

Setting the Bar for Excellence and Innovation

OUR STRATEGIC PLAN FOR
STUDENT FLOURISHING

2022-2027



HIGHLANDS SCHOOL

Habits of success in every student

Dear Highlands Community

Our Strategic Planning Process revealed that Highlands is ready to face the future boldly. Time and again, members of our community expressed gratitude for the role this school has played in the past and faith and determination to move it forward assertively to the benefit of all of our children. It is a great time to be at Highlands, and it is getting better!

Highlands School has the opportunity to do what we ask students to do—be bold, try new things, learn from others, and lead with the knowledge that we are part of something greater than ourselves alone. No school is more prepared to dream big and to roll up our sleeves to serve our students in extraordinary ways.

Many thanks to everyone who lent their voice to the strategic planning process—a great deal of the specific language came directly from listening sessions with parents, faculty, and board members. A particular thanks to the Strategic Planning Committee, led by Board Member Connie Hill. That team's thoughtfulness, and support of the vision for Highlands, will leave an essential mark on our school for generations of students to come.

As you review "Setting the Bar," please pay close attention to what we call "Our Center of Gravity." (pp. 4-5) These two statements are the core ideas of our plan—they are commitments to "be resolute in discovering and delivering the best instructional models" and "set the bar for excellence and innovation in Alabama and beyond."

The beginning and end of our efforts are the continuous improvements of a school where all students flourish in their years here and in the places that come next. Highlands must be restless to meet the challenges of this moment while holding tightly to what has always centered a Highlands education –The Highlands Way. There is no better schooling environment than a pre-kindergarten through eighth-grade school, and Highlands is determined to make the most of it.

On behalf of the Board Trustees, we are excited to share "Setting the Bar for Excellence and Innovation." We can't wait to get started!

Maye Head Frei
President,
Highlands School Board of Trustees

Kavita Vasil
Head of School

OUR MISSION

Highlands School's Mission is to provide an academically challenging program, to create a love of learning in every student, to instill the habits of success in every student, and to prepare the student to be a responsible and productive member of the community.





Our Center of Gravity

AT THE OUTSET OF OUR STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS, WE NAMED TWO NON-NEGOTIABLE CONDITIONS THAT WOULD LIVE AT THE CENTER OF OUR PLAN AND AROUND WHICH ALL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES WOULD ORBIT.

1

Highlands will be resolute in discovering and delivering the best instructional models to serve all our students. These models will balance high academic expectations while preserving childhood within a community of acceptance and belonging.

2

Highlands will set the bar for excellence and innovation in Early Childhood through 8th grade education in Alabama and beyond, including committing to securing financial pathways and resources for enduring sustainability, attracting, hiring, and retaining exemplary independent school professionals; and promoting optimal enrollment growth and retention for the future.

NEXT, WE SELECTED OUR SIX MOST PRESSING STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Student Experience

Faculty & Staff

Diversity & Belonging

Campus & Facilities

Teaching & Learning

Finances & Resources



High academic expectations

while *preserving* childhood



Student Experience

HIGHLANDS WILL EXPLORE, DEVELOP, AND ENHANCE OUR PROGRAM IN ORDER TO CREATE AN UNRIVALED STUDENT EXPERIENCE.

- Create additional opportunities for extracurricular options
- Deepen our commitment to the fine arts
- Build a more complete athletic program

These opportunities will benefit students across all ages and grades at Highlands, contributing to the many facets of the whole child while focusing on overall student wellness.

We will

- Compile data and information of innovative fine arts and athletic programs from other K-8 schools
- Continue to develop and integrate the arts into project work at all grade levels
- Evaluate and update extracurricular offerings across the school with input from various constituent groups.
- Continue to develop processes and procedures to enhance and prioritize the mental health and well-being of all students
- Consider necessary financial and campus facility resources needed to strengthen the overall student experience.
- Explore and develop a service-learning component within The Highlands Way framework.
- Seek additional opportunities to create and build new Highlands traditions through programs and gatherings that enhance the student experience, including middle school electives
- Engage parents, alum, and community to create opportunities for service and volunteer opportunities

An unrivaled student experience

“We chose Highlands because of the level of education, emphasis on a global perspective, and collaborative, project-based learning. We love the diverse, accepting community that encourages children to be individuals rather than cookie cutters of each other.”



All our students belong

Diversity & Belonging

HIGHLANDS JOYFULLY COMMITS TO DO THE CHALLENGING WORK THAT ENSURES ALL OF OUR STUDENTS BELONG AND ARE CARED FOR.

