

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**2022 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program**

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Highlands Elementary School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 525 South Brainard Street  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Naperville State IL Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 60540-6659

County Dupage County

Telephone (630) 420-6335 Fax (630) 420-6957

Web site/URL https://www.naperville203.org/Domain/11 E-mail lnoon@naperville203.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.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal's Signature) Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Superintendent\* Mr. Dan Bridges E-mail dbridges@naperville203.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Naperville Community Unit School District 203 Tel. (630) 420-6300

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.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Superintendent's Signature) Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Ms. Kristin Fitzgerald  
(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.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature) Date \_\_\_\_\_

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, leave blank.*

## **PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION**

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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 2021 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 must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2016 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: 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 or 2021.
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. The nominated school has, or is subject to, a nondiscrimination policy (provide either a link to the policy or submit a text of the policy), is committed to equal opportunity for all students and all staff consistent with applicable law and does not have any outstanding findings of unlawful discrimination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s nomination and/or rescind a school’s award if unlawful discrimination is later discovered.

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.

**The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's nomination and/or rescind a school's award if one of these eligibility requirements is later discovered to have not been met or otherwise been violated.**

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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Data should be provided for the current school year (2021-2022) unless otherwise stated.

**DISTRICT** (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools. For charter schools: If a charter school is part of the public school system, information should be provided for the public school district. If a charter school is considered its own district or part of a charter district, the information provided should reflect that.)

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 14 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 5 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 2 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 21 TOTAL

**SCHOOL** (To be completed by all schools. **Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not for the district.**)

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 in the school as of October 1, 2021 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	42	37	79
1	38	41	79
2	48	43	91
3	44	41	85
4	41	37	78
5	42	40	82
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	255	239	494

\*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):
- 0.4 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 24.3 % Asian
  - 0.3 % Black or African American
  - 5.9 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0.4 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 63.1 % White
  - 5.6 % 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 2020 - 2021 school year: 9%

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, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	15
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	32
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	47
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2020	519
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.09
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	9

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

Albanian/Gheg(Kosovo/Macedon), Albanian/Tosk (Albania), Arabic, Bengali, Bulgarian, Cantonese (Chinese), Dutch/Flemish, French, German, Greek, Gujarati, Haitian-Creole, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Kannada (Kanarese), Korean, Lao, Lithuanian, Malayalam, Mandarin (Chinese), Marathi, Pilipino (Tagalog), Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian, Shanghai (Chinese), Slovak, Spanish, Swedish, Tamil, Telugu (Telegu), Urdu, Vietnamese

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 5 %  
25 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 4 %

Total number students who qualify: 21

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP or 504: 7 %  
34 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. All students receiving special education services with an IEP or 504 should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>4</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>11</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>12</u> Developmental Delay    | <u>8</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>10</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: 7
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. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	23
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.	16
Student support personnel e.g., school 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 21:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017
Daily student attendance	98%	97%	97%	96%	96%
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 2021.

<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. 2010

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

The Naperville 203 District's mission is to produce students who are self-directed learners, collaborative workers, complex thinkers, quality producers, and community contributors. Highlands Elementary School Heroes will engage in the discovery of learning through kindness and collaboration. We strive to be our true, authentic selves as we dive deep into lifelong learning.

16. Provide a URL link to or text of the school’s nondiscrimination policy.

Equal Employment Opportunity and Minority Recruitment Policy:

<https://boardpolicyonline.com/?b=naperville&s=94475>

Equal Educational Opportunities Policy: <https://boardpolicyonline.com/?b=naperville&s=94587>

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

## **PART III – SCHOOL OVERVIEW**

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Highlands Elementary School serves 500 Kindergarten through fifth grade students in Naperville, Illinois. Highlands is a proud community of learners, deeply rooted in a tradition that has high expectations for academic and social-emotional growth and success. We have a deeply engaged parent community that has the highest of expectations of their children and the Highlands teaching staff. Our partnerships with our parent community contributes to our pride and success.

Highlands begins each day together over our morning announcements recommitting ourselves to our core values of being Respectful, Responsible, Safe, and Kind. Our core values align with District 203's mission of educating our students to be self-directed learners, collaborative workers, complex thinkers, quality producers and community contributors. Our students come to school each day ready and eager to learn. They find value in collaborating with staff and peers, creating meaningful ways to connect with each other and to deepen their knowledge and understanding of content.

Our sustained commitment to student success is embedded in our school culture, our school improvement plan and the work our teams engage in during weekly professional learning communities. The Highlands staff has a strong desire to improve instruction and collaborate around curriculum and instructional shifts that will meet the needs of all our students. Our school improvement plan focuses on professional learning for staff, parent/guardian education opportunities and the use of common language that develops our students to be deep thinkers and problem solvers.

