

HIGHER GROUND ACADEMY

Comprehensive Achievement and

Civic Readiness (CACR) Strategic Plan

Adopted by the School Board on 12/16/2025

Contents

Introduction	2
District and School Site Goals and Benchmarks	3
Assessing Student Progress and Instructional Strengths	5
Curriculum and Instruction Review System	8
Strategies for Improving Instruction and Student Achievement	10
Equitable Distribution of Teachers	12
Education Effectiveness Practices	13
Annual Implementation Budget	15
Materials, Practices, and Curriculum	15
Plan Review and Continuous Improvement	17

I. Introduction

Provide a brief summary of your school's mission, student population, and commitment to comprehensive achievement and civic readiness.

Higher Ground Academy HGA is a public charter school located in Saint Paul, Minnesota, serving students in kindergarten through grade twelve. Established in 1998, the school is guided by a mission to prepare students to become successful, ethical, and responsible citizens equipped for the academic, professional, and civic challenges of the twenty-first century. The mission emphasizes college readiness, integrity, equity, environmental stewardship, and a strong work ethic, ensuring that all students graduate prepared to contribute positively to their communities.

HGA's enrollment has experienced steady growth over the past three years, reflecting both strong community trust and effective outreach. Enrollment increased from 1,070 students in 2022–23 to 1,102 in 2023–24, to 1,194 students in 2024–25, and reached 1,206 in 2025–26.

HGA's student body has historically been composed primarily of students of African descent, particularly from East African communities, and the school continues to serve as a strong educational and cultural anchor for immigrant families. In recent years, the academy's demographics have diversified, with the percentage of non-East African students rising from less than 1% in 2022–23 to approximately 20% in 2025–26. This diversification reflects the school's targeted community outreach and marketing efforts under new leadership.

The number of English Learners (ELs) continues to grow significantly, reaching 617 students in 2024–25, an increase of 78 from the prior year. Many are newly arrived immigrants from countries such as Ethiopia, Syria, Libya, Sudan, Yemen, and Afghanistan, representing a wide linguistic and cultural spectrum. This expanding EL population underscores HGA's ongoing commitment to language development, equitable access, and culturally responsive instruction.

HGA is deeply committed to advancing comprehensive academic achievement and civic readiness for every student. The school's instructional model integrates rigorous academic standards, character education, and community engagement, ensuring that learning extends beyond the classroom into real-world contexts. Students participate in community service and leadership activities that foster responsibility, empathy, and a sense of belonging—core elements of HGA's civic mission.

Through data-driven instruction, multilingual supports, and intentional family engagement, HGA ensures that every student—regardless of background or language proficiency—has the opportunity to meet or exceed grade-level standards. The academy's commitment to continuous improvement is reflected in its use of multiple assessment measures, collaborative instructional planning, and alignment of resources with the Comprehensive Achievement and Civic Readiness (CACR) goals. Ultimately, HGA's vision is to cultivate college-ready graduates who are reflective, compassionate, and civically engaged, prepared not only to achieve personal success but also to contribute positively to their communities and society at large.

II. District and School Site Goals and Benchmarks

Set clear goals and measurable benchmarks for instruction and student achievement.

Indicator 1: Mission Related Outcomes

School Goal: Over the period of the contract, students at Higher Ground Academy HGA will demonstrate commitment and connection to their community through service.

- From FY25–FY30, at least 90% of students will successfully participate in a community-related project each year.

Indicator 2: English Language Learners

School Goal: English Learners will demonstrate adequate progress toward English language proficiency.

- From FY25–FY30, the percentage of English Learners meeting target on the ACCESS test (grades K–12) will be equal to or greater than the state percentage.
- From FY25–FY30, the average progress toward target for English Learners on the ACCESS test will be equal to or greater than the state average progress toward target.

Indicator 3: Reading Growth

School Goal: Students will demonstrate growth in reading as measured by state accountability tests and nationally normed assessments.

- From FY25–FY30, the percentage of students whose achievement level improved on statewide reading assessments will be equal to or greater than the state percentage.
- From FY25–FY30, the percentage of students whose achievement level decreased or stayed “does not meet standards” will be equal to or less than the state percentage.
- From FY25–FY30, at least 75% of students will increase their FastBridge scale score from fall to spring by at least 50% of the points needed to qualify as “college pathway.”

Indicator 4: Math Growth

School Goal: Students will demonstrate growth in math as measured by state accountability tests and nationally normed assessments.

- From FY25–FY30, the percentage of students whose achievement level improved on statewide math assessments will be equal to or greater than the state percentage.
- From FY25–FY30, the percentage of students whose achievement level decreased or stayed “does not meet standards” will be equal to or less than the state percentage.
- From FY25–FY30, at least 75% of students will increase their FastBridge math scale score from fall to spring by at least 50% of the points needed to qualify as “college pathway.”

Indicator 5: Reading Proficiency

School Goal: Students will demonstrate proficiency in reading as measured by state accountability tests.

