

***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 [X] Magnet [ ] Choice

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

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

School Mailing Address 831 Erie Street  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Shreveport State LA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 71106-1505

County Caddo

Telephone (318) 364-4740 Fax (318) 364-3481

Web site/URL http://www.southhighlands.com/ E-mail hlwilliams@caddoschools.org

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

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

Name of Superintendent\* Dr. T. Lamar Goree E-mail tlgoree@caddoschools.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Caddo Parish Public School District Tel. (318) 603-6339

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. Tony Nation  
(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, 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):
- 38 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 7 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 12 High schools
  - 1 K-12 schools
- 58 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	38	50	88
1	46	43	89
2	34	53	87
3	32	44	76
4	37	44	81
5	39	41	80
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>	226	275	501

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

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 9 % Asian
  - 18 % Black or African American
  - 2 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 71 % White
  - 0 % 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: ≤1%

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	1
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	4
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	5
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2020	501
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	<.01
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	<1

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

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 18 %

Total number students who qualify: 91

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP or 504: 36 %  
181 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>2</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>1</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>0</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>0</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>0</u> Speech or Language Impairment         |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>1</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: 1
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.	21
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	11
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	0
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

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 24:1

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	95%	94%	94%	95%	94%
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. 2005

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

South Highlands Elementary Academic and Performing Arts Magnet School is committed to educating students to the highest level of academic achievement through integration of the arts, innovative learning experiences, and inclusive instruction. Our goal is for all students to become responsible, creative, and compassionate members of society.

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

<https://www.caddoschools.org/page/legal-notices>

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

[https://core-docs.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/asset/uploaded\\_file/1724304/BOARD-policy-elementary-2017.pdf](https://core-docs.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/asset/uploaded_file/1724304/BOARD-policy-elementary-2017.pdf)

## **PART III – SCHOOL OVERVIEW**

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South Highlands Elementary Magnet is a diverse, arts integrated and academic magnet school with Kindergarten through Fifth Grade. We are composed of the highest academically achieving students in the parish and approximately one-fourth of our students are identified as gifted and talented. Our magnet system is managed through the district and is set up as a test and ranking system with one-third prioritizing our diverse community established by economic classifications. South Highlands students and families are diverse both ethnically and economically. Our parents range from blue collar to white collar and are extremely varied in educational qualifications, their common thread being our students who enter elementary school well prepared. The diversity of our families helps to support our unique school community where our students range from athletes to artists, the common thread being excellence. Overall, our students are driven and hardworking and we work to establish a school community that encourages educational risk-taking and perseverance in problem solving. This allows for the school environment to be both hardworking and joyful. South Highlands is a cornerstone of the city and a pillar of academic excellence in the community.

South Highlands is both an academic and performing arts magnet school. Our arts-integrated focus is key to our unique school culture. These practices boost creativity, and, paired with our student-directed teaching style, support ownership of learning for our students. We use high-quality curricula in each subject and work to integrate varied, arts-focused learning approaches as an enrichment to core instruction. Each class annually performs a full-on play with music, speaking parts for which students audition, full cast, and crew. These performances allow for experiential learning, public speaking and on-stage opportunities for every student, and they support the growth of our students into leaders and help them to become comfortable in front of audiences. Our arts-integrated approach is cross-curricular and not just focused on performing arts. Some examples include students learning about varied mediums, completing artist studies, tying music into math and literature, and engaging in visual and performing arts pieces for which our staff weaves art and academic learning standards together in the planning of these lessons. Throughout our hallways and classrooms are student-created visual art representations tying into their academic focuses. These paired learnings allow students to develop beyond our highly rigorous curriculums, provide cultural exposure and support their social and emotional growth as well.

One innovative practice that we have at South Highlands is hosting grade specific events. Each grade participates in a standards-aligned performance such as a living museum where each student acts out an American hero coinciding with the study of American History in fourth grade. Students from other grade levels, as well as parents, are invited to see the children come to life as they dress up and perform as their chosen hero. This is a cross-curricular experience for fourth grade students as they conduct research and read biographies about their chosen hero, complete a book report for Language Arts by way of a scrapbook page, and build a timeline in Math to represent their hero's life accomplishments. In first grade, students dress and present themselves as a president or first lady to go along with their Presidents' Day Social Studies unit. They complete research and read age-appropriate biographies on their person, complete a self-portrait of the president or first lady using visual art techniques and dress as him/her for the performance. At the performance, the 6- and 7-year-old students come on to the stage individually, introduce themselves, and tell an interesting or little-known fact about their character. This engaging event allows for the students to present material learned in front of a large audience and is both enlightening and endearing for the school community in attendance. These standards-aligned performances happen in each grade, have become a "rite of passage" at South Highlands for our students, and are looked forward to annually.

