

U.S. Department of Education
2017 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Ms. Denise B McLean

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Highland School of Technology

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 1600 North Morris Street

(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Gastonia State NC Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 28052-1739

County Gaston County

Telephone (704) 810-8816 Fax (704) 866-6105

Web site/URL

<http://www.gaston.k12.nc.us/Domain/29>

E-mail dbmclean@gaston.k12.nc.us

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*Mr. Jeffrey Booker E-mail jbooker@gaston.k12.nc.us

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Gaston County School District Tel. (704) 866-6100

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. Kevin Collier

(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. 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.)
2. 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 and all subgroups, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2017 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.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2011 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, or 2016.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
8. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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.
12. 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 (2016-2017) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 30 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 11 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 12 High schools
 - 1 K-12 schools
- 54 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
 - Suburban with characteristics typical of an urban area
 - Suburban
 - Small city or town in a rural area
 - Rural
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2016 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	69	76	145
10	73	65	138
11	62	78	140
12 or higher	57	73	130
Total Students	261	292	553

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 4 % Asian
 - 10 % Black or African American
 - 11 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 70 % White
 - 5 % 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 2015 – 2016 school year: 2%

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

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	9
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	9
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	561
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.016
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	2

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 0 %
0 Total number ELL

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 27 %
Total number students who qualify: 149

8. Students receiving special education services: 0 %
3 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.

- 2 Autism
- 0 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 0 Emotional Disturbance
- 0 Hearing Impairment
- 0 Mental Retardation
- 0 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 0 Other Health Impaired
- 1 Specific Learning Disability
- 0 Speech or Language Impairment
- 0 Traumatic Brain Injury
- 0 Visual Impairment Including Blindness
- 0 Developmentally Delayed

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 4
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	38
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	1
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	1
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	5

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 15:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012
Daily student attendance	95%	95%	95%	96%	96%
High school graduation rate	100%	100%	99%	99%	100%

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 2016.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	129
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	67%
Enrolled in a community college	28%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	3%
Joined the military or other public service	2%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.
Yes _ No X

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.

To prepare students for success in post-secondary education, the community, and workplace by providing students with a rigorous and relevant academic, character, and technological education.

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

Highland School of Technology, a career and technical magnet high school, requires students to apply to attend during their eighth grade year. Each spring the school holds an open house event where interested candidates, along with their families, visit and learn about the school and its career pathways firsthand. In addition, members of the counseling and administrative staff visit the eleven area middle schools to showcase Highland and its benefits. The middle school students view a promotional video created by our graphics students. A deeper explanation of the unique features of Highland is also presented through a digital presentation. School tours are available via appointment by the student Ram HOSTs. Application prerequisites are as follows: students and parents must be residents of Gaston County, students applying must have a C average or higher, must be in good standing in conduct, must have at least a 94% attendance rate, and must score at least a Level III or higher on the End of Course tests for reading and math in both seventh and eighth grade.

PART III – SUMMARY

Highland School of Technology (HST) is a career and technical magnet high school, grades 9-12, reflecting the 260,000 residents of Gaston County, North Carolina. Opening as a one-of-a-kind smaller learning community in 2000, Highland is a renovated and re-purposed public school with three academies and seven pathway options including: Allied Health Science, Medical Science, Dental Science, Computer Engineering, Business and Legal Studies, Manufacturing and Engineering Technology, and Graphics. Admission into this prestigious school is through a prerequisite application process and then lottery system. The number of students from each feeder school represents the distribution throughout the school district.

Highland's parents are crucial to the school's success, remaining involved with activities and in constant communication with teachers. Their confidence in the education Highland provides is evident. One parent recently emailed, "I feel like my son will be better prepared for college...He loves Moot court and FBLA as well as Student Council, and we feel these activities help to make him well-rounded." Because our students come from across the county, parents commit to a commute to support their children's involvement in after school tutoring sessions, extracurricular activities, and athletic practices. Parents' strong involvement pays off to ensure student participation and success.