- From FY25–FY30, the grade 3 proficiency index score will be equal to or greater than the state score.
- From FY25–FY30, the aggregate proficiency index score for all grades will be equal to or greater than the state score.

- From FY25–FY30, the aggregate proficiency index score will be greater than the resident district’s score (ISD 625 – St. Paul Public Schools).
- From FY25–FY30, the FRP subgroup proficiency index will be equal to or greater than the state and greater than the district.
- From FY25–FY30, the ELL subgroup proficiency index will be greater than the district’s.
- From FY25–FY30, the Special Education subgroup proficiency index will be greater than the district’s.

Indicator 6: Math Proficiency

School Goal: Students will demonstrate proficiency in math as measured by state accountability tests.

- From FY25–FY30, the aggregate math proficiency index will increase by at least 5 points from baseline (71.1) or be equal to or greater than the state’s.
- From FY25–FY30, the aggregate proficiency index will be greater than the district’s (ISD 625).
- From FY25–FY30, the FRP subgroup proficiency index will increase by at least 5 points from baseline (70.9) or be equal to or greater than the state’s.
- From FY25–FY30, the FRP, ELL, and Special Education subgroup proficiency indices will each be greater than the district’s.

Indicator 7: Science Proficiency

School Goal: Students will demonstrate proficiency in science as measured by state accountability tests.

- From FY25–FY30, the aggregate proficiency index will increase by at least 5 points from baseline (58.7) or be equal to or greater than the state’s.
- From FY25–FY30, the aggregate proficiency index will be greater than the district’s (ISD 625).
- From FY25–FY30, the FRP subgroup proficiency index will be equal to or greater than the state’s and greater than the district’s.
- From FY25–FY30, the ELL and Special Education subgroup proficiency indices will each be greater than the district’s.

Indicator 8: Proficiency or Growth in Other Curricular Areas or Educational Programs

School Goal: In aggregate, the percent of students in PreK moving on to Kindergarten that meet at least 60% of Kindergarten Readiness Benchmarks (as determined by *Teaching Strategies GOLD*) will be no less than 70%.

Indicator 9: Post-Secondary Readiness

School Goal: Students will demonstrate readiness for postsecondary success.

- From FY25–FY30, the 6-year graduation rate will be equal to or greater than the state rate.
- From FY25–FY30, the 4-year graduation rate will be greater than the district’s rate (ISD 625).
- From FY25–FY30, at least 70% of graduates will achieve college-ready assessment scores (ACT/Accuplacer).
- From FY25–FY30, at least 50% of graduates will earn college credit prior to graduation.
- From FY25–FY30, at least 60% of graduates will be accepted into at least one college prior to graduation.

Indicator 10: Attendance

School Goal: From FY25–FY30, the average annual consistent attendance rate will be equal to or greater than the state’s rate.

Indicator 11: Lifelong Learning

Strategy: Embed inquiry-based learning, problem-solving routines, and discussion protocols into all core classrooms.

Target: Classroom observation data will show 80% implementation fidelity of inquiry-based strategies.

Strategy: Implement a structured quarterly goal-setting and reflection process in grades 6–12.

Target: At least 80% of students will complete all four annual cycles and demonstrate growth in self-management skills based on reflection rubrics.

III. Assessing Student Progress and Instructional Strengths

Describe how the school will:

- *Assess each student’s progress toward state and local academic standards.*
- *Identify students for gifted and talented programs and provide accelerated instruction when appropriate.*
- *Implement procedures for early admission to kindergarten or first grade for gifted and talented learners (per Minn. Stat. § 120B.15).*
- *Identify the strengths and weaknesses of instruction and curriculum to ensure all students are prepared for college, careers, and civic life.*

A. Academic Assessments Used:

HGA will implement a comprehensive and data-driven assessment system to measure and support each student’s progress toward Minnesota’s academic standards and the school’s local goals for comprehensive achievement and civic readiness. The assessment framework will integrate state-mandated summative assessments, nationally normed benchmark assessments, and classroom-based formative measures, ensuring that data is used continuously to inform instruction, advance equity, and promote readiness for college, career, and community life.

1. State Accountability Assessments

All students will participate in the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) in reading, mathematics, and science according to state testing windows and grade-level requirements:

- Reading MCA: Administered in grades 3–8 and 10
- Mathematics MCA: Administered in grades 3–8 and 11
- Science MCA: Administered in grades 5, 8, and once in high school

The MCAs provide summative evidence of mastery of Minnesota’s state standards and serve as the foundation for evaluating progress toward the school’s contractual performance indicators. Results will be disaggregated by grade level and by student group, and content and skill areas to identify strengths, gaps,

and areas for instructional focus. Data from the MCAs will inform school improvement planning and the CACR strategic priorities.

In addition to the MCA, all English Language Learner students will participate in the annual administration of the ACCESS for ELLs exam. The test assess both social and academic language proficiency, aligned with WIDA's English Language Development Standards. Scores from the ACCESS test are used to decide instructional supports, monitor growth, and determine when a student is ready to exit English-language services.