In response to COVID-19, our school has practiced great flexibility. With changing mandates, instructional formats and virtual options, our teachers and staff have worked diligently to continue meeting the needs of our students. Over time we have offered virtual learning, implemented mask-mandates, conducted contact tracing, used seating pods to limit exposure, extended assignment deadlines and worked to accommodate learning around extensive absences. We have relied on Zoom and virtual platforms to keep in contact with our families and parents and worked to bring them into the learning environment virtually as much as possible to keep them active and engaged as members of our school community.

As a previous recipient of the National Blue Ribbon School award, we have been able to leverage the resources available to maximize the impact we make for our students. We experienced an increase in prestige following the receipt of this award. It has helped to draw highly qualified teachers and teacher leaders to our staff and allows us to utilize the talents of our staff not only through core instruction, but also by exposure to the visual and performing arts. Additionally, the esteem of this award has highlighted our ability to meet the ever-growing needs of our students as individuals and our greater school community.

## **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 South Highlands, our overarching approach is focused on integrating the arts cross curricularly. We use the arts to engage students in experiential learning while also growing their cultural awareness and understanding of core content standards. To fully integrate art, teachers have been trained on the art standards and tie these into their lesson plans to supplement core curriculum lessons. In the enrichment classes such as visual art, music and drama, teachers use core content standards to supplement the arts lessons. Arts-integrated lessons are used as varied instructional resources. They can be a formal or formative assessment, a project-based experience, or an enrichment activity. The integration of arts provides students opportunities to work collaboratively with partners or in small groups and allows students to demonstrate their understanding by using creative processes. Beginning in 2014, all staff were trained by Louisiana A+ (LAA+) through a five-day intensive summer institute, many of whom went on to become trainers themselves. Teachers continue to participate in professional development on arts integration through being members of the LAA+ community, attending conferences such as the Kennedy Center Arts Integration Conference, and forming professional collaborations with other arts integrated teachers throughout the state and nation. South Highlands serves as a Model School for LAA+ and was designated a George Rodrigue Arts Integration Lab School. Arts Integrations serves as our collective approach to instruction at South Highlands, allowing our students to demonstrate understanding through creativity and engagement with various art forms.

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

The standards-based goal for students in English Language Arts and Reading is to be able to read and understand complex, grade-level texts and express their understanding of those texts through writing and speaking. We have chosen our curricula because they are top-rated Tier 1, research based, follow the developmental progression of writing and align with the College and Career Readiness standards. In grades kindergarten through second grade, South Highlands uses a comprehensive language arts curriculum based on the science of reading research. This approach ties rich content knowledge from history, science, literature and the arts in with foundational literacy skills. Taught in tandem, the knowledge piece ties in content, vocabulary, structure, forming connections, and comprehension to the skills part consisting of sounds, letters and words; using explicit and systematic foundational skills integrated with knowledge-based comprehension helps students make cross-curricular connections and enables them to unpack complex texts. In grades three through five, a whole class, text-based curriculum is utilized. This instructional approach consists of varied texts and novels, compelling questions, and integrated reading and writing activities which build knowledge throughout the units. This approach provides students with the foundation to form connections which they communicate through writing and speaking. Our upper grade curriculum uses standards-aligned materials and resources focused on humanity and the arts and includes explicit writing progression.

Our instructional approach to English Language Arts allows students to build knowledge around a central question which continues throughout the unit. Teachers use anchor texts and various supporting texts from diverse authors tied to the topic to help students establish, expand, and deepen their understanding. Collaborative and independent activities are used throughout the units where students read, write, and verbalize their opinions, justifications, and reasoning, allowing them to grow within a learning community. A scope and sequence is built with teachers to maximize instructional time and allow students to progress through the standards. Autonomy is given to teachers to adjust instruction based on student and class needs. Various grade levels focus on specific types of writing and upper grades practice multiple approaches. We use a tiered model to individualize instruction, composed of core, differentiated and individualized instruction. Students experience whole groups, small groups, and individual instruction based on skill level and individualized needs. Teachers use assessment and data to determine the needs of their students and

adjust instruction accordingly. The state guidance documents and achievement level descriptors are used to help teachers and students identify success criteria, set individualized goals, and strive to meet them.

