

(e.) DESCRIPTION OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Mission Statement

Highland Academy Charter School strives to equip students with the academic, social, and technical skills to excel in today's world and contribute positively to our society and the future.

Vision Statement

Educating for Leadership, Educating for Life

Focus Areas

- Accountability
- Academics
- Character Development
- Career and Service Learning

Philosophy & Performance Targets

Highland Academy Charter School is a competency-based learning environment that promotes mastery learning across the curriculum. A philosophy of Shared Leadership, Shared Vision, Personal Competency, and Continuous Improvement is the foundation that guides our program. Attention is placed on individual student learning needs in which student voice and ownership are encouraged and expected.

Highland Academy was developed for parents (and students) interested in an innovative educational environment that combines interdisciplinary, real world, project-based learning, with rigorous academic expectations. The program focuses on several key principles including:

- *Personalization*
- *Student ownership of learning*
- *Shared decision making*
- *Varied and holistic assessments*
- *Social and emotional learning skills*

With a focus on these principles, Highland Academy prepares students to embody its' vision of "Educating for Leadership, Educating for Life" beyond the classroom and into adulthood.

Students are expected to achieve competency in District, State, and National standards, as well as those specific to the Highland learning continuum.

Often there is a profound gap between the knowledge and skills students learn in a traditional, seat-time based system and those that they need for success in their communities and workplaces. The

Highland Community recognizes that every child needs an education system that works to prepare him/her for participation in a workforce requiring the ability to communicate with others, solve complex problems, and think critically. Highland strives to systematically support students to successfully face rigorous higher education coursework, career challenges, and a globally competitive workforce. This includes a focus on competency learning through real-world experiences.

In addition to core academic standards, Highland students are expected to learn and achieve competency in additional sets of standards that bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world experiences. These are Personal, Social Service Standards (PSS) and College and Career Preparedness Standards (CCP). Embedded in these standards is skill development of the 4 C's – Communication, Critical Thinking, Collaboration, and Creativity, 21st Century skill sets critical to success beyond the classroom.

Core Values

The Highland Academy program emphasizes core values that include leadership, responsibility to culture and community, ethics, hard work and cooperation, and integrity, humility, and respect for others. Ultimately, Highland aims to have students become self-motivated, competent, lifelong learners prepared to contribute positively to our society. Highland Academy Charter Schools core values are:

- An academic program of excellence that is grounded in the basics with a rich understanding of culture and environment, which requires demonstration and application through a project-based curriculum connected to real-world issues.
- A program that cultivates personal, intellectual and social-emotional growth and responsibility. Instill integrity through leadership, promote the value of living an ethical life, and ensure that students make the connection between themselves, their education and the rest of the world by mastering the process of educating themselves.
- A learning environment in which all students are to be held to high standards of growth and progress, supported by a dedicated community of instructors, parents and mentors.

A mutually supportive and respectful learning environment.

The foundation for these values is a Culture of Respect for Everyone (CORE). Less a system of discipline and more a collective commitment to a physically, mentally, and emotionally safe learning environment, CORE endows all members of the Highland learning community with the responsibility of acting and speaking in a way that honors CORE values. In addition, staff and students also bear the responsibility to hold others accountable to CORE: adult to student, student to adult, adult to adult, and student to student.

THE EDUCATION PROGRAM

Core Curriculum Overview

The core educational program at Highland Academy supports 21st Century Learning for all students

in reading, writing, science, social environments and mathematics each school year. The curriculum is progressive and students develop competency in one developmental level before moving on to the next. This requires students to complete work on all learning standards in a particular content area and developmental level at a minimal expectational level. Learning is not “one and done,” rather students are given the opportunity to revise and re-do work until they have demonstrated competency.

Upon enrollment students are assessed in the core skill areas (reading, writing, mathematics) to determine initial placement at their developmental levels. Assessments are both formative and summative and are benchmarked and aligned to Highland Academy's standards.

Highland Academy structures the 6-12 developmental learning to build self-directed learning with a focus on transitions from one learning level to the next. This includes the use of technology that supports skills and knowledge acquisition.

Highland’s guaranteed and viable curriculum is driven by standards (what students must know and be able to do) that are aligned to the Common Core State Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, and the Alaska State Social Studies Standards. rubrics specifically outline how student learning is assessed across the rigorous expectations of each standard. Students engage in the process of learning by using multiple sources of information. These include but are not limited to traditional textbooks, magazines, blogs, websites, podcasts, and video. Further, as students progress through a competency system the learning is both synchronous and asynchronous.