Highlands is known for our traditions that make us unique as a school community. Our school year begins as a community of learners with staff, students and parents gather for our flag raising ceremony and end our school year together with a flag lowering ceremony. Grandparent's Day, Veterans Day end of year BBQ, and Science Fair are other examples of how we gather as a community. We use these events to strengthen our school community and as a way to set new goals as the school year begins and reflect on the success we have had throughout the year. We recognize that through collaboration and partnership we are stronger together.

In order to enable and empower the multi-faceted development of each individual child, we approach our instruction and classroom culture through integration of both academic and social-emotional learning (SEL). At Highlands we do not teach each content area as stand alone subjects but as integrated disciplines that inform and enhance each other. Additionally, social-emotional development and non-curricular interests are similarly integrated. We begin the year by providing opportunities for children to share as well as developing meaningful relationships with both peers and adults to create a trusting environment where they can share their ever-evolving strengths, interests, and needs. As teams, we discuss and collaborate on how to infuse social-emotional and personal identities into the curriculum as well as how to provide opportunities within and beyond the school day. This extends to our specials teachers (Librarian, Art, Music and Physical Education) who meet weekly as a Professional Learning Community (PLC), to discuss the integration of SEL, identity, and classroom curriculum into their respective areas.

In addition to SEL and student identities, grade level teams begin the year analyzing both classroom and benchmark assessments. We use NWEA's Measure of Academic Performance (MAP) to screen any student who may need additional diagnostic testing to precisely determine targeted instruction for students who will need support either to access grade level content or who will require extension and enrichment opportunities. PLCs, specialists, along with administration collaborate around all students to ensure each child's need is met. These results along with pre-assessments for each unit also inform what revisions or modifications may need to be made to the curriculum so that Tier 1 instruction matches the levels of the students in the classroom.

Throughout the unit, teams meet weekly to monitor and discuss progress on essential standards through collaboratively designed common formative assessments (CFAs). Our summative assessments provide insight into which students will need to receive additional Tier 2 support to become secure in the essential standard by the end of the year. This ensures that students are continually engaged.



In Winter, we re-administer our benchmark assessments and convene to ensure that students are showing growth. We identify students who are not meeting their growth targets and compare this data to classroom evidence to determine the best support necessary for students as well as considering social-emotional needs.

We assess students' SEL needs through the Illinois 5Essentials Survey (provided one time a year) that reports on student's perceptions of a supportive environment as well as the Panorama Survey which measures students perceptions of relationships, belonging, safety and climate. Our SEL committee reviews data to uncover trends and supports needed in classroom and school-wide systems. For instance, we implemented morning meetings school wide to ensure that every child was greeted, accepted and had a chance to share non-academic interests each and every day.

Additionally, before and after school offerings by staff range from STEM and literacy pursuits to athletic and creative ones. We offer a variety of clubs including robotics, literary club, podcasting, intramural athletics, chess, Student Advisory Board as well as other offerings that vary each year according to the interests and voice of students. Past examples include talent shows, podcast club, Pokemon club and game board clubs.

To bring the entire community together, Highlands Elementary implements a One Book, One School initiative. A committee of staff and community members spend each fall carefully selecting a book that targets the widest range of students and family engagement. Each winter, all families are given a copy of the book to read along on a schedule to give classrooms and the entire community a chance to discuss. The hallways are abuzz each January as clues are revealed about the book. Every year includes a kick-off assembly related to the themes of the book. The book chosen usually has a theme of acceptance, and often there will be a program or initiative to give back to the community as well. For instance, when reading *The Lemonade War*, classrooms competed with collecting loose change to donate to a local charity, and when the community read *The Sasquatch Escape*, grade levels collected specific supplies to donate to our local animal shelter. During the 2020/21 school year, books were delivered to remote students and a virtual assembly was created to keep all students and families involved. Overall, the One Book, One School program brings the community together while reinforcing the importance of literacy at school and at home.

While the sudden and unexpected pivot to a completely remote learning setting was untrodden territory for our community and society, at Highlands Elementary our collaborative and committed staff, along with our community, responded quickly to create an experience for each child that provided them with as much normalcy as possible. We kept our goals for our students rigorous but more importantly our connection and relationships with them intact.

We met with students virtually from the very beginning of the pandemic and throughout our transition back to in-person learning in 2021. Together we continually worked to leverage the digital tools available to continue an excellent education and strengthen relationships. We coordinated supply pick-ups and drop-offs with our community and provided support and learning along the way. Throughout the process, staff was provided with professional learning not only about the digital tools but also about the most appropriate means to meet the social-emotional needs of students who not only were learning from home but also may be experiencing a range of challenges or success as a result.

We also pivoted to digital field assemblies by using our Zoom technology to bring in authors for students to interact with, as well as collaborating with our local children's museum to provide hands-on STEM activities related to their grade-level standards. While there are many effects of this global struggle, we also have emerged with an even stronger mission to educate the whole child, partnering with families and communities, and reliance on each other for support and innovation.