We gather and utilize data in a variety of ways and for varied purposes. To start the year, we begin with universal screeners to get a baseline of where students are in their learning progression. If students are identified in the bottom 25% they are immediately started on progress monitoring. Students can be added or dismissed from progress monitoring at any time based on performance. We also complete diagnostic assessments at this time which are tied more specifically to the curriculum and skills. The data from diagnostics is used to establish remedial and enriched small groups for our tiered instruction. These groups are fluid and the students progress through them based on need which we determine using a cyclic process of monitoring, diagnosing, and evaluating. Throughout the year, teachers use formal assessments such as cold reads, benchmark reading assessments, curriculum embedded assessments, culminating writing tasks (summative), and projects/presentations to evaluate student learning. They also rely on formative assessments like concept maps, response writings, curriculum-embedded check for understandings, and arts-integrated projects to monitor student progress and adjust instructional feedback. Throughout the year, teachers track student data using matrix reports for summative assessments, progress monitoring data points, grades, anecdotal records, formative assessments, and state testing reports. These measures are compiled into a classroom support plan which the teachers use to guide their remediated and enriched instruction. This fluid plan identifies who needs what, how the instruction will be delivered, when the students will receive remediation and/or enrichment and what materials will be used. We rely heavily on our classroom support plans to meet the individual needs of our students. These plans are developed with administrative support, team data analysis, and are continually monitored and adjusted. Teachers use these to guide whole group mini-lessons or reteaching, small-group response to intervention for remediation, after-school tutoring focused on moving student achievement levels, small-group enriched instruction, frontloading content, and for individualized instruction.

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

South Highlands uses a highly engaging and rich content math curriculum which incorporates teacher-led small group instruction, individualized digital lesson support and independent practice. This curriculum was chosen based on this Tier 1 classification, its coherent math learning experience for students and the College and Career Readiness standards alignment. In every math class, we use a scope and sequence for pacing guidance throughout the year. This document provides teachers with the date, topic and lesson, lesson objective, standard alignment, links to coherence map for grade level alignment, links to foundational guidance and remediation resources, possible lesson assessments, and enrichment activities. The scope and sequence also identifies the progression of learning for each lesson as in conceptual understanding, procedural skill, and fluency or application to ensure teachers are able to analyze student mistakes and provide feedback accurately. Each standard is identified as major, supporting, or additional in order for instruction to be prioritized accordingly. The majority of time is spent on major content to ensure a strong foundation. Also, teachers use the coherence map to address aligned prior grade level standards and activities that are prerequisite for students when struggles appear. Lessons incorporate a fluency activity, rigorous application problem, a small group teacher directed lesson, an independent aligned digital lesson with embedded individualized supports, and independent practice. This allows for the gradual release instructional method as students move towards independence with the skills.

The small group instructional model allows teachers to tailor to their students' needs. Groups are fluid and the depth and focus of the lesson is adjusted based on the student. Both heterogeneous and homogeneous groupings are utilized based on skill and learning progression. Teachers use a range of instructional resources such as manipulatives, white boards, digital manipulatives, paper/pencil, cooperative learning, and arts integration to support students with skills.

Similarly to English Language Arts, we start with universal screeners and diagnostic assessments to determine where students are and what supports are needed at the start of each year. Progress monitoring begins with any students deemed at risk or below grade level and we track their growth. Teachers use formal assessments like topic quizzes which are a culmination of every few lessons or a set skill, mid-unit assessments, and unit assessments (summative) to gauge student proficiency. State assessment test scores

are also used to determine student proficiency. To provide feedback, adjust supports and communicate with students about learning progression, teachers use exit tickets tied to lesson objectives, independent practice problems, and observations from small group lessons as formative assessment. All teachers utilize the data-based, fluid, classroom support plans to monitor student needs, address deficits, and identify areas for individualizing instruction. Daily, teachers provide small group response to intervention (RTI) for students who need remediation or frontloading of skills as well as individualized and small group enrichment to keep students at their individual pace. Teachers use the classroom support plans to continually monitor who needs support, when they will receive support, and which resources will be used. We use guidance from the state such as the Assessment Guidance Document and Achievement Level Descriptors to help determine success criteria for proficiencies and we work to communicate these with the students and school community.