Highland is made up of diverse students; however, they are connected through their common interest in academia. Student collaboration leads to authentic conversations about classroom content. Students hold each other accountable, understanding the importance of drawing upon each other's strengths. Highland students take academics seriously, while being versatile in the arts, athletics, and extracurricular activities, and they are driven by success to achieve in and out of the classroom.

With various competitive events, students earn numerous awards for effort and persistence. Annually, Highland art students compete in the Gaston County Schools' art show where unique displays capture titles of Best in Show and Director's Choice, taking honors in drawing, ceramics, and fiber arts. Highland's band recently competed at the coveted Music Performance Assessment (MPA) for the first time in school history, receiving straight superiors! Students have earned passage to state and national competitions for individual and group performances. A Microsoft Office Excel National Competition winner in 2016 was a Highland student, while additional state awards at the Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSO) have also been earned. The Class of 2016 won over 8.3 million dollars in scholarship money, with past graduates receiving the prestigious Morehead-Cain, Park, Robertson, National Merit Scholarships, and Air Force Academy Appointments. They additionally earned Alumni, Chancellor's, Dean's, and Presidential scholarships to many post-secondary institutions.

Success is attributed to rigorous academics including Advanced Placement, Career and College Promise (CCP), North Carolina Virtual Public Schools (NCVPS), and Gaston Online (GO) courses. Likewise, students are required to take a fourth math along with demanding, critical-thinking infused, and application-based career and technical education courses associated with career pathways. Highland seniors take Advanced Studies, a course allowing students to demonstrate their pathway skills and knowledge through maintaining a journal, building a resume, and writing a research paper. Students participate in a mock interview with a member of the professional community as well as present a digital portfolio on their high school career. All teachers help prepare students for this capstone, requiring students to select artifacts and write reflections. Their digital portfolio is presented to peers, teachers, parents, and community members. They also complete an internship which provides valuable experience in the professional workplace. Highland students intern at hospitals, dental offices, law firms, city government offices, engineering firms, print and graphics companies, accounting firms, and law enforcement agencies. Advanced Studies is designed to ensure Highland students are career and college ready by using real world experiences and applying the knowledge they learned while at HST.

Highland is rich with tradition, providing for the community while celebrating the school. For example, during Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA) Week, students dress like healthcare professionals, sport HOSA temporary tattoos, and attend the HOSA meeting led by a medical professional. Recently, they held a Smile Drive, collecting over 1,200 dental products which were distributed to local shelters and

nursing facilities. Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) sponsors Hour of Code, while Technology Students of America (TSA) showcases robotics and 3-D printing. All three big clubs jointly sponsor a Winter Warmth drive, and Student Council sponsors Can the Principal, which is a drive for local food banks. College Week is a time to wear college gear, inquire about colleges teachers attended, and complete college applications. Teachers also come together for some fun competition with the Relay for Life's Pink Toilet Fundraiser, raising cancer awareness.

Highland School of Technology is serious about success in every way. The atmosphere is one of excellence. We simply refuse to settle for mediocrity. Because of this, HST has had one of the highest cohort graduation rates for any public high school in North Carolina for the last eleven years. We have a Performance Grade of A+ NG (No Gap). Teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders take great pride in the work that is done and see it as an honor to be affiliated with Highland School of Technology.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Highland School of Technology (HST) follows the curriculum and learning standards set forth by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. To advance academic achievement of these standards, HST teachers deliver student-centered lessons designed to promote civic learning and engagement as well as build foundational skills. Lessons are infused with critical-thinking, problem-solving, project-based, and collaborative learning opportunities as these best practices promote achievement and teach skills that transfer to success in college and the workplace. HST collaborates with business leaders and stakeholders to enhance students' achievement, civic engagement, to offer real world learning experiences, and prepare students to be ready for post-secondary pursuits.