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

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

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

At Highlands Elementary, we take a collective, responsive and student-centered approach that aims to meet student needs while also ensuring alignment with state standards and district-provided curricular maps and resources. The first step in doing so is to know the students we teach as individuals with passions and interests inside and outside of school that do not show up in standardized assessments or curricular maps. We listen to the student's voice of who they are and what they need to be successful in the classroom through our Dear Future Teacher videos created at the end of each school year. From this understanding and a focus on relationship building at the beginning of the year, we compare teachers' knowledge and expertise of the essential standards of each grade level with what students' current level of performance is along a progression of learning. This results in a responsive curriculum that is infused with student identity.

In Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and in grade-level meetings, teams create formative assessments that ensure student thinking and processing are visible and provide opportunities for student choice and self-reflection. We aim to provide flexibility in the format to best elicit student thinking and mastery of that standard by leveraging both analog and digital platforms. Assessments are frequent and varied and their resulting student evidence which help teachers to determine shifts in our core instruction, goals and structures of small groups, and opportunities for extending learning. To meet the needs of our large number of high achieving students, we use problem and project-based learning, curriculum compacting, and peer-to-peer discussion of open-ended and multi-faceted applications with a variety of approaches.

Additionally, Highlands leadership ensures that staff is prepared and able to meet the needs of their students through analyzing grade and school-level data, current research, and the voiced needs of the staff to create professional learning opportunities that are based on student needs.

#### **1b. Reading/English language arts curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

Highlands literacy curriculum emphasizes a workshop model of a balanced literacy approach within reading and writing while utilizing structured literacy components aligning with the science of reading. This approach meets the diverse needs of all students in all grade levels. Students have equal access to breaking the code of reading into becoming fluent readers and writers who research, compose and comprehend a variety of text genres both collaboratively and independently. The English Language Arts Common Core State Standards provide targets for instruction that are posted in every classroom to allow students to take ownership in their learning and are aware of the success criteria for visible learning.

John Hattie's educational influences are the cornerstone of each teacher's planning for high-impact literacy routines and structures. Our School Improvement Team identified various strategies such as: prior knowledge integration strategies, explicit teaching of metacognitive strategies, opportunities for small group instruction and whole group discussions, explicit phonics instruction with access to repeated readings to increase fluency, and providing moments where students can engage in presenting via memorization and rehearsal, as well times for reciprocal teaching (where students facilitate their expertise). In addition, each grade level's Professional Learning Community (PLC) identifies essential learning standards to be mastered in reading and writing. Then common formative assessments are composed to measure student mastery of the essential standards. Students who are secure receive extension activities to apply the standard into real-life applications, alternatively students who need more practice with a standard receive targeted instruction within a small group setting. Students who are in need of intervention are also identified at PLCs and specialists coordinate to set goals for students to close achievement gaps via our Instructional Support Team and Individual Problem Solving. Data-driven decisions guide our student-centered literacy instruction.

Our primary (K-2) classrooms are filled with rich experiences in building foundational skills of phonemic awareness, phonics, and beginning reading strategies for students to successfully comprehend grade-level text and respond in written form to share their opinion or retell the main idea in both fiction and nonfiction text. The student's writing lessons build upon a student's oral language and are refined into narrative, opinion, and informational compositions developed by Lucy Caulkin's Units of Study. The primary classrooms are structured to allow for co-teaching with specialists (Reading Specialist, English Language Specialist, Learning Behavior Specialist) as well as a Flood model; where specialists work directly inside the classroom with students who need additional support. The coordinated efforts of classroom teachers, specialists, and paraprofessionals ensure that all students will accelerate their growth in literacy.

Within our intermediate classrooms (3-5), students can be found engaging in rich, diverse texts of an array of both fiction and nonfiction genres. Similarly, as in the primary classrooms, mentor texts provide an anchor for discussion of essential comprehension strategies, author's craft, and analysis of the text. Students work both individually and collaboratively reading and responding to text by analyzing different perspectives of character or non-fiction content to synthesize and apply their own ideas to connect and transfer their acquired knowledge. The synchronized student support from paraprofessionals, specialists, and teachers yields collaborative instruction in small groups and utilization of goal setting within reading conferences.

### **1c. Mathematics curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

In the area of mathematics, Highlands believes in providing balanced math instruction that emphasizes conceptual understanding, procedural fluency, and application. This balance leads to an increase in proficiency among our learners. Our district curriculum structures include: numeracy routines, core lessons, integrated tasks, small group supported lessons, independent practice, and assessments that all lead our students to becoming proficient. These structures and concepts are evident in every classroom at Highlands Elementary School.

The teachers at Highlands help drive students towards achieving mastery in the Common Core State Standards. In order to do this, teachers work collaboratively with staff members throughout the building to ensure that our comprehensive and cohesive curriculum is taught while exploring and analyzing topics with significant depth and breadth. Lessons are taught while utilizing the Standards for Mathematical Practice that encourage reasoning, proof, communication, representation, connections, proficiency, conceptual understanding and efficiency.