2. Local Benchmark and Growth Assessments

To monitor student growth and instructional effectiveness throughout the year, HGA administers FastBridge Reading and Math assessments three times annually—fall, winter, and spring—for students in grades K–11.

- The fall assessment establishes baseline proficiency and identifies students in need of additional support or enrichment.
- The winter assessment monitors midyear progress and informs adjustments to intervention and instructional pacing.
- The spring assessment measures cumulative growth and readiness for grade-level advancement.

FastBridge data supports ongoing academic decision-making by teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators. Students not meeting benchmark expectations receive differentiated instruction, small-group intervention, or targeted tutoring which include Tier II support by Title I teachers, Tier III support by a reading specialist, Extended-day program support. Data trends will be analyzed to ensure equitable access to learning opportunities for all students, particularly English Learners and those requiring academic support.

3. Formative and Diagnostic Assessments

To provide real-time insight into student learning, HGA will continue utilizing IXL Reading and Math diagnostic pre-assessments at the beginning of each semester. These adaptive tools identify skill gaps, enabling teachers to personalize instruction aligned with state standards and each student's individual growth pathway.

In addition, classroom teachers will conduct standards-aligned formative assessments—including unit tests, writing prompts, projects, and performance tasks—to evaluate daily and weekly mastery. These assessments will support responsive instruction, helping educators immediately address misconceptions, reinforce key skills, and extend learning for advanced students.

4. Data Analysis, Collaboration, and Communication

Assessment will be systematically reviewed and applied across multiple levels to promote academic achievement:

- **Teacher Level:** Educators will use data dashboards to track growth, group students strategically, and tailor instruction. Collaborative data meetings, referred to as Student Progress meetings, will allow teachers to share effective strategies and align support across content areas.

- Leadership Level: Instructional leaders will analyze disaggregated data to monitor subgroup performance, evaluate curriculum effectiveness, and guide professional development priorities.
- Schoolwide Level: Aggregate data will inform the CACR strategic goals, Title program planning, and annual improvement initiatives. Findings will be integrated into the school's progress monitoring for both academic and civic development benchmarks.
- Family Engagement: Results from each testing cycle will be shared with families through conferences, digital reports, and family nights. These communications will strengthen the home–school partnership and empower families to support student learning.

5. Continuous Improvement and Civic Readiness

HGA's assessment system will be embedded within a continuous improvement cycle—assess, analyze, act, and reflect. Data will not only be used to measure achievement but also to cultivate key civic competencies such as responsibility, perseverance, and self-reflection. Students will learn to set personal goals, track their own progress, and reflect on growth—skills that directly contribute to civic readiness and lifelong learning.

Through this intentional use of assessment data, HGA will ensure that every student will be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and habits necessary for academic success and active, responsible citizenship in the broader community.

B. Gifted/Talented Identification Process:

HGA will establish a systematic process to assess, identify, and support students with exceptional academic abilities. The goal is to ensure that advanced learners are appropriately challenged and provided with opportunities to reach their highest potential.

Identification Process – Students will be identified for gifted and talented (G/T) programming through multiple measures, including:

- Standardized assessments: Students exceeding standards on the MCAs and identified as “college pathway” students on the FastBridge.
- Classroom performance: Students who demonstrate advanced problem-solving, creativity, or mastery of content well above grade-level expectations.
- Parent and teacher recommendations: Input from families and educators is incorporated to capture a holistic picture of student potential.

Once identified, gifted and talented students will be provided with differentiated and accelerated instruction. Strategies include:

- Skipping a grade (primarily available for elementary school students)
- Flexible grouping within classrooms to allow advanced learners to work on higher-level material
- Access to honors-level coursework (for students in grades nine and ten)
- Encouraging qualified high school students to participate in Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO)

C. Early Admission

Higher Ground Academy will implement clear procedures for early admission to kindergarten designed to identify and support gifted and talented learners whose fifth birthday falls between September 2 and December 31.

Eligible children will undergo both academic and developmental assessments to ensure readiness. Academically, they must score above average on the FASTBridge Early Reading and Early Math assessments used for entering kindergarteners. Socially and behaviorally, they must demonstrate advanced maturity, as measured through a normed behavior rating scale, parent reports, and teacher observations during a simulated kindergarten experience.

The assessment team will make a consensus decision on eligibility, and results will be documented in a written report shared with parents. Accepted students will be formally enrolled following standard enrollment procedures, and the school conducts annual follow-up reviews to evaluate the progress and success of early entrants, ensuring the process remains equitable and effective.

D. Instructional Strengths/Needs Review:

HGA will use a comprehensive, data-driven approach to evaluate the quality of instruction and ensure continuous improvement toward student and school success. The process combines assessment results, classroom observations, stakeholder feedback, teacher self-reflection, and collaborative review structures to build a full picture of instructional effectiveness.

Data Analysis – Student achievement data will serve as a primary tool for evaluating instruction. Results from state assessments (MCAs), local benchmarks (FastBridge), and curriculum-based tools (Lexia, Read Live, IXL) will be analyzed to identify patterns of success and areas where students are struggling. When large groups of students underperform in a specific standard or subject area, instructional gaps will be examined to determine whether adjustments in teaching strategies or curriculum alignment are needed.