Highland Language Arts curriculum encompasses both the foundations of reading and writing while building civic awareness. HST students take four required English classes in which they think critically in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language. In English I & II, students learn to cite textual evidence to support analysis of literature by incorporating graphic organizers, classroom discussions, and reflective writing. Students make inferences through reading and develop higher order thinking skills and also master grammar/usage/mechanics, write well-developed essays, and critique and edit writing samples. College readiness and digital literacy are taught in English III through means of Google applications and Web 2.0 resources. Students create public service announcements published on social media to encourage reading to a wider audience. Persuasive videos on issues facing the world today that students feel passionately about are also published online. Research skills such as avoiding plagiarism, using credible sources, and properly citing sources, while also gaining writing skills specifically in the areas of argument and exposition are also taught. English IV students pair their literary analysis skills with close reading of informational texts to support other core subjects and pathway courses. Learning strategies include seminar discussions, close reading annotations, Ignite presentations, and technology integrations.

Math teachers utilize real-world data, student interest, and current events to make learning relevant. Foundational skills are spiraled throughout curricula with lessons designed to support civic learning and community engagement. Best practices in modeling, peer collaboration, experimentation, and discovery learning are employed. For example, in Math II and III, students use factoring (learned in Math I) to solve real-world applications of quadratics and other polynomial functions. In Advanced Placement (AP) Calculus, connections are made among real-world problems that are represented graphically, numerically, analytically, and verbally. Strong emphasis is placed on solving problems and drawing conclusions from data. For example, Math III Honors students learn about statistics and create a sample survey, collecting quantitative data from at least 100 people in the school and the community which is then used to determine the mean, median, mode, standard deviation and what percent of people fall within 68%, 95% and 99.7% of a normal distribution. This project reinforces the concepts of statistics, creates interaction within the community around us, and broadens students' sociological perspectives on contemporary issues.

Science courses are taught with different modalities: simulations (both virtual and hands-on), project-based learning, independent research projects, integration among the disciplines as well as online textbooks. Flipped classrooms are used to increase time for hands-on lab experiments. For example, Earth and Environmental Science (EES) students teamed with Civics students for a research based project on renewable energy focused on the human impact of our energy needs, developing environmentally friendly ways to power local communities and businesses. All facets of the science curriculum were covered with an emphasis on engineering and civic responsibility. To advance achievement, lessons are designed to vertically align with Biology, Anatomy, Chemistry, and Physics. Inquiry-based investigations cultivate students' understanding of the AP Biology and AP Chemistry curricula as they explore atomic structure, intermolecular forces and bonding, chemical reactions, kinetics, thermodynamics, and equilibrium.

World History explores recurring themes of human experience common to civilizations around the globe. Students study themes of geography and analyze cultural traits of civilizations. Problem-seeking, problem-solving, critical analysis, and reflective thinking help students examine historical roots of significant events,

movements, and phenomena. In Civics and Economics, students develop a practical understanding of the systems that affect their lives as consumers and citizens. Students complete an Election Project where they model what it is like to run a political campaign. They practice and engage in the US election process, preparing for their civic life after high school. This curriculum supports state standards of "analyzing the election process at the national, state and local levels in terms of the checks and balances provided by qualifications and procedures for voting." Students become aware of their rights and responsibilities and put this information into practice.

Through Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, Guidance curricula, and dual enrollment in College and Career Promise (CCP) classes, Highland students are both college and career ready. Ninety-five percent of our 2016 graduates entered post-secondary institutions. Three percent went directly into the workforce, and two percent enlisted into the military. In addition to the stringent demands of academic coursework, career pathway programs focus on the intricacies of a career area, and school counselors help students plan and meet their career and college goals. The result of concentration and hard work is a graduating class replete with college and career ready students.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

The Arts (visual and performing) occur every day for students who choose these elective courses. Students are registered for Art, Band, Chorus, and/or Theatre Arts based on their interests and level (beginning, intermediate, proficient, or advanced). The visual arts program is designed to develop visual literacy by promoting fluency in the various modes of visual communication. Students learn the visual arts by using a wide range of subject matter, media, and means to express their ideas, emotions, and knowledge. Visual arts education is a multifaceted creative process which includes the development of perceptual awareness and the ability to use materials expressively. The theatre arts program integrates several aspects of the art form: script writing, acting, designing, directing, researching, comparing art forms, analyzing, critiquing, and understanding context. Using these skills, students create situations to play and assume roles; they interact with peers and arrange environments to bring their stories to life; and they direct and respond to one another's dramas. The music program is designed to develop musical literacy. Through music, students increase their awareness of rich and diverse cultures, beliefs, and societies of humankind. As students examine the role of music throughout history and in different cultures, they develop respect for diversity. The processes of creating, performing, and understanding music are the primary goals of the music program. Cross-curricular integration and collaboration result in culminating art performances and productions.