Through the use of weekly professional learning communities, teams collaborate with instructional coaches, specialists, and leaders. These professional learning communities provide time for staff to create common formative assessments, analyze data, and make data-informed instructional decisions in order to meet the variety of needs among learners within each grade.

The core resource for all kindergarten through fifth-grade classrooms at Highlands is Ready by Curriculum Associates. Teachers use this resource as a tool to support daily instruction while meeting all grade-level learning targets. Teachers also use the diagnostic assessment component of iReady, a computer adaptive assessment, to help determine student groupings, gaps in learning, and extension opportunities for all learners. This resource is utilized to help drive instruction and to provide differentiation.

This year Highlands added a new position, the Math Specialist. The Math Specialist provides a building-wide leadership role in collecting and analyzing math data, supporting struggling learners by using curriculum maps to identify their learning needs to close learning gaps. Students supported by the Math Specialist receive grade level instruction in the classroom as well as individualized, instruction supported by best practices using a push in/ pull out model.

Additionally, Highlands has an Honors Math program available for students in third through fifth grade that have already demonstrated proficiency in grade-level standards. In the Honors Math program students are challenged and supported with rigorous curricular content so that these students can achieve at levels that align with their intellectual abilities in order to reach their full potential.

Another amazing learning tool utilized in the math classrooms at Highlands Elementary School are Three Act Tasks, originally designed by Dan Meyers for the secondary classrooms but adapted by elementary math education expert, Graham Fletcher, for K-5 students. Teachers at Highlands had the opportunity to have Graham Fletcher in the building. During his time at Highlands, Graham Fletcher provided professional development to teachers. In break-out sessions, he spoke with small groups of educators, modeled lessons in classrooms while teachers observed, and then provided a debriefing session. Teachers had the opportunity to experience firsthand how powerful these real-world problem-solving situations could be. After this experience, the use of Three Act Tasks at Highlands took off, encouraging even more use of rich problem-solving experiences and strategy-based discussions in all classrooms.

#### **1d. Science curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

Teachers at Highlands utilize the District 203 created curriculum to guide instruction when teaching the Next Generation Science Standard, NGSS. A wealth of resources are used to support students and teachers in our inquiry-based curriculum including STEMscopes, National Geographic, Mystery Science, and LEGO for education.

Teachers at Highlands follow the constructivist approach, the 5E model for science instruction. In this model, students go through the phases of engaging, exploring, explaining, elaborating, and evaluating each scientific hypothesis. When walking through classrooms you will notice portions of this model being used to energize students. In the Engage step, you will see teachers providing a real-world hook that helps students make connections to their learning. Next, you will notice students Exploring. During this time students participate in hands-on activities or labs where they design and investigate topics. Then, students move to the Explanation portion of the lesson. In this portion, students demonstrate their understanding but teachers also provide instruction in vocabulary, skills, and concepts which moves students towards a deeper understanding of concepts. After that, you'll see students moving towards the Elaboration phase. During this time students take their new learning and apply it to their work in order to create a deeper understanding. Finally, students and teachers move to the Evaluate portion of the lesson. At this time, students evaluate their own learning and teachers also work to determine student progress in meeting learning targets.

One of the favorite parts of Science for students Engineering. During this time students in first through fifth grade classrooms use Lego WeDo or Lego Mindstorms to create and program robots to complete tasks. These methods follow the 4 C Process of connecting to a story, constructing a model, contemplating the function, and continue improving the design. Students are highly engaged in these lessons and they help engage some of our most reluctant students.

#### **1e. Social studies/history/civic learning curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

Highlands follows a traditional model for students to experience learning about being a member of a community, state, nation, and global economy. Historical perspectives are researched so that civic traditions and history can be compared and contrasted. An emphasis is placed on providing opportunities for students to bring in their own culturally diverse backgrounds and experiences to personalize learning within each classroom.

In order to link civics to our school community, Highlands has a strong partnership with our parent organizations: Home & School and School Family Community Partnership. Each December our school participates in the Giving Tree, where families from our community provide goods for less fortunate families. For the past 15 years, our Student Advisory Board has been involved in a variety of community service projects, including students visiting senior citizens in the community to play games, collecting various goods for local food pantries, donating Halloween candy for soldiers, and participating in Feed My Starving Children Million Meal pack held annually at North Central College. Highland students have the opportunity to help lead school programming with daily announcements and creating school rules. The most memorable event was when the student advisory board ran our school's talent show for our year-end barbecue.