Classroom Observations and Evaluations – Principals and team leads will conduct regular classroom observations to assess the delivery of instruction, use of best practices, and alignment with Minnesota state standards. These observations will be paired with at least two formal evaluations and a summative review each year, providing feedback on instructional strengths and areas for growth.

Stakeholder Surveys – Parent, student, and staff surveys will be conducted annually to gather direct feedback on instructional effectiveness, classroom environment, and overall school climate. These surveys provide valuable insights into how instruction is experienced by learners and perceived by families and staff. Results will be reviewed alongside assessment and observation data to identify trends, highlight strengths, and uncover areas that may require additional attention or improvement.

Collaborative Professional Learning – Findings from data reviews, evaluations, and surveys will be shared during Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and staff meetings, where teachers analyze student work, reflect on instructional practices, and collaborate on strategies to address areas of need. Professional development will then be tailored to meet identified needs, whether through training in culturally responsive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, or content-specific strategies.

IV. Curriculum and Instruction Review System

Explain how the school will regularly review the quality and effectiveness of its instruction and curriculum.

Note: The information in this section reflects current practice. Moving forward, HGA will continue to refine its processes and strategies to better align with student needs as well as emerging ideas and technologies in teaching and learning.

HGA has established a comprehensive system for the periodic review and evaluation of all instruction and curriculum. This system is rooted in the school's long-term strategic plan, designed to ensure continuous improvement in teaching and learning, promote comprehensive student achievement, and prepare students for civic readiness. The process emphasizes evidence-based strategies, data-driven decision-making, stakeholder feedback, and alignment with state statutes on teacher and principal evaluations.

1. Best Practices and Proven Strategies

Instruction and curriculum are reviewed regularly through a multi-layered system of oversight and evaluation. Teachers submit lesson plans, which are reviewed to confirm alignment with state education standards. Instructional delivery is evaluated through both formal and informal classroom observations conducted by principals and the executive director. Formal observations occur at least twice per year, with additional visits for new or struggling teachers, while informal walkthroughs provide ongoing feedback on instructional practices, classroom management, and student engagement.

These processes ensure that strategies and best practices—including student-centered, culturally responsive pedagogy and the integration of technology—are consistently applied across classrooms. Instructional review data is used to confirm that teachers implement proven, research-based methods that support diverse learning styles and promote academic growth.

2. Student Outcomes

The school's evaluation system will place strong emphasis on student outcomes as indicators of instructional quality. Data from both internal benchmarks and state assessments, including the MCA and FastBridge, will be analyzed to measure academic growth and identify trends across grade levels and student groups.

These data will be supplemented by student, parent, and teacher surveys, which provide insights into instructional quality, curriculum effectiveness, and school climate. Findings from these sources will be used to make data-driven adjustments to curriculum and instructional priorities, ensuring that decisions are grounded in evidence and responsive to community needs.

3. Access to Effective and Representative Teachers

Equity and representation are central to HGA's strategic plan. The school actively recruits and supports teachers from diverse racial, ethnic, and national backgrounds. Currently, more than 60% of the school's staff come from diverse groups, closely reflecting the demographics of HGA's student body—where over 95% are from low-income families, approximately 97% are students of color, and more than 40% are English learners.

This intentional alignment ensures that students see themselves represented in their teachers and leaders, which enhances engagement, fosters trust, and promotes a culturally responsive learning environment. Representation also strengthens the school's capacity to deliver equitable outcomes for all learners by

ensuring all students have access to effective educators who understand their backgrounds and learning needs.

4. School Leader Evaluations

Accountability for instructional quality will be reinforced through principal evaluations. These evaluations assess leadership effectiveness, with particular emphasis on instructional supervision, staff development, and student achievement outcomes. Results will be used to identify leadership strengths, target areas for professional growth, and guide ongoing coaching and support.

By maintaining a consistent evaluation process for school leaders, HGA will ensure that instructional oversight, curriculum implementation, and staff development will remain effective and aligned with the school's mission of continuous improvement.

5. Teacher Evaluations (per Minn. Stat. § 122A.40, subd. 8)

Teacher evaluations will incorporate multiple measures, including classroom observations, professional responsibilities, and student academic growth. Formal evaluations will occur at least twice per year, and additional observations will be conducted for new or struggling teachers. This process provides meaningful feedback on teaching practices, classroom management, and student engagement.

Through the evaluation process, teachers will receive individualized guidance to strengthen instructional practices and align them with schoolwide goals. Evaluation results directly inform professional development planning, ensuring that teacher growth contributes to overall instructional improvement and student success.

V. Strategies for Improving Instruction and Student Achievement

List strategies for improving instruction, curriculum, and student outcomes for all students, with specific attention to English learners' English language development and, when possible, their native language development. Please note, this section should not include only information about English learners.