Our Health/Physical Education program is built around teaching students the science of healthful living and the skills needed for an active lifestyle. A strong foundation is built to enable students to be physically active, have healthy eating habits, and exhibit health-enhancing behaviors. Freshmen are required to take Health/Physical Education, acquire CPR/First Aid certification, and to participate in suicide awareness/prevention lessons. After this, students are allowed to register for Body Wellness and/or Team Sports. In these programs, students learn the knowledge and skills for movement that provide the foundation for enjoyment and social development through physical activity that leads to lifelong physical and mental wellness. Collaboration with local community organizations enriches the Physical Education program and provides students with incentives to maintain an active and healthy lifestyle. Students are empowered with fitness assessment knowledge and skills so they can evaluate their fitness and attributes about wellness and set both long and short-term goals throughout their lives. Students learn the importance of physical, social, and emotional health and how all three concepts contribute to lifelong wellness.

HST students prepare themselves for college and the diverse world in which we live by taking two levels of a foreign language to graduate with the UNC College Diploma Endorsement. Four levels of Spanish are offered on campus, or students can take other world languages offered online via the North Carolina Virtual Public School or Gaston Online. As individual and collaborative learners, students understand words and concepts presented in the language, interpret what they hear, read based on their understanding, and present information in Spanish to an audience of their peers. Students are also taught to compare their own culture with others. Learning and communicating in a foreign language utilizes reading, writing, speaking, and listening which connects to all other disciplines. Learning another language also helps students become effective communicators, creative critical thinkers, and knowledgeable global citizens. Acquisition of a

second language has allowed our students to be globally competitive for work and opened international post-secondary education doors for many graduates.

All students at HST are required to take courses in Microsoft applications and are able to gain industry standard Microsoft Office Specialist Certifications in four applications: Word, PowerPoint, Excel, and Access. In Word and Excel, Expert certification is often attained. Many of these applications are used broadly in other curricula, and as these certifications are portable and internationally recognized, they provide accountability for college and career readiness. Every student at HST achieves at least one certificate, while most (98% or better) achieve certification in all four applications. Approximately 75% of HST students achieve the Expert level certification. Highland seeks to help all students gain expertise in learning and using new software. As a result, of the 316 students earning Microsoft Office Masters in North Carolina in 2015-16, Highland earned 101 of them.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

The staff at Highland School of Technology are committed to best serving students day in and day out. To that end, teachers utilize a variety of instructional methods to fit the needs of our diverse population of learners. Teachers make a point to differentiate instruction. For example, a teacher may begin a lesson with a brief lecture followed by a collaborative learning activity designed to put information learned from the lecture into practice. Later in the class, the students may use Chromebooks to access Google Classroom to begin the next activity. When possible, teachers use problem-based learning for students to actively engage throughout the learning process. When students fall short of achieving their potential, teachers reach out to each other, school counselors, and administrators to meet the individual needs of these students.

Highland teachers ensure high levels of student learning and achievement through interdisciplinary curriculum. In these lessons, teachers of different disciplines plan lessons structured in higher-order thinking skills, combining their respective students and curricula. These lessons often involve hands-on, collaborative, and active learning. For example, students in our Dental, Medical Science, Anatomy, and AP Biology classes collaborated to work on a problem-based unit titled, "If we could eradicate bacteria, should we?" Students worked as individuals and/or pairs delving deep into all aspects of bacteria and created Ignite presentations that were shared with all other involved students, district administrators, and board members. We also attain enhanced levels of learning and achievement through the integration of our Earth & Environmental Science and Civics & Economics classes in which students work in small groups to analyze the creation of a sustainable business. Collaborative learning occurs as students create a cost-benefit analysis, consider the resources at their disposal and how best to use them, and generate a sustainability plan for a modern business. Aside from our integration model, a new method of instruction is being implemented by teachers at a rapid pace - Breakout EDU, in which students work together to decipher clues about instructional content. Answers to the clues unlock locks on lock boxes. Students are forced to work as one unit and critically analyze all parts of the content to solve clues. As each clue is solved, they are able to open one lock and get closer to opening the box. The overarching idea is students immerse themselves in the material and achieve breakout, they have a much deeper understanding of the content and the value of collaboration.