Highland Academy utilizes blended models of learning where education combines face-to-face classroom methods with computer-mediated activities. The input and feedback of peers is central to the learning process at Highland, and students learn strategies and tools for giving and receiving constructive feedback. Interactions in the classroom are deliberate, guided, and design to improve processes and products. Highland Academy’s performance rather than time-based system allows students to progress through academic levels as they reach expected levels of competency, ultimately earning their high school diploma.

Highland Academy recognizes that students' different learning needs, family backgrounds and personal interests require individually designed educational programs. Our commitment of time and personnel maximizes our ability to know our students well. We emphasize a low student-teacher ratio, small class sizes, , and an advisory system that provides every student at Highland Academy with an adult advocate and academic advisor.

Classes are small and accommodate individualized assessments of the full range of each student's achievements. Assessments are not based solely on testing remembered facts, but also on a student's ability to problem solve, experience, and apply what they have learned. Students will not only complete projects, but often present to and teach others about their findings.

Students must complete performance and content skills at each level before moving to the next. The Highland Model includes learning in both content and process standards:

- Language Arts

- Mathematics
- Science
- Social Studies
- Personal, Social, and Service Skills (Character Education)
- College and Career Preparedness

In order for students to complete a level of instruction at competency, all learning targets (standards) in that level must be completed with at least a minimal level of understanding. No individual learning standard is omitted. Students “level up” at one of three levels:

- Advanced – the majority of standards have been mastered at the highest level of understanding and competency while the student has demonstrated proficient competency in the remaining standards
- Proficient – the student has demonstrated proficient competency in the majority of standards while demonstrating growth and adequate progress on the remaining standards
- Developing – the student has demonstrated sufficient competency in the learning standards in order to be prepared for instruction at the next level of learning

A student who has not demonstrated sufficient competency and is not academically ready for the next level of instruction may remain in an academic level beyond one year of instruction. Highland Academy is committed to giving students the tools they need to be successful as they make progress through their academic careers.

Unique Learning Opportunities

At Highland Academy, students learn by actively engaging in real-world problem solving. This type of work requires critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity and innovation. Project-based learning incorporates relevant and current issues, as well as the core disciplines. Students envision the interdisciplinary nature of these projects and find that each task may have more than one solution.

Leveraging current technology opens the environment to anytime, anywhere learning where students are encouraged to connect the learning from real-world activities to the standards they are required to earn on the journey to earning a high school diploma.

Each semester students participate in exploratoryIntensives. Staff and students work together to develop these non-traditional learning exploration days. The focus of exploration is wide in scope and is dependent on student need, interest and passions, teacher expertise, time, and available resources.

Topics can be scientific, technical, artistic, philanthropic or physical. Intensives address a range of standards and provide opportunities to be introduced to novel and non-traditional learning opportunities. Students experience content they may not be familiar with and explore their desire to develop a deeper understanding of areas in which they may be interested outside of the traditional classroom. Students spend a week in half or full day intensive, hands-on activities dedicated to the particular topic they have chosen.

Research shows that students who have the freedom to choose different strategies and approaches become more involved in the learning process and will be more likely to approach other problems with an open mind. The curriculum is academically rigorous. Student voice and choice in the learning

process is a significant driver in student motivation. Intensives are one example of Highland's dedication to utilizing real-world experiences, and brainbased learning to allow students to realize their individual potential.

Social-Emotional Learning and Career Readiness

Two critical and unique elements of the Highland curriculum are Personal and Social Service Standards (PSS) and College and Career Preparedness (CCP). These standard strands cover a range of essential skills and dispositions, and encompass a set of attributes necessary to promote the growth of young adults who are ready for college, the work force, and at the most basic level, adulthood.

Highland Academy recognizes that social-emotional learning has become a critical component of education nation-wide in general and in the Anchorage School District in particular. Highland not only explicitly teaches these critical skills but assesses them for all students through the completion of PSS standards. The student's advisor is the conduit through which PSS standards are assigned, assessed, and earned.