HGA is guided by a long-term strategic plan that integrates rigorous instruction, culturally sustaining curriculum, and data-driven improvement to advance student learning and civic readiness. The school's instructional framework is grounded in equity, continuous reflection, and high expectations for all learners. Through aligned curriculum design, targeted support systems, and ongoing professional development, HGA ensures that every student—particularly English Learners and those from diverse cultural backgrounds—has access to effective teaching, a responsive learning environment, and the skills necessary to thrive in college, career, and community life.

Curriculum

Higher Ground Academy HGA provides a rigorous, standards-aligned curriculum that supports comprehensive student achievement and civic readiness. All curriculum areas are aligned to the Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards and structured to promote depth of understanding through a student-centered and equity-driven approach. Teachers apply Robert Marzano's instructional model, planning lessons with clear learning targets and scales that guide students from foundational knowledge to mastery and extension.

Curriculum materials are continuously reviewed to identify and eliminate bias and to ensure that instruction remains culturally sustaining and antiracist. The school library is intentionally curated to include books that reflect the diverse cultures, languages, and lived experiences of its learners, reinforcing inclusivity and representation. Teachers integrate technology and digital learning tools across grade levels to expand access to advanced coursework, differentiate instruction, and provide real-time assessment of student progress.

Instruction

Instruction at HGA is grounded in best practices, continuous reflection, and a commitment to educational effectiveness. Teachers employ differentiated strategies to meet varied learning needs, promote critical thinking, and build on the strengths of each learner. The instructional program integrates technology, data, and culturally sustaining pedagogy to ensure equity, rigor, and student engagement.

Each teacher completes approximately 40 hours of professional development annually, focusing on standards-based instruction, formative assessment, rigorous and student centered instruction, and culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices. Ongoing mentoring and coaching strengthen lesson design and delivery.

HGA's motto — *"How are the children? The children are well and learning."* — anchors the school's instructional philosophy. It serves as a reminder that every decision and instructional choice must prioritize the well-being and success of students. This guiding principle is revisited in professional development sessions, faculty meetings, and collaborative planning, reinforcing the school's student-first mission.

English Learners (EL) and Native Language Development

With over 40% of students identified as English Learners, HGA operates a robust ELL Program supported by eight licensed specialists. The program equips students with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to achieve communicative and academic success in English while valuing and affirming their native languages and cultural identities.

Instruction is delivered through push-in and pull-out models, ensuring students receive targeted English language development along with full access to grade-level content. Instruction emphasizes academic vocabulary, reading comprehension, oral fluency, and writing development. Teachers and ELL specialists collaborate to align content and language objectives across all subjects, integrating language learning into core academic instruction.

Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)

To address academic differences and accelerate growth, HGA employs a data-driven, tiered intervention system grounded in real-time assessment results.

- Tier I: Core classroom instruction includes differentiated supports and scaffolds.
- Tier II: Targeted small-group instruction is led by licensed Title I teachers focusing on skill reinforcement.
- Tier III: Intensive, individualized interventions are delivered by reading specialists.

Student progress is monitored using FastBridge assessments administered in fall, winter, and spring. Results are reviewed during quarterly data meetings to evaluate intervention effectiveness and guide instruction.

This framework ensures all students—particularly those needing additional support—receive timely and appropriate academic intervention.

Professional Learning and Teacher Development

HGA puts effort towards fostering a collaborative professional culture designed to strengthen instructional quality and teacher retention. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) meet weekly for data analysis, lesson study, and sharing of effective instructional strategies. Staff participate in ongoing professional development focused on antiracist instruction, culturally responsive teaching, and trauma-informed practices.

To sustain a high-quality and representative workforce, HGA invests in its “Grow Your Own” initiative, providing pathways for alumni and paraprofessionals to become licensed educators. This approach reinforces staff diversity and ensures that educators share cultural and linguistic connections with the students they serve, strengthening engagement and community trust.

Continuous Improvement and Equity

HGA’s commitment to improvement is embedded in its long-term strategic plan, which integrates rigorous instruction, cultural validation, and equity-centered practices. Data from assessments, classroom observations, and stakeholder feedback drive ongoing adjustments to instruction and curriculum.

Intentional efforts are made to create a culturally validating and embracing community environment. With a student body composed largely of immigrant and refugee families, HGA does its best to incorporate cultural perspectives into instruction, communication, and family engagement. Through these intentional strategies—anchored in its mission and motto—HGA strives to ensure that all students have access to high-quality teaching, equitable opportunities, and the skills needed to thrive in college, career, and civic life.

VI. Equitable Distribution of Teachers

Describe how the school will check for and correct any inequities in teacher assignments, ensuring that students from low-income families, families of color, and American Indian families are not disproportionately taught by inexperienced, ineffective, or out-of-field teachers.

Higher Ground Academy HGA recognizes that the consistency, preparation, and diversity of its teaching staff have a direct impact on student achievement and civic readiness. By regularly analyzing teacher assignments, experience levels, and licensure alignment, the school maintains an instructional workforce that mirrors its student population and upholds the school’s mission of equity and excellence for all learners.