All educators at HST work in Professional Learning Communities and subject-specific departments to review and analyze data generated from using common-formative assessments, benchmarks, unit tests, and standardized state testing. Specifically, our math teachers utilize common-formative assessments on a weekly basis, share the results from these assessments at their PLC meetings, and discuss ways each teacher can strengthen his/her approach to teaching the material so students may ultimately see the benefit in their performance. Data from Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) is used to further help us understand how students perform on assessments so we can increase achievement. Additionally, data from the PSAT, Pre-ACT, ACT, and SAT are used to pinpoint areas our students and teachers can focus on to improve overall performance so all students graduate career and college ready.

Simply put, it is an expectation that all students at Highland School of Technology succeed. We believe success comes in many forms; however, each student at HST receives support in a variety of ways so he/she can reach his/her potential. Multiple layers of support exist to ensure our students maintain high levels of

achievement. For instance, our School Improvement Plan is directly connected to maintaining such achievement. Our School Improvement Team works diligently to ensure teachers and staff receive the necessary supports that lead to both professional and student success. Hundreds of learning walks are also conducted each year by both administrators, and the data from these snapshots are shared with teachers in staff meetings. Administrators and teachers then utilize this data to plan professional development targeted at developing areas of instruction that can assist us in maintaining our high level of achievement. Additionally, our Student Support Management Team works closely with students and their families to help meet their needs so they are able to refocus on their school work. For students in crisis, the school counselors, social worker, nurse, and administrators work together to provide appropriate interventions and/or referrals to our school-based therapist.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

One of the most engaging and motivating components of Highland is our tradition of excellence and success. Current students strive to maintain and surpass the achievements of alumni. Freshmen are welcomed into Highland's family during an orientation before each school year. Ram HOSTs (Highland's Official Service Team), upperclassmen leaders, guide students through an extensive tour of the school. These ambassadors communicate not only the logistics of classroom locations and bell schedules but also the standards of academic rigor, extracurricular participation, and student conduct. They also communicate that at Highland it is cool to be smart and involved. This school climate allows students to find a place to be accepted and excel in a safe environment.

Highland facilitates and empowers students to be successful as they pursue career aspirations, moving from self to service. This occurs not only in the classroom, but also through extracurricular activities. Future Business Leaders of America, HOSA-Future Health Professionals, and Technology Student Association provide students the opportunity to belong to academy-oriented clubs. Highland students often place at the state and national levels in these clubs. Other clubs engaging students in both the school and local communities include BETA, Bible, Drama, Earth, Friends of Rachel, Gay Straight Alliance, International Cultures, Moot Court, Students Against Violence Everywhere, Quiz Bowl, and Student Council. Students found new clubs based on their personal passions with the support of faculty advisors. For example, students interested in finance and the stock market created the Investment Club with the assistance of a dedicated teacher. In the spring of 2015, a group from this club placed fifth in the nation in the Capitol Hill Stock Market Challenge!

Teachers know they are supported by the community, parents, and administration through numerous celebrations and recognitions throughout the year. Teachers know they are valued and respected by students through their outstanding performance in the classroom and beyond. The impact of this support is demonstrated through teachers' willingness to go beyond normal school hours to facilitate learning opportunities for their students. The administration, faculty, and students are all like-minded in the pursuit of providing and earning a superior education thus creating a culture of excellence and success. A pyramid of interventions is in place that stems not only from the administration and teachers, but one in which students hold each other accountable to excel in and out of school. Teachers want to be the best and so do students!