Elements of PSS include:

- Personal Growth
- Service to the Community
- Personal Expression
- Health
- Social Skills

Students engage in activities in and out of school to cover the standards in each of three levels of PSS. The culmination of each level is a PSS Advancement in which students present the growth they've made as a result of completing this work to a panel including their advisor, teachers, administrators, and peers. A PSS advancement is a celebration of learning in the truest sense.

CCP standards cover a range of skills and attributes necessary for a successful transition to college and the working world. Also set at three levels of increasing complexity and demand, CCP standards include:

- Professional etiquette
- Personal finance
- Internet safety
- Ethics
- Career exploration
- Collaboration

PSS and CCP standards round out a Highland Academy education by complimenting academic skills with the unquantifiable attributes that standardized tests don't measure. These elements of student growth and development are as important as content knowledge. Whether it's perseverance, social-emotional intelligence, metacognition, or executive functioning, these abilities indicate potential and success as much if not more so than academic ability.

Curricular Review

Highland Academy Charter School reviews and revises its standards on a cyclical basis to ensure what students need to know and be able to do keeps pace with the knowledge and skills required in today's interconnected global environment. Further, rubrics are revised as necessary to ensure alignment and rigor with standards. Review and if necessary, revision, takes place on a four-year cycle as follows:

- Year 1 - Language Arts
- Year 2 - Science; College and Career Preparedness
- Year 3 - Social Studies
- Year 4 – Mathematics; Personal, Social Service

Standards in Highland Academy's College and Career Preparedness strand (CCP) were revised in the summer of 2016. This revision consisted of the combining of two previously independent strands: Careers and Technology, as well as a streamlining of the technology-related standards to focus more on application of technology skills to learning and career. Personal Social Service (PSS) standards, revised in 2014, emphasize skills for healthy living, self-knowledge, service to the community, personal growth and responsibility, and job readiness. Technology standards within the CCP strand align to the National Educational Technology Standards for Students (NETS-S).



Students participate in all required state and national tests including.

Highland Academy Charter School recognizes that a comprehensive assessment system is designed to identify student strengths and areas of need. Key to that process is the systematic and systemic program known as Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).

From the Anchorage School District website, “The Anchorage School District defines Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) as an integrated, multi-tiered system of instruction, assessment, and intervention designed to meet the academic, social/emotional and behavioral needs of ALL students.”

The success of an MTSS framework is dependent on the effective interaction of student outcomes:

- data used for decision-making,
- use of evidence-based practices to get to student outcomes, and
- the systems which adults need in order to support the implementation of the practices.

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support at Highland Academy

MTSS is an important framework for pulling apart the content students must know and the processes

students must be able to demonstrate in order to be proficient learners. Highland's competency-based instructional framework is the foundation of an MTSS system that is embedded in the components of Shared Vision, Shared Leadership and Personal Mastery. There is an implicit recognition that each student learns at his/her own pace and that placement in a student's academically appropriate instructional level begins the process of providing support in an appropriately challenging learning environment.

Highland's Shared Vision grounds the learning community to work towards a common outcome for student learning. Shared Leadership engages all stakeholders to participate in the decision-making process. Additionally, it provides a framework that encourages students to take ownership of their own learning, thus they are able to articulate problem areas. Instructional design focuses on personal competency. Rubrics, standards-based assessment data, web-based programs along with formative and summative assessments are used to compare, contrast, and validate student progress.

The most powerful tools that support student learning are the standards and rubrics. The standards are a clear picture of what students need to know and be able to do, while the rubrics detail the criteria for determining progress towards competency. Rubric assessments fall into the following categories:

Cumulative Analytical Assessments: Assess the ability to measure the application of skills and knowledge in the context of real world situations.

Student Self-Assessments: Student directed assessments of knowledge and skills in a particular standard and level.

Skill Assessments: Demonstration of knowledge and skills through basic recall of facts and specifics.

As outlined above, Highland Academy Charter School's model aligns with the district MTSS initiative, addressing the goal to increase the effectiveness of instruction so students achieve competency in learning standards across content areas.

Highland's educational model places students at their development level regardless of age, thus students with special needs are fully integrated into the general education program. The student-centered, individualized nature of Highland allows teachers to target IEP goals and move students through the required levels at a pace that meets the unique needs of each child. Related service providers, when possible, work in the classroom setting to support the students within the context of that learning. When this is not possible, space is provided for pull out services (Speech, OT, PT).