A. Data Collection and Analysis Process

Each year, Higher Ground Academy will conduct a systematic review of staffing assignments to examine teacher experience, licensure, and diversity. This review will ensure compliance with Minnesota’s statutory requirements and support equitable access to effective instruction across all grade levels.

Data will be collected and analyzed to verify that teachers are appropriately licensed, experienced, and teaching within their assigned subject areas. The annual evaluation will also help identify any potential inequities in staffing or licensure distribution so that corrective measures can be taken promptly. This

process will allow the school to maintain transparency and accountability in its efforts to provide all students with highly qualified educators.

B. Current Status of Teacher Assignment

Staffing data for FY25 reflect strong stability and alignment in teacher placement across grade levels and programs:

- 97% of teachers are licensed.
- 93% have more than three years of experience.
- 97% are teaching within their licensure area.
- 65% hold advanced degrees.
- 73% of HGA's teachers identify as racially or ethnically diverse, reflecting the school's student body.

These data confirm that HGA students are not disproportionately taught by inexperienced, unlicensed, or out-of-field teachers. The school's diverse instructional team closely represents the backgrounds and experiences of its learners, creating a culturally responsive environment that supports student engagement and academic growth.

C. Improvement Strategies and Timeline

HGA's long-term strategic plan includes deliberate recruitment and retention strategies to sustain staffing equity and enhance instructional quality.

- The school will continue to recruit qualified educators from multiple countries, including Kenya, Ghana, the Philippines, Pakistan, and Egypt, expanding its pool of experienced and culturally diverse teachers.
- HGA will continue operating a "Grow Your Own" initiative, providing pathways for former students who serve as teacher aides to become licensed educators, strengthening community ties and long-term workforce stability.

These initiatives will reinforce HGA's commitment to maintaining a highly qualified, multicultural, and representative teaching staff. Through ongoing monitoring, annual data review, and sustained professional growth opportunities, the school ensures that all students—particularly those from low-income families and communities of color—benefit from equitable access to experienced, effective, and licensed teachers.

VII. Education Effectiveness Practices

Outline practices that the school will implement to:

- ***Combine high-quality, rigorous, accurate, antiracist, and culturally sustaining instruction, curriculum, and technology.***
- ***Create learning and work environments that respect, affirm, and integrate the cultural and community strengths of all students, families, and staff.***
- ***Build a collaborative professional culture that supports and retains qualified, racially and ethnically diverse staff who are effective with diverse student populations.***

At HGA, educational effectiveness means creating a system where rigor, equity, and cultural responsiveness work together to ensure all students thrive academically and personally. These practices are

intentionally designed to integrate antiracist, culturally sustaining instruction with a collaborative, professional culture that values and retains a diverse, mission-driven staff.

A. High-Quality, Rigorous, Antiracist, and Culturally Sustaining Instruction, Curriculum, and Technology

HGA will actively embed antiracist and culturally sustaining principles into lesson design, classroom materials, and instructional strategies to affirm students' identities while challenging inequitable narratives. Teachers will receive professional learning in culturally responsive pedagogy, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and trauma-informed instruction, ensuring that lessons meet the diverse academic and emotional needs of learners. Technology integration will support equity by expanding access to advanced coursework, differentiated instruction, and digital literacy for all students. Platforms like FASTBridge and Google Classroom will enable teachers to deliver data-informed, individualized instruction that meets each student's learning profile.

The school library, reading lists, and visual displays will be intentionally curated to reflect the racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity of HGA's students, reinforcing that academic rigor and cultural identity coexist as strengths rather than tradeoffs.

B. Learning and Work Environments that Respect, Affirm, and Integrate Cultural and Community Strengths

HGA's community is composed primarily of immigrant and refugee families, and the school's mission centers on honoring those cultural strengths as assets in learning. Classrooms are structured to validate home languages, traditions, and perspectives, and family engagement efforts—such as multilingual communication, parent advisory meetings, and community celebrations—ensure families are partners in the educational process.

A majority of staff share students' racial and cultural backgrounds, creating a school environment where students see themselves reflected in their educators and leadership. This alignment fosters trust, belonging, and mutual respect. Students learn in spaces that honor their lived experiences while upholding high expectations for achievement.

Beyond the classroom, HGA's culturally sustaining approach extends to schoolwide events, advisory programs, and community partnerships. The result is a school climate where families report strong cultural affirmation, students demonstrate high engagement, and the learning environment reflects the shared values of the community.

C. Collaborative Professional Culture that Supports and Retains Diverse, Effective Staff

HGA cultivates a collaborative and inclusive professional culture where staff feel valued, supported, and inspired to grow. Through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), mentorship programs, and peer observations, educators engage in reflective practice and shared problem-solving centered on student outcomes and equity.

Building on current strength, professional development will be continuous and relevant, focusing on antiracist teaching, cross-cultural communication, and equity-centered leadership. The school's Teacher Development and Evaluation Plan will embed these priorities into coaching, feedback, and growth plans, ensuring that professional learning translates into classroom excellence.

