

HIGHLAND COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 5

Finally, it's not ALL about brick and mortar in the district. We welcomed 26 new certified staff to the district this week. We are proud of all our staff, new and returning, for their continued efforts. While many districts struggle to fill positions, Highland CUSD No. 5 continues to attract and retain great teachers and staff each year. This is a testament to the fact that we have a great district to work in and let it not be understated, a great community to live in. The support our Board of Education, administration, and teachers receive from this community speaks volumes about the values and worth it puts into educating our youth. As partners in providing our students with excellent educational experiences, thank you so much for your continued support.

Serving the Communities of Alhambra, Grantfork, Highland, New Douglas, and Pierron

MICHAEL S. SUTTON
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS
INSTRUCTION

CHRIS A. BECKER, Ed.D
ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT -

MARI E. NEKOLA
CSBO-BUSINESS MANAGER

August 1, 2024

Highland CUSD No. 5 Parents and Staff,


As summer draws to an end, a new class of students will soon enter our doors to begin the 2024/25 school year. It is an exciting time for all of us. As school begins, now is a good time to do a thorough update of things going on districtwide, as the last few years have brought many changes. Please know that through all the changes, our district continues to focus on providing the best opportunities for our students in a way that maintains the values of our community.

Our [strategic planning](#) was completed in 2019, as several district priorities were identified. Due to the challenges of the COVID years, we were unable to make significant advancements on many priorities as our focus was simply keeping kids in school. However, the last few years have brought a whirlwind of activity. Let's start with the highest priority identified in the strategic plan (from a facilities standpoint), the construction of a new primary school to address the safety and security of students and staff.

It is anticipated that the new school will be completed in November, just four months from now. The plan is to have the building furnished and ready to go by the end of Christmas break and move approximately 650 PreK through 2nd grade students and staff into the building to start the spring semester on January 7th. To achieve that, we are taking every step to ensure a smooth and orderly transition. We have reviewed bus schedules, school schedules, and staff schedules, attempting to address shortcomings that may exist. We have a monumental task ahead and will continue considering all

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information to bring this project to fruition on time and on budget. To see the July monthly progress report, click here: [July Progress Report](#). During the next several months, we appreciate your continued patience as we work to make this move as painless as possible for all students, staff, and parents.


Some of the necessary adjustments for this preparation have already become evident. We adjusted the [school calendar](#) for the 24/25 school year to maximize the length of the Christmas break to ensure enough time to make the move. We sandwiched Christmas break with two Teacher Institutes, Dec 20 and Jan 6, to allow enough time with staff in the building to organize learning environments and to review all safety and security protocols. [School schedules](#) were sent to all staff and parents this week with adjustments to accommodate the January changes. We will continue to look ahead and address all barriers to ensure the new building is a source of pride for our students, staff, and the entire community.

The construction of the new school is just a sample of the ongoing facilities projects taking place in Highland CUSD No. 5. We recently completed the 9-classroom addition at Highland Middle School. This wing will address the space concerns, primarily created when 6th grade moved into the building in 2014, and the growth of several programs within the school environment. The new addition incorporates a vocational space to house new career and technical programming for students to encourage exploration in these fields. We have a strong vocational program, and this will help students experience opportunities that may have only previously presented themselves in high school.

Another project is improving parking lots at Highland Middle School and Highland High School. If you drove on either of those lots last year, you would agree that the asphalt at HMS and the concrete parking lot at HHS were in dire need of repair. Between the amount of traffic and winter weather, the lots required continual attention. The

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improvements being made currently give us a more long-term approach. Both lots should be completed next week to ensure time to cure before school begins.

Another big project undertaken in the last 12 months is the solar project at every district building except Highland Primary, for obvious reasons. The solar is now up and running at Grantfork Elementary and Highland Middle School. Alhambra Primary is completely finished and just waiting on Ameren Illinois to go live. Installation continues to progress at Highland Elementary, Highland High School and the main office. The district was presented with this project, which included hefty credits to offset the cost. The project cost was approximately \$5.2 million, and payback is less than 8 years. Once the solar arrays are paid for, we anticipate savings in excess of \$250,000 each year in energy costs for the district.

In addition to the larger projects, several smaller projects and preventative maintenance continue to occur throughout the district. We strive to provide our students, staff, and community with safe, clean, and well-maintained facilities that meet the expectations of a community that values educational excellence. I welcome opportunities to talk with staff, community groups, parents, and students about improvements that can be made to enhance education and the peripheral activities that occur in our school district.

Educationally Yours,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent

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