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

South Highlands uses a science curriculum that is phenomenon-based and was chosen for its engaging nature and being tied to the Next Generation Science Standards. It provides students with hands-on experiences aimed at sparking their curiosity about the world around them. The curriculum is designed to build a deep understanding and lasting connection to science concepts as they revisit them throughout the years. Our curriculum uses the "activity before concept" and "concept before terminology" approach by allowing students to engage in activities to develop their basic understanding before the concept is presented. Then, students are allowed to investigate the concept further before introducing formal terminology. Students use a "notice and wonder" approach for pre-learning and conduct experiments where they analyze data and evidence. Each unit includes an engineering challenge which allows students to work cooperatively, collaborate with peers, practice problem solving, and build connections within their knowledge and understanding.

Teachers use visual arts as a hook, inviting students to observe, wonder and question topics. They also use varied texts to help students learn more about phenomena while reinforcing their reading skills. Progression of learning can be tracked through journaling, the use of science logs, and practices such as diagramming. These are formative assessments used in Science along with graphic organizers, written and verbal discussions, and note taking. Teachers use student understanding and proficiency to gauge and guide the scope and sequence of learning. In Science, the classroom support plans which drive the individualization of instruction are tied closely to students' abilities to read and respond to complex text, connect ideas across disciplines, and reason scientifically. As in the other subjects, the state assessment guidance documents and achievement-level descriptors are communicated with students and integrated into the curriculum to track progressions of learning and proficiency levels.

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

The core curriculum used to teach Social Studies is an inquiry-based approach through units of study. We use a scope and sequence to guide instruction, helping teachers to identify instructional opportunities where students can deep dive into content and guide students in developing and supporting claims about Social Studies topics and concepts. The goal is for students to be able to use varied sources to learn content, make connections among people, events, and ideas across time and places. We strive for our students to be able to clearly express their opinions, supported by evidence, and cite sources for the content knowledge.

Instruction consists of tasks which are tied to the unit claim, set the context by introducing key terms, review previous learning, and provide necessary context. Then students explore sources by reading and examining various sources to build content knowledge and skills. They work to develop their claims through clarifying, understanding, making connections, and locating evidence. Finally, they are able to express their claims through speaking and/or writing, and their claims must be informed and supported by evidence. Through these tasks students work both collaboratively and independently and are highly engaged in the thinking process.

Gauging student learning is important as our goal is for students to be able to use evidence to support their claims in a way that is logical and cohesive. Formative assessments are used to monitor students and address student learning progression throughout the unit with diagrams, graphic organizers, charts, maps, written

responses, and exit tickets. Summative assessments are given using source comparison and written/verbal arguments, projects, and tests. Discussion based practices are used to aid both instruction and gather data about student abilities. Socratic seminars and discussion-based questioning are two tools we rely on to teach our students how to become evidence-based writers and speakers.

**1f. For secondary schools:**

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

**2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

At South Highlands, we offer numerous other curriculum areas outside of core instruction that we call enrichments. These include Visual Arts, Music, Drama, French, Physical Education, and Library. Every student goes to an enrichment class daily for 50 minutes. This is the core teacher's planning period. Students rotate through the classes over the course of a five-day week and follow the same schedule each week. Since there are 6 enrichments offered to students, the Library is visited by students once a week during their English Language Arts/Reading class rather than during their set enrichment time. Each enrichment teacher has set standards they teach but also work collaboratively with the core teachers to integrate and support students.