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Community stakeholders support Highland, and in turn, Highland serves the community. Business partnerships provide up-to-date technology, allowing hands-on experience in high-tech career models and assessments including Workkeys testing, Dental Radiology certification, and the CISCO Certified Entry Networking Technician exam. Thanks to community partnerships, the school has a manufacturing and engineering lab with professional engineering stations with robotics, 3-D modeling and printing, and a Computer Aided Design (CAD) lab. Our medical department has three dental operatories, Digital Radiographic Sensor, Ultrasonics, and healthcare stations for extensive hands-on experience. Computer Engineering classrooms have technologies among six computer labs to enhance their studies in the CISCO Academy and on the Microsoft Office Specialist exams on which Highland students rank the highest in North Carolina. Businesses serve as partners for internships, interviews for job placement and pathway-related research, and guest speaker opportunities. Highland provides students an edge in careers of choice due to specialized learning experiences resulting from strong community partnerships.

Highland students connect with Gaston County through community service such as Head Start, Run for the Money community charity, Autism Speaks, NC-Mom (free dental clinic), and vision screening for local elementary schools. Students volunteer at CaroMont Regional Medical Center, Schiele Museum, and Holy Angels, a specialized care facility for children and adults. Other opportunities are found through student internships and extracurricular means, such as other schools, Bit of Hope Ranch, and Boys and Girls Clubs.

One student leads a monthly backpack food drive through the school's Technical Student Association, as he realized the need and wanted to help the school's immediate area.

Highland's Parent Teacher Student Organization (PTSO) assists in specific and generous ways like gifting staff members with \$100 every year to benefit instruction and the annual "Unfundraiser" to support school and teacher wish lists. Highland's Booster Club hosts special events to cheer on the Highland Rams at sporting events. This volunteer group sells Highland spirit wear and concessions at home athletic events to financially support athletics.

Highland communicates through ParentLink messages, emails, website updates, and highlights presented by the district's own television channel. Frequent communication results in strong parental support for academic and extracurricular events. The counseling department hosts events focused on college and career planning, and the counseling website offers information on scholarships available, application deadlines, and referral forms to address students' specific needs. In the spring, the school holds an Academic Awards Night and an Athletic Sports Banquet to honor students in the classroom and on the field.

Highland's success results from strong community, parent, staff, student support, and collaboration. Another stakeholding group is the school's Advisory Board made up local business leaders that support each academy. They meet at the school once every quarter to stay apprised of our current curricular approaches and to make recommendations for adjustments for real world practices.

3. Professional Development:

Professional Development for Highland is multifaceted and is as unique and specialized as the individualized instruction offered at the school, as opportunities to master and hone skills in best teaching and technology practices prevail. Great strides and initiatives ensure professional development is prescribed according to the needs of the teacher. Because of the specialization of courses at Highland, professional development offered in the district is not always aligned to the school's curricula. For example, a radiology course for the Dental Science teacher required training in another part of the state. Engineering teachers required software training for equipment only used at Highland. Provisions have been made for teachers to apply for resources to participate in focused professional learning via funding from Highland.

As the district implements new initiatives, teacher leaders are selected for professional learning opportunities. Teachers receive training on instructional strategies, equipment, or resources and implement the new strategies into instruction. Highland teachers solution-find and alter lesson plans to implement the new strategies, and as interest grows, success is seen and even expressed by students themselves, resulting in the administration planning professional development in which the trained teachers showcase student success to all. The school makes purchases of equipment or resources to support the now, school-wide initiative. As with the district's current P50 teacher initiative, principals attend training provided by their leaders and then model strategies to their staff, supporting teachers and purchasing required resources to assist with implementation. Our administrators attend professional development led by the district to enhance abilities as instructional leaders of the school. These professional development sessions focus on coaching, teacher feedback, lesson-plan design, critical thinking, and classroom assessment.

Each summer, the district holds the Teaching and Learning Conference at Gaston College where our staff participates and often leads current and popular educational trends and practices. In addition, the district holds a mini-conference before the school year begins focusing on specific courses and curricula to enhance instruction and highlight changes made in content and pacing guides. Those changes are made early in the summer, and many Highland staff are actively involved on the leadership teams to improve course content, assessments, and rubrics.

In short, continued education and self-reflection are part of Highland's DNA. Teachers observe each other three hours per semester, making lasting connections with students, building relationships with each other, strengthening their own practices and procedures, and supporting the school's curriculum as a whole.