Recruitment and retention strategies will intentionally prioritize diversity and representation. Over half of HGA’s staff and 60% of administrators will share students’ cultural backgrounds. The school’s “homegrown educator” model—where alumni and paraprofessionals pursue licensure through Grow Your Own and mentorship pathways—will create a sustainable talent pipeline deeply rooted in community values.

This inclusive professional culture will not only attract and retain diverse educators but also strengthen instructional quality and consistency. Teachers will describe HGA as a workplace where they are seen, heard, and supported, leading to long-term commitment and high staff stability.

VIII. Annual Implementation Budget

Include an annual budget to support continued implementation of the CACR plan.

HGA is still in the process of developing its CACR plan. However, the school has already taken concrete steps to align resources with the statutory requirements of CACR by allocating funds across the designated areas. For example, in the reporting year, HGA purchased 300 new iPads to replace outdated devices, ensuring that students and teachers have access to reliable technology that supports instruction, assessment, and engagement. The school also upgraded its internet infrastructure by replacing all access points and switches and improving internet speed from 1 gigabyte to 2 gigabytes. These investments demonstrate HGA’s commitment to integrating technology into teaching and learning—one of the key priorities of CACR.

Beyond technology, HGA has continued to direct resources toward professional development, curriculum updates, and culturally sustaining instructional materials. These investments are designed to strengthen teaching and learning while affirming the diverse backgrounds and needs of the student body. By linking expenditures to CACR focus areas, the school is laying the foundation for a more comprehensive, strategic approach that will be formalized in its plan.

At the same time, challenges remain. Like many schools, HGA faces budgetary constraints and must balance investments in new initiatives with the ongoing costs of staffing, student support services, and facilities. The growing costs of insurance—projected to increase by 37% in FY26—pose a major strain on the budget, as do the steadily rising transportation expenses, which have more than doubled over the past seven years. These escalating costs, combined with enrollment growth and inflationary pressures, make it difficult to expand resources in all areas at the pace envisioned by CACR. Nevertheless, the early steps HGA has taken—such as major technology upgrades and targeted professional development—reflect steady progress toward the long-term goal of ensuring that all students are both academically successful and civically prepared.

IX. Materials, Practices, and Curriculum

Provide a list of recommended and required resources, sample curricula, and teaching practices for Grades K-12 that reflect Minnesota’s diversity accurately.

Higher Ground Academy HGA maintains a comprehensive, standards-aligned K–12 curriculum designed to promote academic rigor, cultural relevance, and student engagement. Instruction is anchored in Robert Marzano’s Teaching and Learning Model, which emphasizes intentional lesson design, clear learning targets, and measurable performance scales. This approach ensures that instruction across all grade levels is cohesive, data-driven, and aligned with the Minnesota Academic Standards.

Core instructional materials are selected to ensure continuity of skill progression and alignment with developmental benchmarks. These include:

- Reading Street for upper elementary reading instruction, emphasizing comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary development.
- Benchmark for middle school literacy, providing structured reading and writing practice with integrated language development.
- Perspective for high school English and humanities courses, fostering analytical thinking and text-based discourse.

Teachers supplement these core materials with digital platforms and curriculum-based tools such as Lexia, Read Live, and IXL to reinforce reading, writing, and math proficiency. These programs enable personalized practice and immediate feedback, allowing teachers to monitor progress and adjust instruction in real time.

All instructional resources are continuously reviewed to ensure cultural responsiveness, accuracy, and representation of Minnesota’s diversity. Materials are evaluated for bias and inclusivity, with updates made annually to reflect the diverse identities, histories, and experiences of HGA’s student population.

Other Resources Available to Teachers

Teachers at HGA have access to a robust set of tools and collaborative systems that enhance instructional quality and equity. The school employs FastBridge Assessments, administered three times per year (fall, winter, and spring), to measure student growth in reading and mathematics. Assessment results are used to group students for intervention, enrichment, or acceleration within the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework.

Under MTSS, instruction is differentiated across three tiers:

- Tier I: Core classroom instruction with embedded supports and universal design strategies.
- Tier II: Targeted small-group intervention focusing on specific skill gaps.
- Tier III: Intensive, individualized instruction for students requiring additional support.

In addition to data systems, HGA promotes collaboration through PLCs that meet weekly to review data, align instruction, and share best practices. Teachers will improve the utility of these meetings by analyzing data by subgroup performance—by English Learner status, Free or Reduced-Price Lunch eligibility, gender, and grade level—to ensure equitable access to learning opportunities.

Curriculum decisions will be made collectively, grounded in student performance evidence and guided by the school’s mission to prepare students for postsecondary success and civic readiness. Teachers will be supported by instructional leaders and program coordinators who will provide coaching, model lessons, and feedback to ensure fidelity of implementation and continuous instructional improvement.