As an arts-integrated school, the enrichment programs work closely with core content teachers to tie in cross curricular concepts. The visual arts, drama, and music teachers support both core concepts in their classes and arts concepts in the classrooms. Recently, the music teacher used glitter on a drum to show how sound waves move as a coordinating unit of study with the fourth grade science teacher's physical science unit. The arts courses also provide an important avenue for varied cultural exposures and learning about diversity. Drama and music provide students with experience listening and speaking, directly impacting their language arts development. They also pair for students when classes participate in plays. This allows our students to put their learning into action as a performing arts magnet school. Outside of the arts, but as an example of how the teachers all work to maximize student learning, the P.E. teacher uses math operations to count in her class when students are warming up and cooling down. She also focuses on her units of study teaching students about health, nutrition, and the importance of physical activity. In French, our teacher is highly skilled with cooperative learning strategies and provides an engaging learning environment for all students. She incorporates many elements from her home country of France and has the students connect with pen-pals from Paris by exchanging hand written letters. The Librarian works with the ELA teachers to teach concepts like digital citizenship and pair students with books leveled in their zone of proximal development. She also assists teachers with setting individualized goals for students, first through fifth grade, in reading that is incentive based and encourages independent reading. Our counselor, although not an enrichment teacher, goes into the classrooms each month to teach character development. She teaches concepts like attitude of gratitude, integrity, grit, and growth mindset.

**3. Academic Supports**

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

We have numerous tiered supports in place for our students who are performing below grade level. Teachers use explicit instruction, engagement strategies, cooperative learning, and multi-sensory options throughout core instruction. For struggling students, support starts with preferential seating, scaffolding, cues, sentence frames, peer help, repeated directions, and extended time. Supports vary based on student need and initially are tracked to ensure effectiveness. Teachers also model thinking, check for understanding, provide consistent small group or one-on-one interventions, and front load content. Our certified teachers also provide after-school tutoring to students for a variety of reasons, one being academic struggles. To ensure the best instructional support is being provided for individuals, teachers work with their co-teachers, the

instructional leadership team, administration and the students' parents. Data is tracked to monitor progress in various ways. In the case that the student is not growing, the tier of interventions provided increases for additional support/time on the skills lacking. The supports listed above are used throughout the process.

When students are first identified as below benchmark, we begin using a subject-specific data management system to track his/her progress. We also begin providing additional minutes daily through individual or small group instruction which is referred to as Response to Intervention (RTI). If a student is continuing to lack growth, we increase the amount of minutes in RTI and they move to Tier 2 support at this time. We also begin looking at a variety of screeners which might indicate that the student has something else going on such as a learning disability to rule out other possible causes hindering their academic growth. This process is guided by the School Based Learning Committee (SBLC) which is composed of the teachers, parents, administration and other pertinent parties. From that point on, the SBLC committee supports the teacher and parent to ensure students continue to receive the necessary support. In some cases, students are referred to the 504 committee for possible formal academic accommodations.

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

We tailor our instruction to meet the needs of students who are performing above grade level. Students have the opportunity to engage in activities based on their performance when they have finished core assignments early, have flex time in the schedule, or when teachers are working with students who are performing below. In English Language Arts and Reading, the level of the independent texts are more rigorous and extension tasks are provided. For upper grade students, this is maybe a leisure writing, project-based activity, or digital presentation. In the younger grades this would be considered word work (game-like), solving a riddle, or responding via an artform. We work to keep these tasks tied to the instructional goal but engaging and self motivating for students. Our students often request additional independent reading time for their leisure. In Math, students may work slightly ahead of instruction as their teacher can easily tailor within the small group teacher-led lesson. The students also have embedded individualization in the digital component so they are supported there as well. The digital component allows students to earn bonus activities tied to the overarching concept and students can engage in these when the opportunity arises. Additionally, we work to provide students with hands-on, game-like opportunities. An example is in math, first grade adds three numbers by three rolling dice and finding the sum and in kindergarten, students use a deck of cards to play War, identifying each time which is the greater value. Students performing consistently above grade level, or presenting characteristics consistent with giftedness are recommended by the teacher or parent and screened at the school level by the counselor. If they pass the screening, they are recommended to special education for a full evaluation in the area of giftedness.

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

Our special education population consists of approximately one-fourth of our students identified as Gifted and Talented in academics. Our district considers gifted and talented to be an ability which falls under special education. To meet the needs of these students, we have certified gifted teachers and each student has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) assigning an individualized learning goal. These goals are determined by the gifted teacher and parent(s) of the student. The gifted teachers work alongside the core teachers on grade level teams and students shift in and out of the gifted classes based on the IEP goals. This means they may receive services in English Language Arts but are in core classes for Science as their goal does not address Science or Social Studies.