Next year, our district is making the shift to the inquiry-based model of social science where literacy and social-emotional skills are interwoven into units of study. Students will engage in collective decision making and answer overarching compelling questions about their family, community, nation, and world histories. They will then take informed action both individually and collaboratively after formulating a compelling essential question to initiate and sustain inquiry. Credible sources will be evaluated so that students draw conclusions to take civic action, understand geographical influences on our society, analyze our nation's economics to become financially literate, understand the cause and effect of our state's and nation's historical events to today's society. At the conclusion of each unit, students will construct a service project that links to their unit of study. Our teachers would like students to showcase their collaborative acts of civic service and the impact it had on our community, state, or nation to "think globally, yet act locally."

**1f. For secondary schools:**

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

**2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

Highlands defines art as the product of human creativity. Art is a means of communication that shapes our current world and helps us to envision a better tomorrow. With an eye toward equity and respecting all students, the Highlands art curriculum is choice-based, allowing students flexibility in what they create and how they hit learning targets. Highlands staff have created a rich media library including extensive instructional videos, podcasts, slides, websites, and other resources to facilitate self-directed learning. This ensured top-quality educational experiences remained consistent and accessible to all during remote, hybrid, and in-person instruction. As students explore the arts, they develop the studio habits of mind along with 21st-century skills such as digital literacy, critical thinking, problem-solving, perseverance, creativity, and communication.

The Highlands music program encourages students to explore their creativity in a variety of ways. Students explore music through song, instrumentation, dance, drama, and digital creation. Students learn there are multiple ways to create music and perform and build confidence each time they step into the music room. Students plan the public performances in second through fifth grade showcasing their musical skills as well as their creative writing and other contributions. This ownership strengthens their understanding of the skill necessary to succeed in the performing arts.

Highlands Physical Education classes help students to be physically and mentally fit. Students learn to care for themselves and others through team-building activities and healthy competition motivating students to do their best. Students engage in individualized goal setting with activities such as running or rock climbing with an emphasis on challenge by choice and encouraging students to set their target for a healthy zone that is appropriate for them. Students build a foundational understanding of how to care for themselves through healthy eating, physical activity, and prosocial behaviors, empowering them to achieve and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

In our Learning Commons (LC), four guiding principles shape student learning on a daily basis: literacy skills and literacy growth, innovation and creation through STEM, inquiry and research, and communication and collaboration. The LC is the hub of the school, where students can meet as a whole class, in small groups, or individually. They know the library is a place they can come to seek help, follow their passions, or try something new. Through consistent programming, students emerge from the library curriculum with skills such as evaluating sources, seeking specific information related to their passions, and having a design thinking mindset when problem solving. These are necessary to navigate a media and literacy-rich world, as well as develop the curiosity and drive to be self-directed learners and complex thinkers.

Students at Highlands engage in learning about more than just academics; Social Emotional Learning (SEL) also drives how students, staff, and the community engage with each other. Students work through explicit instruction through class meetings to help them face challenges in their daily life and interactions. Our Second Step program at the primary level helps students understand how to problem solve in a variety of situations, while infusions of the Habits of Mind works to establish strong critical-thinking routines that empower students to become lifelong learners and face challenges with a toolbelt of strategies.

### **3. Academic Supports**

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

Highlands utilizes a highly collaborative, supportive approach to support our students. Through ongoing, intensive collaborative efforts of teachers, specialists, administration, and parents working together we are able to support each child. Through the Multi-Tiered System of Support framework, Highlands targets academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs of each learner. All students have access to core curriculum and high-quality instruction tailored and adjusted to meet the needs of each learner.

Staff engage in weekly professional learning communities (PLCs) reflecting on student progress toward essential standards. Highlands engages in Grade Level PLCs as well as PLCs made up of our Instructional Support Team (IST). Through consistent monitoring, reflection, and ongoing collaboration, teams reflect on student data and plan targeted instruction in alignment with the needs of each individual. Formative assessment data guides us as we design instructional practices that are differentiated and best align with students' needs. Staff engages in an ongoing cycle of data reflection to adjust and refine instructional practices ensuring each student grows and succeeds.

Through PLCs, grade-level teams work with the reading specialist, math specialists and School Psychologist every eight weeks to reflect on students' progress as they receive tier 2 targeted instruction in addition to the core curriculum. For example, specialists provide push in/pull out services to support students in acquiring grade level essential standards that have not yet been mastered. Teams reflect on current data and determine whether to continue, increase, fade or change the current supports in place. Plans are created to target each student's learning needs focusing on closing gaps in learning. Instructional support staff attend grade-level PLCs and work in partnership to consult and plan. IST members work with teachers both formally and informally, pushing into classrooms to co-teach lessons, consulting with teachers or formally meeting with teachers to address and plan for student needs.