- Embrace The Highlands Way and its core values of Integrity, Respect, Responsibility, Compassion, and Collaboration in order to live up to our highest ideals
- Foster a community that welcomes all individuals, as well as diversity of background, thought, ideas, and talents

We will

- Develop a comprehensive professional development plan and timeline for faculty & staff to include Professional Learning Communities
- Consider diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) staffing needs and resources
- Create school-wide policies and procedures for gender health of all students
- Continue to integrate diversity and inclusion into curriculum and school programs
- Provide opportunities for bringing parent body alongside faculty and school as partners in support of the school's diversity and inclusion beliefs and practices
- Develop a DEIB team to offer guidance and support and to ensure teaching, learning, recruitment, and school culture reflect the school's beliefs and commitment to DEIB

OUR DIVERSITY STATEMENT

Highlands School celebrates diversity, inclusion, and belonging. We thoughtfully embrace all individuals as essential to the mosaic of our community. We are stronger together.

We are committed to...

- Fostering a culture of inclusion where children know that they belong
- Ensuring a just community for the well-being of our students
- Building a thriving community based on kindness, empathy, and relationships
- Celebrating all children with their diverse backgrounds, talents, perspectives, and gifts
- Embracing an openness towards ideas that differ from our own
- Actively cultivating a diverse community within our board, faculty, staff, and student population
- Promoting an educational environment and curriculum that promotes understanding of multiculturalism



Teaching & Learning

HIGHLANDS WILL BE A NATIONAL LEADER IN THE CREATION OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE AND MOST ENGAGING TEACHING AND LEARNING MODELS.

- Create and sustain the systems and resources necessary to maintain a forward-thinking approach to teaching and learning
- Be the place other schools and educators look to for best practices within a cohesive Early Childhood-8th grade community

We will

- Gather data and information from latest brain and educational research on student learning
- Explore innovative teaching and learning programs and best practices nationally and internationally
- Examine and implement evidence-based practices that strengthen the learning outcomes of all students
- Develop a process to ensure curricular alignment within and across all grade levels
- Develop and implement a plan for regular and ongoing curricular audits, including peer curricular audits utilizing teams from regional and national independent schools
- Continue to develop global competencies in curriculum throughout all grade levels and content areas
- Seek out and offer practical and relevant professional development for best teaching practices
- Focus on professional development on student learning, brain development, and child development



A national leader in creating engaging learning models



Attract, support, and retain an *outstanding* independent school faculty

Faculty & Staff

HIGHLANDS WILL NURTURE, SUPPORT, AND BUILD A DIVERSE FACULTY AND STAFF COMMUNITY AND CULTURE THAT BELIEVE EVERY CHILD CAN CHANGE THE WORLD FOR THE BETTER.

- Create leadership avenues and opportunities for those that seek career advancement across the various domains of the independent school world
- Set the bar for attracting, supporting, and retaining an outstanding independent school faculty and administrative team that is fully aligned with The Highlands Way

We will

- Create a formal recruitment plan with focus on community outreach to attract and hire outstanding and diverse faculty and staff
- Continue to benchmark faculty and staff compensation packages against SAIS/NAIS schools
- Explore incentives used by educational and non-educational organizations to recruit and retain employees
- Engage, inspire, challenge, and support faculty by creating a culture of collaboration and growth mindset through the lens of the School's mission

The ideal school for the leaders of tomorrow...



Campus & Facilities

HIGHLANDS WILL DEVELOP SHORT TERM AND LONG-TERM CAMPUS MASTER PLANS THAT MAKE OUR SCHOOL IDEAL FOR THE LEADERS OF TOMORROW.

We will

- Consider possible enrollment growth at key inflection points, as well as reflect a commitment to outdoor education and outdoor classrooms
- Address necessary facilities upgrades
- Complete a long-term enrollment plan to identify opportunities for growth at key grade levels and pinch points related to current physical campus

Finances & Resources



HIGHLANDS WILL REIMAGINE AND IMPLEMENT A COMPREHENSIVE FINANCIAL STRATEGY SO THAT THE SCHOOL WILL FLOURISH.

We will

- Build the School's financial resources in order to ensure that it can serve its current and future students and their families
- Refine the school's retention strategies while the Board and leadership consider thoughtful enrollment growth



...fully aligned
with *The
Highlands Way*

The Highlands Way

Integrity

Respect

Responsibility

Compassion

Collaboration

Visit Us-

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