Students in our ELA gifted program work on grade level standards but use grade ahead curriculum in some instances. They incorporate above grade level texts and vocabulary. Many project-based activities are incorporated to further develop problem solving skills in both ELA and Math. Students in gifted math courses learn grade level standards but use an adjusted scope and sequence to progress through the material at an accelerated pace. School-wide, we have a handful of speech students who are identified as needing an IEP for services. Additionally, we have one hearing impaired student and two autism students who receive inclusion services. These services are provided by an itinerant special education teacher and based on their IEP.

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

We do not have any students who are identified as English Language Learners at South Highlands. Our school district does have designated school sites with certified ELL teachers to meet the needs of students for which English is not their first language.

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

A special program worth noting is our gifted and talented arts program. We have 63 students who are identified as gifted in the area of visual arts, theater arts, or music. These students have Individualized Education Plans to ensure they receive additional support in these non-core areas. Certified teachers who specialize in the artform provide additional instructional minutes to students weekly depending on their IEP. These are itinerant teachers who serve multiple campuses of students. The services range from vocal coaching, instrument specific lessons, visual arts to performing arts. Students who are identified as gifted in one of these areas are first screened and if they pass the initial screening then they are tested for giftedness. These tests are run through the school district and students are evaluated by contracted professionals in the designated art form. Student services are provided in both individual and group settings.

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

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

South Highlands works to provide an engaging and positive learning environment for students each day in numerous ways which support student academic, social, and emotional growth. We work to address student needs so that barriers to learning are removed. When students feel heard, valued and supported, they are more likely to work to their full potential. Teachers and staff do this by greeting students daily, making personal connections with them, and allowing students to get to know them personally as well. Our structured environments help create a sense of order for students which also allows them to grow optimally. By having a structured learning environment complete with clearly communicated routines and procedures, students are able to feel comfortable taking educational risks therefore they participate more in discussion. Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) is a program we use as a social, emotional, and behavioral support system. With PBIS we have set school rules and regulations to encourage positive behavior consisting of responsibility, obeying safety rules, having a positive attitude and respecting self and others. At the beginning of each semester, we work to establish expectations throughout the school environment and review these in the classrooms, cafeteria, halls, playground, restroom, and outside areas. This puts the students and staff on the same page for expectations. In PBIS, we also use positive behavior supports like Terrific Tiger, where each staff member picks a student for a Friday reward. We also have Tiger Praise where any staff member can turn in a student for any type of acknowledgement. Nine week conduct rewards are given as well as rewards for meeting and exceeding individually set reading goals for each student and improvements in final grades. We establish learning targets and success criteria with students to help communicate clearly the academic expectations. These practices allow students to know the expectations and encourage ownership and self motivation. In addition, we focus on self goal setting which allows students to set personal expectations for themselves. They do this throughout academic courses and for state testing.

To keep students engaged, we use both cooperative learning and arts integration in the classroom as instructional tools. These practices allow students to work collaboratively, encouraging social and academic growth through discussion, problem-solving, and shared responsibility. We hold Make-a-Difference Mondays and share motivational messages on the announcements. We also participate annually in events like the Kindness Challenge and National Compliment Day. There are engaging activities that go along with these events promoting emotional and social well-being. We are intentional about promoting positivity and a growth mindset to create a climate and culture in the school which fosters student growth across all aspects.

Throughout the pandemic, teachers utilized virtual classrooms and Zoom to provide real-time instruction and interaction to students. They also quickly learned new platforms such as Nearpod, Kahoot, and Blooket to provide students with engaging components for digital learning. Teachers were available for office hours throughout to ensure students were able to access teachers for individualized needs and personal connections.

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

We are proud of the family and community support we have here at South Highlands. We have an extremely supportive and active school community. Our Parent Teacher Association has 100% involvement and has been named a National PTA School of Excellence. Our PTA fundraises throughout the year to support the school community. They host an annual Fall Carnival which was free to families this year, and paid for our copier maintenance contract, teacher appreciation week, and support for teacher professional development. They also provide funding for the various awards and rewards we hand out to students such as reading celebrations and Terrific Tiger awards. We have a Foundation composed of a board of directors who focus volunteer efforts on raising funds to support the school. The additional funding goes to non-consumables and capital projects. The Foundation raises money through community and business partnerships which purchase sponsorships to support the school and students. The Foundation has funded repurposing the walking track, converting the old auditorium into a physical education space, and purchasing copiers, chromebooks, iPads, and Smart TVs for the teachers. Their goal is to support all students. These

organizations help to provide for our school and are integral to the success of our students and school.

