MTSS might be identified for special education testing.

### **3b. Students performing above grade level**

Highline Academy Southeast's performance grouping model is a great way to meet the needs of advanced learners. At Highline we firmly believe that teaching advanced students doesn't mean that students need more work or harder work, rather, we believe that advanced students need engaging opportunities to take ownership of their learning. The teachers who teach our highest achieving learners teach the same curriculum as other teachers at their grade level, but the instruction model is designed to put ownership on students. For example, in math classes students might provide feedback on classmates work real time, explaining opportunities for growth using standards language for feedback. In literacy classes students might engage in Socratic seminars based on their own research. Additionally, all Highline students take the NNAT to screen for gifted and talented status at kindergarten, 2nd grade, and 6th grade. Students who are identified are provided with an Advanced Learning Plan (ALP). ALPs are written with input from our GT coordinator, teachers, students, and parents. They are intended to be documents that allow students to participate in creating the most challenging and engaging school environment possible.

### **3c. Special education**

Highline Academy Southeast is an inclusion model school. We are also a cross-category school, meaning we serve students need to be in the general education classroom for 21% or more of their day. All students with Individual Learning Plans (IEP) are served within the classroom whenever possible. We have three full-time special educators and two special education teaching assistants (TA) on staff. Special Education teachers and TAs push in to classrooms and co-teach with general education teachers in all content areas. The co-teaching model varies based on the needs of students as documented in their IEPs, but all general education and special education teacher co-plan and co-teach classes daily. Mental health, occupational therapy, and speech therapy are provided in class when possible, though sometimes it is better for the student to receive services in a pull out setting.

### **3d. ELLs, if a special program or intervention is offered**

Highline Academy Southeast employs a full time ELD (English Language Development) coordinator who oversees all programing, progress monitoring, and administrative task for English Learners (ELs). The registration packet for Highline Academy includes a home language questionnaire. Any student who lives in a home where another language is spoken is given a baseline assessment to determine if they would benefit from direct instruction in English development. ELs have 45 minutes of language development instruction during our differentiation block each day. In elementary school, we use the EL Achieve curriculum for ELD instruction. In middle school, our ELD coordinator and a social studies teacher co-teach a ELD/History class for all ELs. The class uses the Colorado state Academic Standards and WIDA standards to provide social studies content and language development skills. Progress of ELs is monitored throughout the year using a body of evidence including classroom assignments and assessments, state testing, STAR data, and ACCESS testing results. Students who are making progress can be nominated to our authorizer, Denver Public Schools, for redesignation. If a student qualifies, the student no longer has the ELD block each day, however, we monitor their progress for two more years before officially exiting them from the ELD program.

### **3e. Other populations (e.g., migrant), if a special program or intervention is offered**

## **PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE**

---

### **1. Engaging Students:**

Highline Academy implements PBIS, Love and Logic, and Restorative Practices in addition to our character education program - REACH. We spend the first three days of school each year specifically focusing on community building and introducing what it means to REACH up for academic excellence, REACH in for personal excellence, and REACH out to better the community. These first three days are three of the most important days of the year. We are able to show each student what it looks like and sounds like to be a member of our school community. Students leave the first week of school connected to their peers and invested in building a strong community. As a staff, we focus on consistently using REACH language with our students: teachers use REACH language during academic classes, we use REACH language when we are talking about behavior choices, all schoolwide expectations are tied to REACH values. This consistent messaging allows us to really embed REACH in our students' day to day life at Highline. We reinforce REACH throughout the school year in different ways based on grade level; some of the reinforcements used include REACH cards, positive phone calls home, dress-down days for exhibiting REACH values, and monthly school wide assemblies.

Using REACH alongside Restorative Practices, Love and Logic, and PBIS allows us to create a community oriented, positive school environment. Students know what success looks like at Highline - they are explicitly taught what we expect; when expectations are not being met, we approach the student in a respectful manner that focuses on behavior choices not shaming students; and finally, through Restorative Practices, students are able to reflect on their behavior and own the harm they caused. This has allowed us to create an environment that is not fear or consequence based, rather one that celebrates mistakes and what we learn from them. In fact, we don't have a school-wide detention or study hall because we firmly believe that students thrive when they are empowered as respected members of a school community. We have found that through these practices students are able to spend more time in the classroom learning, build stronger, trusting relationships with teachers, and create a compassionate community with their peers.