4. School Leadership:

Highland's leadership philosophy is based largely on a shared and participatory approach. Leadership is aligned to a democratic model with a distribution of responsibility. The school's success is based on a structure where the principal, assistant principal, academy coordinators, school counselors, school improvement team, teachers and other stakeholders collaborate to continuously improve our school.

The role of the principal and the administrative team is to lead with a high degree of accountability. They monitor the day to day operations of the classroom for focused instructional practices to the implementation of the curriculum, providing direction, establishing structures, supporting instruction and school improvement efforts. The administration builds relationships with faculty by being approachable, maintaining an open-door policy, being visible, and recognizing student, teacher, and staff success.

The School Improvement Team (SIT) is an elected body of representatives of teachers, paraprofessionals, parents, and administrative team, which is responsible for examining school-wide concerns. They develop action plans to support student achievement by analyzing school wide data and setting measurable and attainable goals with strategies to continue on a path of success. The SIT team serves as a forum for communications, promoting a clear and consistent vision aligned to our strategic goals. One major function of the SIT team is to manage the instructional budget. Teachers submit requests for instructional resources. The SIT team is tasked with analyzing the requests to determine the instructional priority, feasibility, and the impact the resources will have on student achievement.

Highland is fortunate to have a wealth of highly qualified, National Board Certified and enthusiastic teacher leaders. They are experts in their field and hold leadership roles in their countywide Professional Learning Community (PLC). These teacher leaders are trusted to be master practitioners by constantly finding new ways to improve student achievement. They lead by allowing teachers to observe them and by sharing successes in PLC meetings. They have interactive classroom websites and facilitate professional learning in staff meetings. Many of these teacher leaders are also mentors for beginning teachers, guiding them as a coach by building trusting relationships and offering collegial advice.

The leadership structure employed by Highland embodies shared leadership. All stakeholders are involved in contributing to better the organization. This leadership structure is invaluable to success. As a result of the collaborative framework, the school is constantly recognizing success and continuing to help students exceed expectations, while realizing their true potential during and after high school.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

A key component Highland's success is a focus on interdisciplinary instruction through extended and self-contained integrated lessons. The school year begins for Highland faculty with two days of extended employment dedicated to an integration theme, which is chosen from faculty suggestions. Past integration themes include We The People, Healthy Living, Digital Transformations in the 1980s, CSI: Highland, and Collaborations of Choice. Professional development sessions during extended employment include field trips to industry sites, workshops on new school wide technologies, guest speakers, and team building challenges. Time is dedicated to teachers collaborating and developing integrated lessons. The final session is a showcase of upcoming integrations for the year. A recent integration theme was CSI: Highland. Faculty capitalized on the interest students display for media related to forensics to demonstrate real world connections to content. During extended employment, a local police officer presented his experiences working with forensic science and also led staff through several activities that displayed various skills crucial to careers related to forensics. Teachers used the inspiration to integrate forensics with their content area. One extended lesson from this theme integrated Physics and Math III. "CSI: Blood Spatter Analysis," presented students with insight to the forensic sciences and the mathematics used by police officers. Students used the trigonometric functions sine, cosine, and tangent in order to solve problems and find out at what angle blood was spattered. Self-reflection is also a key component to the integration lesson review. One teacher who implemented this integration, documented the following student outcomes: "Students were able to make the connection between mathematics and careers that they could see themselves involved in. They scored higher on the test than my previous semesters Math III Honors class had without this integration."

Highland's focus on curriculum integration extends throughout the entire year with monthly integration meetings, each providing an opportunity to discuss progress of integrated lessons and share upcoming course content to foster further integration opportunities. Teachers share best practices in their classrooms and observed during classroom observations. Faculty publish both extended and self-contained integrated lessons on teacher websites to share original lessons with the education community.

Highland's belief in integrated instruction creates a culture of collaboration and innovation. This focus on interdisciplinary instruction provides students with a model of academic alchemy. Through integrated lessons, students learn that content areas and technical skills do not operate in isolation but flourish through creative connections and collaboration.