One primary strategy we use that has proved to be successful in directly affecting the success of our students is holding parent meetings. We do this both in person and via Zoom to allow for flexibility and high attendance rates. In these meetings we discuss the academic and social skills that we are focusing on at school. We show student work samples, explain academic terms, give examples of age appropriate chores and routines at home that will support students in the classroom and answer questions parents may have. These meetings let parents know what to expect and how to best support their student at home. We also send newsletters home each week reviewing the skills being taught, assignments, upcoming assessments and other activities in which families may participate. Each Wednesday we send Tiger Folders home that contain graded papers and any school communications such as spirit night at a local restaurant or a school-wide service project. Additionally, we use both our school website and social media to communicate about our school culture, focus, and engaging activities for families. Communicating consistently with our families is a priority, as it helps keep everyone engaged in the school community and has a positive impact on our overall culture.

Additionally, we have business partnerships which support our students in a few targeted ways. A local orthodontics company sponsors our Tiger Folders which we use to communicate weekly with families. They have also provided picnic tables so the students can eat outside which started during the pandemic and even glasses for every student for the solar eclipse a few years ago. They are a strong community partner who directly helps the school to provide experiences for our students we would not be able to give them otherwise.

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

We work to create a collaborative and cohesive school environment for all staff members. Teachers are provided with daily common planning times, duty free lunches, and due to our community and family support, we are able to provide funding for each class so teachers have any materials they need.

Professional development is carried out in a few different ways. We use individualized professional development tracks to support teachers' learning. They start going through self-paced courses which are mandatory to support their academic area and then progress to individualized course selections. These are tied to a self-created professional growth plan which each staff member creates annually. We also provide school-based professional development. The focus of these sessions are based on teacher feedback and observational data. We gather information about what teachers would like to learn about and in areas where they feel they could use additional support, coupled with what the administrative teams deems necessary based on classroom observations. School based professional learning is collaborative, engaging and led by teacher leaders from the campus.

One way we support teachers feeling valued is by polling staff and gaining their feedback and insight. We check in with them on a regular basis on items such as establishing school norms, adjusting carpool procedures, selecting curriculum materials, methods for school communications, and professional development focuses. We supported teachers in the transition to distance learning, through the hybrid model and back to traditional classroom settings as well. Steps such included adjusting the school calendar to give teachers ample time to learn new virtual platforms prior to starting school, reducing class sizes, and providing additional planning time. A short time into the hybrid model, we listened to the teachers and realized it was not working well for our students or our teachers. They felt exhausted and like they were not able to teach the in-person or virtual students well due to the difference in planning so we adjusted and took volunteer teachers to teach only virtual or only in person. We shifted students to support teachers and their overall wellbeing. Also, during these times we have worked to keep very open lines of communication acknowledging the overall heaviness of living through a pandemic, feeling responsible for lost learning and working with teachers to hear, acknowledge, and help support their social and emotional wellbeing during distance learning and the hybrid model. The impact of our professional development approach is that of improved instructional skills and continual growth of capacity which positively impacts our students' achievement. This is evident in our consistently high student performance. We believe in and model lifelong learning which is the foundation for the professional culture we have created.

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

Our school leadership philosophy at South Highlands is that of distributive and servant leadership. We have skilled and highly trained teachers who collaborate to lead the work of the school. Part of our philosophy is to collaborate as a team, gather feedback, make data informed decisions and to clearly communicate expectations. We have a principal, instructional coordinator, teaching coach, counselor, and instructional leadership team (ILT) of teacher leaders who help to guide our school culture of learning. Together this team, with varied areas of expertise, shares the work of impacting instruction and school practices to impact student achievement.