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

Our Honors Math Program and Project IDEA programs are designed for students who excel academically. Honors Math (grades 3-5) is designed for students who demonstrate mathematical understanding, problem-solving and reasoning skills at a deeper level than their grade-level peers. Project IDEA (Increase and Develop Excellence in Academics- grades 4-5) is for students demonstrating advanced reading comprehension. Instead of receiving mathematics or reading instruction in their classroom with their grade level teacher, students attend a separate class for instruction in these areas with the Honors Math and/or Project Idea teacher. Our Honors Math curriculum is compacted so that students will have the opportunity to take Algebra 1 during their 8th grade year. Students enrolled in Project Idea engage in reading and analyzing complex texts. They demonstrate knowledge of complex vocabulary, evaluate diverse perspectives, and justify their thinking with concrete evidence while making connections across disciplines. Students in this program will continue to be challenged in high school as they are able to enroll in Honors English 1.

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

Highlands Instructional Support Team (IST) is composed of building specialists, teachers, and administration with the sole purpose of taking a deeper look into students who are struggling academically, behaviorally, and/or socially emotionally and designing intensive instruction and support in order to help students grow and make progress toward goals. Parents are valued members of their child's team as we

work collaboratively in partnership to plan targeted support plans to address their child's needs. The team engages in intensive collaboration to design individualized plans (Individual Problem Solving Plan-IPS, Individualized Education Plan-IEP, 504 Plans) that are in alignment with students' strengths and opportunities for growth. Reflection on student progress is ongoing for students no matter what type of plan they have. The team has established weekly/biweekly/monthly Child Study Team Meetings to monitor progress toward IEP goals and adjust their instruction and support as needed. The team reconvenes every 6-8 weeks to monitor the progress of students who have an Individual Problem Solving Plan. At this meeting, the team reflects on student data and progress toward the established goals and determines whether to continue, fade or change the support in place.

Highlands values the uniqueness of each child, always seeking to build on student strengths while carefully crafting instructional practices in alignment with each student's instructional, behavioral, and/or social-emotional needs. Key components in the process include implementing formative and summative assessment, reflecting on student data, and aligning our instructional practices to meet the unique needs of our students. At Highlands, we know no individual can do this alone. What stands out about Highlands is the highly intentional and ongoing collaborative efforts between teachers, specialists, administration, and parents all working together to support the whole child, every step of the way.

### **3d. English Language Learners, if a special program or intervention is offered:**

Highlands provides support for English learners (ELs) through flexible service delivery models, including co-teaching within the general education classroom, as well as pull-out instruction. Classroom teachers and specialists reflect upon individuals through a holistic lens. Teachers consider the student's cultural and linguistic background, schooling history, progress to proficiency, and academic needs throughout the decision-making process.

EL teachers develop co-teaching partnerships with classroom teachers to implement Tier 1 instruction and assessments to meet the needs of our diverse students who are performing below, at, or above grade-level. EL teachers collaborate with classroom teachers to create resources like anchor charts, visual word banks, and genre-specific sentence stems that support the language demands of the district writing curriculum. These resources allow English learners to meet and exceed grade-level expectations in a challenging curricular area. Teachers also respond to the needs of ELs with emerging English language proficiency by integrating translation technology and welcoming the use of the native language to help students process and express the social/instructional and academic language. Classroom teachers seek opportunities to confer with EL teachers regarding assessments of ELs to ensure that they are taking into account the intersection of language proficiency and academic performance to provide appropriate accommodations like text read aloud, oral or drawn responses, and visual word banks.

When data indicates that a learner would benefit from targeted Tier 2 or Tier 3 instruction, an instructional support team, including the EL teacher, determines interventions that incorporate multi-sensory instruction, create context, and provide meaningful opportunities to integrate isolated skills and align academic support with language proficiency. This team approach is illustrated by the action taken for a third grader who demonstrated a discrepancy in academic skills compared to her English language proficiency. After reviewing data, the team implemented a plan for intense reading and math interventions that embedded best practice EL strategies to ensure substantial growth to close the achievement gap.

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

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

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

Student engagement at Highlands begins and ends with the centrality of student identity and a culture that celebrates and enriches those identities. Before students start the year, teachers have watched student-created videos to their future teachers about who they are and what they need to be successful. Teachers use our Student 360 tool to capture the non-academics aspects of students and identify areas to learn more about or students to invest more time getting to know. Through opportunities of daily morning meetings and classroom culture-building activities, we allow for more opportunities for students to express who they are. This creates a welcoming and accepting environment for all students.

Within the classroom we engage students through the constant differentiation and personalization of our curriculum as well as instructional practices that enable students to learn from peers through Socratic Seminars, book clubs, numeracy routines, reciprocal teaching and cooperative learning structures. This results in classrooms that are truly student centered and in which students are the agent of their own learning. Teachers and staff integrate social-emotional learning into lessons as well as the Habits of Mind so that students learn to work collaboratively, self-reflect on their own needs and next steps, and support others in their own growth.