### **2. Engaging Families and Community:**

Highline Academy Southeast is a school of choice, which means we don't serve families from a specific neighborhood. Because of this, we work especially hard to build partnerships with parents. We host a variety of events the Spring before students join our community. Our goal is to ensure that new families are knowledgeable about Highline and excited to join our community. We also match new families with a current Highline family through an ambassador program. The ambassador is someone who speaks the same language as the new family and ideally has children in the same grade. The goal is that new families are not just connected to Highline but to the community as well. Once families are started at Highline we have many community-building nights including food truck dinners, bingo nights, a pool party, and child/parent dances. Highline also encourages parents to be volunteers within our community. We have a very active parents with purpose (PWP) that supports with the organization of over 300 parent volunteers each year. Highline actively works to create an open environment for parents to encourage engagement and partnership.

Highline parents are an essential voice in the decision-making process at Highline. In a recent example, Highline was considering a new aftercare company for families. Any interested parent was invited to join the committee to make the selection. Twelve parents participated in the process and ultimately the parents selected the new program. This is common practice at Highline. Parents also serve on our school accountability committee which works directly with the principal to provide oversight on all areas of Highline. Finally, the principal hosts a monthly coffee for all parents to attend where parents can give feedback and hear details about what the school is working on.

Highline teachers are the frontlines of communication about student needs and performance. Each teacher has either Class Dojo or Remind for direct, quick communication with parents. Through these platforms' teachers share classroom updates and photos multiple times a week. We use the Google classroom platform

which keeps parents up to date on student assignments. Highline hosts conferences with families three times a year; goal setting in September, progress monitor in February, and student lead in late May. Between these times teachers may call a "care and concern" meeting to work collaboratively with families on specific student needs. Highline hosts education nights several times a year for parents to ensure all parents have the tools they need to actively participate in student learning. Grades are available to parents any time through our learning management system, Infinite Campus. Formal report cards are sent home twice a year and Star assessment data is sent home three times a year.

The Highline network employs a Director of Communication who oversees building community partnerships.

### **3. Creating Professional Culture:**

Highline Academy expects that all teachers are reflective and life-long learners. In turn, Highline Academy strives to provide focused, purposeful, and actionable professional development for teachers. All teachers at Highline Academy participate in the coaching and observation cycle weekly. The focus of coaching is growth - novice teachers use a teaching framework to develop foundational skills through coaching, effective teachers set their own instructional goals that become the focus of coaching. In addition to weekly coaching, teachers also have extensive professional development. Teachers return to school two and half weeks before students begin each school year. Each year we pick a specific focus for professional development; recent topics include data drive instruction, differentiation, DEI work, writing instruction, trauma informed practices, rubric use and design, and student feedback. During our summer institute, we roll out our focus for the year and provide multiple sessions on the focus topic over the two weeks. Teachers also meet in grade-level and vertical teams to align academic expectations for the year. Throughout the year, Wednesday is an early release day for students to allow staff to participate in professional development. Professional Development is sometimes whole group; however, over the last two years we have implement a practice called "collaborative cycles" where teacher leaders provide four-week cycles on a topic and teacher self-select into cycles. All professional development is designed to be actionable; what teachers learn on Wednesday afternoon can be implemented on Thursday morning.

We also prioritize staff culture as a school. Teachers work exceptionally hard and deserve to work in a professional environment where they are appreciated. During summer institute, teachers work collaboratively to define the culture they want, what behaviors are connected to that and even write a survey that we use to evaluate the quality of our culture monthly. We also have professional norms and internal commitments that we use to celebrate each other with shout-outs at our weekly staff meeting. Our sunshine committee does birthday celebrations and a preferred parking spot for staff members each week. As a school leadership team, we work to provide celebrations where we can - staff theme days, pot lucks, Friday fun - we know that all teachers deserve to have fun at work. Because of the explicit focus on staff culture, Highline Academy has a 90% staff retention rate.