English Language Learner (ELL) students are fully integrated in the general education program. Highland coordinates additional support for English Language Learners with the ASD ELL Department. Without the constraints of time, ELL students can progress through the course of study at a pace that supports English language acquisition and may include a modified course of study

Community Connections

A practical understanding of ethics and integrity is not only a part of our curriculum, but also an essential element in the work place. Students learn how personal ethics relate to moral codes, as well as building responsibility, leadership, integrity, and teamwork. Community service projects and volunteer work are required at all levels of the Personal, Social and Service Learning strand. Students

are also expected to participate in job shadows and internships with a focus on exploring career interests.

Highland Academy's schedule is designed to meet the rapidly changing needs of today's learner and the needs of an evolving work place. The schedule is re-evaluated each spring to ensure that it is meeting student needs and providing optimal opportunities for core instruction, elective offerings, and supportive and productive advisory time.

Students involved in sporting or academic activities at other facilities may receive waivers for release time from Highland, continuing their project work outside of the school. Students wishing to leave school during the regular day must complete an Off-Campus ILP (Individual Learning Plan) that shows what standards they are completing, how they will do this, and when they will submit their work. Similar to projects at work, students are accountable for their work outside the walls of the school, setting up and meeting with their teachers to go over their work and get revised assignments/projects until proficiency is reached.

Community and Business Links to Support Student Learning

The core curriculum offers the opportunity to participate in real-world projects often supported by business and industry partners that give students the opportunity to learn while working on problems of interest and concern in the community. . Participation in programs such as, Lego Robotics and Real World Design Challenge provide natural opportunities for partnerships with mentors to support student learning. Highland continues to look for and utilize School Business Partnerships with various organizations in Anchorage in order to provide students with opportunities to connect with businesses and industries in which they may have interest in pursuing.

Staff Roles and Relationships

Leaders, learners, collegiality

Highland staff members have an opportunity to form close bonds with every student. Each student has an advisor with whom they meet with regularly to address important personal, social, future career, and academic challenges and opportunities. The advisor becomes familiar with each student's personal needs, strengths, and family background, and functions as the point of communication with the student's family. Advisors serve as a student's academic coach, PSS and CCP facilitator, and family point of contact. The advisor-student relationship is critical to the growth and progress of students across disciplines and throughout their years at Highland. Students often loop with an advisor for multiple years.

Staff members embrace professional development in research-based best practices that support teaching and learning. Professional development topics include (but are not limited to):

- School-wide action or improvement plans including data analysis
- Pedagogy (in general, by content)
- Technology use and innovation
- Formative/Summative Assessments
- Interventions for struggling students
- Social, Emotional Development (Mindset, Habits of Mind)
- Brain research

Teachers have planning times at the beginning of each school year, allowing them to develop the team unity and curriculum projects that challenge and motivate students. Additionally, in-service planning days prior to each semester and daily group planning time are provided to give teachers both formal and informal

opportunities to review, revise, and propose curriculum activities, thus developing the genuine interdependence that is critical to the success of the learning program at Highland. By planning multidisciplinary curriculum projects together, teachers become a collaborative team invested in the performance of each student, as well as the performance of the whole school.

Parent Involvement that Supports Learning

Parent involvement in their child's educational experience is a critical component to success. Open, honest communication is a key aspect of Highland Academy's student/parent/teacher partnership. Parents have 24/7 access to Highland Academy's on-line recording and reporting system, *Empower*. (Exhibit F) *Empower* provides information on a child's progress towards standards competency in each content strand. Notes from teachers detail the assignment(s) and/or projects that were used to evaluate student progress. Additionally, students are expected to revise work that does not meet expectations for competency. *Empower* allows parents to monitor student-defined goals and/or work with their child to set and monitor goals. Parents also have access to playlists, that are linked to the standards being addressed, the tasks/projects to be completed, a calendar of due dates, and the ways in which learning will be assessed. Additionally, Highland utilizes quarterly reports to provide parents with information regarding their child's classroom performance, work habits, and progress toward completing levels of instruction.

Conclusion

Highland Academy Charter School offers students a unique learning environment predicated on the belief that when students take charge of their own learning, they develop not only strong academic skills, but life skills that will serve them well beyond the classroom. In Highland's competency-based system, students are expected to make progress and growth on all learning standards and achievement is measured by the satisfactory completion of standards rather than an average of multiple assessments resulting in a letter grade.

Social emotional learning and college and career preparedness