Technology is also leveraged for student engagement. For four years, we delved into how to leverage technology not as a replacement for analog practices but instead to identify new practices that were not possible without technology. For example, through the use of Pear Deck students can show and process their learning and in real time teachers can both review that evidence, provide feedback and anonymously share student work. In another instance, student are able to use FlipGrid to process, talk, model and reflect on a topic in a variety of mediums rather than being restricted to writing.

This centrality of student identity also shaped our response to the COVID-19 pandemic when shifting to remote learning and throughout hybrid learning. We centered students' social-emotional well-being by providing staff with training and resources to use digital spaces for student connection and relationship building. We ensured that a greater amount of time was allowed for student socialization and structures such as morning meetings and class SEL lessons. Additionally, we provided support for families with technology liaisons, delivering materials, and providing a book study with expert speakers in order to both support them at home and create a network of other families that were experiencing similar challenges. In turn, this strengthened student engagement by providing united support between school and home.

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

Highlands has a very strong parent community partnership. We have two engaging and effective parent groups; Highlands Home and School, and our School Family Community Partnership (SFCP). Both of these organizations are dedicated to providing support to our staff and students. They align their work with our School Improvement Plan to ensure that their efforts are maximizing opportunities for our students to grow.

Our Home and School Organization collaborates with Highlands's staff and administration to ensure that our school and student needs are met. They do this through fundraising efforts that support our SFCP initiatives such as opportunities for our students to volunteer within our community, hosting community events, and school-wide activities. The focus of our partnership with SFCP is to introduce new opportunities to our students that will enhance their learning and spark new interests by allowing them to contribute to our learning community. Throughout the school year, we engage our community in events such as One Book, One School, Science Fair, History Night, Healthy Balance Fun Fair, and Culture Kaleidoscope. We also provide our students' opportunities to engage both before and after school in activities such as Intramurals, Robotics, Literacy Club, Battle of the Books, Math and Art Club, and Podcast Club. All of these activities strengthen our commitment to learning and developing well-rounded students that are ready to positively contribute to their community.



We partner with our local YMCA to provide after-school care for our families that work outside of the home. We collaborate with the YMCA to ensure that the time our students spend with them supports their academic and social-emotional needs. Highlands also has a strong partnership with North Central College, specifically their Education Department. We provide their practicum and student teaching candidates opportunities to learn from our highly qualified staff members. The administration at Highlands partners with professors from their Education Department to ensure that they are preparing their students in their education program with the best training and experience to support the diverse learners in our community.

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

Through a shared leadership model, the Highlands School Improvement Plan is created. Our instructional teams, alongside our administration and coaching team, review student achievement and growth data. Through collaborative conversations, trends are identified and instructional shifts are planned in a timely and engaging manner. This work allows us to determine what our professional learning for the school year needs to look like. Listening to the voice of our staff is crucial as we determine the next steps in what they need to support all Highlands students.

Highlands utilizes our Leadership Team to ensure our professional learning is provided in various settings and structures. This process allows us to meet the needs of our staff in a manner that is meaningful to them. In addition to that approach, staff members often seek ways to grow their instructional practice through an individual process. Work then begins to determine their area of need so that professional learning opportunities can be identified. Professional Development conversations are structured so that teachers share their learning with grade-level professional learning communities, through cross grade-level articulation or through an area of interest in small group sessions as a way to grow us collectively in our instructional practices.

As we have worked through the various stages of the pandemic, our professional development process shifted as we worked to meet the needs of staff and students through a virtual and hybrid learning structure. We found ways to professionally develop our staff on the various technology tools and platforms so they were prepared to educate their students in a virtual setting all while maintaining the highest of expectations and standards. Our professional development provided training on meaningful ways our students could remain academically engaged with all members of our teaching staff. As we transitioned students back into the building, we surveyed the staff to see what the immediate professional learning need was. We quickly identified social-emotional learning as a need for both staff and students. We needed to create an environment where everyone felt safe, cared for, and respected. During all professional development we have embedded time for staff to connect with each other as they share a response to a prompt. This allows us to see each other beyond our academic setting. Team building and SEL activities are also ways we use to check in with each other and extend support.

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

The key leaders at Highlands consist of a principal, assistant principal, Learning Support Coach, Student Support Coordinator and Learning Commons Director, who also serves as our librarian and instructional tech coach. The roles on this team are diverse, allowing us to bring expertise from a variety of interest areas. Members of this team also serve on a larger decision-making team known as our Leadership Team. The Highlands Leadership Team encompasses our key leaders, classroom teachers, assistants, and specialists and meets monthly to ensure our work is aligned with our school mission, culture, and improvement plan.

This key leader team at Highlands is ultimately responsible for the creation of our school improvement plan that is vetted through our Leadership Team and staff as a whole, as well as ensuring that our professional development supports and aligns with our school improvement plan. This team reviews data and instructional trends so that we know if our efforts are positively impacting the academic and social-emotional growth of our students.