### **4. School Leadership:**

The leadership team at Highline Southeast includes the campus principal and two assistant principals, one who oversees the elementary school and the other, the middle school. The principal and assistant principals are instructional leaders on the campus, they coach 15 - 20 teachers each on a weekly basis. In addition, they run data teams and design all professional development. The three administrators share an office that they open as a teacher work space during the day to encourage collaboration and accessibility.

All leaders at Highline are hired for their servant leadership mentality - there is no task we would ask staff to do that we would not do ourselves. You can find our school leaders running the crosswalk, cleaning the gym after lunch, or stepping in to teach classes; if we see the need we will meet it. In addition to servant leadership, our principal believes in shared leadership. Teachers serve in a variety of different committees and teams throughout the school. Teachers are nominated by peers to serve on the teacher leadership team (TLT) each year. This team meets regularly with the school administration to provide feedback and support with new initiatives. Teachers can also volunteer to be on our school accountability committee, the PWP, run our service learning program, oversee our garden, run student council, and mentor new teachers. All

teachers have two one-on-one feedback meetings a year with the principal where they provide feedback on leadership, systems, and their ideas for improvement. Shared leadership is not just about roles, but about ownership. Our whole staff owns the successes and challenges of our students and our school.

At Highline Academy Southeast our principal believes that our teachers are experts in their field; as such, the teachers have autonomy to make decisions that they feel are best for their students. The principal sets the vision for the school, but the teachers can execute on the vision in the way that best works for them. The result of this style is that each classroom looks different, yet the common goals of the school are visible in each. Recently teachers were asked to create purposeful community time during an extended block on Wednesday morning. Rather than prescribing a morning meeting format, teachers were left to develop their own structure. The result was that each teacher was able to bring their passions into their classrooms to connect with students - teachers used music, service learning, games, and books to build community with their students in a way that they were entirely comfortable with. With a clear vision for intended impact but openness for execution, teachers were empowered to take ownership of a new idea rather than push back.

## **PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

---

Over the past few years Highline Academy has made several changes that we believe contributes to the exponential growth that we have recently seen, however, the most impactful change that we have made is in how we think about data driven instruction (DDI). Highline began using DDI practices in 2010 with interim assessments, however, we were not having impact on student learning. Beginning in Spring of 2018 we implemented new data driven practices with the intention of ensuring that we were meeting the needs of the diverse population of students we serve.

The first change we made was developing a common definition of proficiency. Data is only impactful when everyone understands the bar that they are holding for students. We found that while we were all teaching standards, teachers at the same grade level had a different understanding of what mastery really looked like. Beginning in Spring 2018, teachers worked through each priority standard at their grade level and developed a common understanding of proficiency. They wrote exemplars that showcased what proficiency looked like for students and created rubrics aligned to standards. Teachers also took all student assessments as teams; during the process they identified skills that would need explicit instruction during class time. These skills may or may not have been highlighted within the curriculum. Where it was needed, teachers adjusted the curriculum to be more standards aligned. It took us several months to complete this process for all standards and subject areas, but it was time well spent. Through the process teachers engaged in rich conversations about learning goals and were able to rethink how they spend instructional time. The most impactful part of this process, however, was that it created a common expectation for students. Regardless of where students were starting, we knew where we needed to get them.

At the start of the 2018-2019 school year we continued our data driven instruction work by revamping our data team structure. We wanted to make sure we were continuing the work from the Spring in a purposeful way. Previously data team time was spent on identifying issues, not on creating action plans. The new format in fall of 2018 was focused on action. Teachers engaged in a six-week cycle on a priority standard within the current units they were teaching. The first week was spent reviewing rubrics and creating a baseline assessment; the following five weeks were spent looking at student work samples and identifying action plans. Each week teachers narrowed their focus on the students who needed additional supports, provided supports, and analyzed the impact. The shift in process resulted in high growth for students - all students. Teachers were able to make small adjustments to their lessons to really give students what they needed, then quickly see if those adjustments were effective. We stopped talking about problems and started talking about solutions.

Ultimately the data-driven instruction practices we have implemented have created a clear road map for teachers and empowered teachers to be more responsive to the needs of the students within their classrooms. As we have become more comfortable with DDI, we now rely on standards to drive our work, with the curriculum as a tool not the guide. Our classrooms are responsive; teachers believe that they have the tools to help every student reach their potential.