The Principal oversees policies and programs, communications about changes to these come directly from the principal. She consistently polls teachers, students, parents, and the school community for feedback which is then brought to the ILT. She meets with teachers individually and promotes teacher growth opportunities such as National Board certification, district content team membership, state contracted content and curriculum work, and other certification opportunities like Lego, Google and arts-integration based on individualized interests and skill sets. Numerous teachers, the principal, counselor and instructional coordinator are National Board Certified Teachers and annually, the leadership supports cohorts of teachers seeking their National Board certification. The Instructional Coordinator oversees student data performance, supports teachers in the analysis and application of this information to drive instruction, and works alongside the ILT for teacher development and student achievement growth. The ILT is instrumental in delivering applicable teacher professional learning, reviewing programs and policies, and aiding in school improvement. Over time, the primary administrators have grown teacher leaders, allowing for their roles to shift into shared leadership driving the change and school initiatives. Our Teacher Coach supports both teachers and students in the classroom setting through direct instruction, modeling and individualized student interventions. She builds personal relationships with students that have the greatest need to support their growth.

All staff members, certified and classified, as well as parents, students and community members, work collectively to promote student achievement. The focus of fundraising is to provide additional material for students such as one-to-one devices so students have adequate access, writing journals to avoid limiting use due to lack of space, and teacher computers and printers so they may adjust curricular materials to meet the needs of students. Incentives to motivate and reward students through both academic and behavioral achievements are also supported. Our greater school community is a huge part of these additional supports which school leadership has intentionally structured to focus on increasing student achievement.

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

South Highland students and families are a diverse group especially in comparison to our metropolitan area. In order to ensure culturally responsive teaching we work to have open and honest communication with our staff about the importance of recognizing bias, what implicit biases are and how to combat these unconscious practices in the classroom. We discuss particular student actions and how they can be misconstrued as disrespectful, and consistently encourage one another to avoid assumptions about others' actions. Although our subgroup performance mirrors that of our majority, we work to keep focused on student engagement which helps ensure all students' needs are met.

We have a large subgroup population of Indian descent. We have an event called Lunch Bunch where parents volunteer to feed the staff once a month. These families often bring in food and culture to share with the staff and students. They teach staff about their foods and heritage which builds the bridge between school and home for these students, families and staff. This helps to ensure mutual respect and understanding which are key to student success. Often we find that this particular group of students struggles with reaching out when in need of help or asking the teacher for help. By forming a personal connection with the families, teachers and parents are comfortable going to each other and working together to encourage students to feel safe and comfortable in the learning environment and process.

Another very impactful event is Going Global. This is a school-wide event for the whole school community. The instructional coordinator organizes this event to bring all the cultures of our students and staff together.

Presentations about various cultures and heritages are set up throughout the school and everyone rotates through the event. The presentations vary from geographically focused, learning about cultural traditions to food and celebrations. This event allows students to feel represented in our school and fosters an overall sense of belonging. Instructionally, we utilize practices such as Discussion Based Questioning and Socratic Seminars to teach students how to have an educated and respectful debate on set topics. These practices contain instruction on respectful communication and being able to agree to disagree. Cooperative learning and student directed learning are also ways we encourage student ownership while promoting rigor. Overall, we use clear and high expectations balanced with consistent encouragement and support to help students feel safe, acknowledged, and given an avenue to succeed.

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

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The primary practice which sets South Highlands apart is the way we integrate the arts into our instruction, it has become part of our school culture. Integrating the arts into our everyday instruction fosters creativity in our students, promotes cultural awareness, and creates lifelong learning opportunities which students remember. By teaching and assessing both art and curriculum standards simultaneously, students connect with content in a deeper and more meaningful way. It helps learning come to life. We are able to encourage expressiveness and educational risk-taking by providing students with alternative avenues to express their understanding and show mastery of concepts. In our school, students are often found performing tableaux to express understanding of story elements such as main idea, point of view, conflict or resolution by collaborating with peers to create a frozen picture. They generally use student created rubrics to peer or self-assess both their understanding of content and the artform. Visual art pieces have endless opportunities to support learning and are often used to discuss point of view, setting, or perspective such as that of the Patriots versus the Loyalists or Native Americans in westward expansion. Providing students with time to analyze paintings of these historical events allows them to form connections with the emotions and a deeper understanding of the content alongside an appreciation and value for visual art. Conversations often lead to the artistic approach, varied mediums, and artist studies when students are given exposure to differing art and elements.

Over the years, integrating the arts into our classroom instruction has provided our staff with professional growth opportunities where we have grown our knowledge base and allowed for collaborations. We continue to push ourselves as the lead learners in the classroom. It has allowed our staff and students to be more creative and provided opportunities to explore perspectives, think creatively, challenge their own beliefs, take educational risks, and be open to new ways of thinking.