Community Partnership. This collaboration allows us to plan for family and student programming that directly aligns with our school improvement efforts. Although these two parent organizations have different missions, they come together to support student learning and parent education.

Our Student Ambassador club is a way that we involve students as leaders at Highlands. This club gives students a voice to share their ideas, ask questions, and inquire about new and upcoming school initiatives. Our students take this opportunity to be involved in positive change both in our school and community through volunteering opportunities. Examples of this include bell ringing for the Salvation Army, visits to a retirement community, assisting with cleaning up our Highlands Habitat and sending messages of support and encouragement to our Armed Forces.

The key leaders at Highlands have a servant leadership mindset. Recognizing that creating strong and trusting relationships with all of our stakeholders will only move us forward to support the needs of our diverse community. It is our mission to meet families where they are at so that parents can support their children in the ongoing learning process.

## **5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:**

Highlands is committed to meeting the diverse needs of our community. Equity leaders participated in training to engage colleagues in building cultural competencies and increasing capacities in culturally responsive practices. Teachers formed personal journey cohorts to continue investigation on topics of their choice. One cohort is deepening their understanding of equity through the lens of ability differences and the power of mindset, and will share their learning with colleagues.

Colleagues develop trust to create a safe space for courageous conversations. In class meetings, students engage in rich conversations and authentic relationships are encouraged across differences. Teachers facilitate discussions that allow for inquiry and respect of diverse ideas. In response to global events, timely communication and resources are provided to staff to build awareness and support conversations with students.

Staff explored their own personal culture and lens of difference through various identity exploration activities. Teachers engage families in activities that explore and honor diverse identities among learners which creates an inclusive environment. Teacher facilitate opportunities for students to develop empathy and see their own identities reflected in the classroom. Highlands received a Naperville Education Foundation grant to establish an Identity, Inclusion and Diversity Library. This collection provides teachers with tools to anchor rich conversation, celebrate differences, and enable students to explore the many facets of their identities.

Highlands Learning Commons (LC) offers bilingual books purchased with grant money. The LC spotlights books donated by Muslim families, Asian American Pacific Islander, and the Gay Straight Alliance which reflect the identities of our diverse population. Highlands increased the representation of women and underrepresented cultures in books as well as the intentional highlighting of picture books to share powerful messages of equity and inclusion.

Highlands makes a collective effort to increase religious literacy among staff and students. Resources were created to build shared knowledge and serve as talking tools for students to share about their religious or cultural backgrounds. Teachers survey families about their religious celebrations to ensure representation. Families are invited to share photos of their celebrations to display.

Highlands School Family Community Partnership (SFCP) coordinates programs to support inclusion initiatives. During “Cultural Kaleidoscope Night” families created immersion experiences to teach others about their cultural backgrounds. SFCP hosted a “Healthy Balance Fun Fair” to highlight healthy and balanced living for all children. In response to community needs, SFCP sponsored a “Parent Night” to discuss protective factors for students with anxieties related to separation, testing, and social interactions. The SFCP “Neighborhood Ambassadors” ensure that new families have equitable access to resources and opportunities.



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

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The practice that truly drives our success with a wide range of impact is our Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). We begin each year of PLCs reflecting on who the students are as developing individuals. We take the time to discuss, know and understand each child before beginning to design the learning, supports, and experiences that will maximize their learning, belief in self and connection with others.

Each grade-level PLC is centered on the needs of each student along a progression of learning of essential standards. We design multimodal common formative assessments (CFAs) to reveal evidence of student thinking to best elicit student progress. Using these CFA's Teachers teams, including reading and math specialists, collaborate around further instruction for both whole group, small groups, and individuals across the grade level. Teachers, specialists and support personnel meet with students to provide the targeted instruction that will move them to the next progression of learning and to practice it within the context and/or learning targets of the unit. For example, in a small group from multiple second grade classrooms, students receive instruction on a targeted phonics pattern with the reading specialist. These students then apply that instruction into decodable books and writing. The reading specialist then guides students in applying this practice to the learning target of the unit: describing characters. This helps students connect their learning in small group to the learning in class.

Grade-level PLCs also focus on the social-emotional development of each student and often center around the needs, supports, and strengths of students to better equip and support their learning. Through these PLCs, we reflect on student growth in targeted area of social-emotional learning (SEL) alongside the impact on academic growth. In a fifth grade writing unit, teachers implemented executive functioning tools for planning and prioritization that were applied to the writing process. They collected student evidence from these tools, student surveys, as well as the quality of writing. Throughout the unit students showed growth in both the use of tools and self-reported emotional responses to managing due dates. Additionally when compared to the prior years of instruction, students' writing ability showed more growth over the course of the unit.

If the PLCs are the engine that drives our school, it is the student that fuels it. We work each day and week to ensure that we are both celebrating where students are as well as inspiring them to continue to grow in all areas of their life; as students, as friends, as the future, as humans.