Professional Development on Instructional Skills

HGA's professional development program reflects a deep commitment to continuous improvement and instructional excellence. In FY25, teachers and staff participated in 85 hours of structured professional development, with 78 hours meeting licensure renewal requirements. Training sessions focused on:

- Reading and literacy instruction aligned to the Science of Reading framework.
- Lesson planning, differentiation, and assessment design.
- Classroom management and behavior support strategies.
- Technology integration for personalized learning and data monitoring.
- School safety, emergency procedures, and crisis preparedness.

A major focus area during the year was the Read Act Implementation, through which 55 teachers collectively completed over 2,400 hours of study on the Science of Reading to strengthen literacy practices across all grade levels. This large-scale initiative enhanced teachers' capacity to deliver explicit, evidence-based reading instruction and aligned with state literacy goals.

Mentorship and peer-led professional learning are integral to HGA's instructional culture. Experienced educators host mentor-led workshops that provide practical strategies for technology use, formative assessment, and instructional differentiation. These sessions ensure that both new and veteran teachers have consistent opportunities to refine their skills, reflect on their practice, and align instructional methods with schoolwide academic priorities.

Through the alignment of evidence-based curriculum, targeted assessment systems, and comprehensive professional development, Higher Ground Academy will continue to ensure that all teachers have the resources, tools, and training necessary to deliver culturally sustaining, rigorous, and equitable instruction. Every curricular decision—from material selection to professional learning—will continue to reflect HGA's ongoing commitment to educational excellence, cultural responsiveness, and the academic success of all students.

X. Plan Review and Continuous Improvement

Outline how the CACR Strategic Plan will be reviewed annually and updated. Please note that CACR statute requires that schools create an advisory committee that reflects the diversity of the school to ensure active community participation in planning and improving instruction and curriculum.

Higher Ground Academy (HGA) will establish a comprehensive process to ensure that its CACR Strategic Plan remains a living, responsive framework guiding continuous improvement in teaching, learning, and governance. The plan will be reviewed annually by the school's leadership, staff, and Board of Directors to assess progress, align resources, and strengthen academic and operational performance. This cyclical review process will integrate multiple forms of evidence—including student data, stakeholder feedback, and compliance reports—to ensure that the CACR plan evolves in response to measurable outcomes and community needs.

Annual Review Date(s)

The annual review of the CACR plan will be conducted at the end of each fiscal year, typically between May and July, following the completion of statewide assessments and internal performance evaluations.

- May–June: Leadership and instructional teams analyze student data from MCA, FastBridge, Lexia, Read Live, and IXL to identify strengths and gaps in achievement.
- July: Findings are compiled into the Annual Performance Evaluation Report and presented to the Board of Directors for discussion and goal-setting for the upcoming year.
- August: Updates to the CACR plan are finalized and integrated into the school’s professional development calendar, curriculum revisions, and operational priorities for the new academic year.

This annual timeline will ensure that instructional adjustments, professional learning goals, and resource allocations are data-driven and strategically aligned with HGA’s mission.

Responsible Team or Committee

Oversight of the CACR plan will be shared across a multi-level leadership and governance structure that reflects the diversity of the school community:

- Board of Directors: Will provide final approval of CACR goals, reviews annual performance data, and ensures alignment with Minnesota Statutes §120B.11.
- Executive Director and Leadership Team: Led by the Executive Director, the leadership team will coordinate data collection, instructional review, and program evaluation.
- Instructional Core Team: Composed of principals, academic coordinators, and department leads, this team will analyze classroom data, recommend curriculum modifications, and track implementation fidelity.
- Community Advisory Committee: A parent- and staff-inclusive advisory body that reflects HGA’s cultural and linguistic diversity. The committee will provide input on instructional practices, family engagement, and culturally sustaining strategies to ensure the CACR plan remains responsive to the needs of students and families.
 - Commitment to Diversity and Representation: The advisory committee will be intentionally structured to represent the demographics of HGA’s community—over 82% students of color and more than 40% English Learners. Membership will include parents, educators, and staff from varied racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. This inclusive representation guarantees that curriculum, instruction, and policy decisions authentically reflect the lived experiences, values, and strengths of the school’s families. By embedding this commitment within its review process, HGA will ensure that equity and cultural responsiveness remain central to all aspects of planning and continuous improvement.

Together, these groups will form a continuous improvement structure that integrates governance, instructional leadership, and community voice.

Process for Board Review and Community Engagement

HGA’s CACR plan review process will operate through a transparent and participatory model grounded in evidence and equity.

1. Data Review and Analysis

Each spring, student outcome data—including state assessments (MCA/ACCESS), local benchmarks (FastBridge), and curriculum-based measures (Lexia, Read Live, IXL)—will be reviewed by instructional

teams. The data will be disaggregated by grade level and subgroup (ELL, FRP, Special Education, and ethnicity) to identify performance trends, achievement gaps, and program effectiveness. Findings will be summarized in a Data Review Report presented to the Board of Directors and discussed during professional development sessions.

2. Stakeholder and Community Feedback

The school will conduct annual surveys of students, parents, and staff to gather perceptions on instruction, school climate, and engagement. Results will be analyzed to identify areas for improvement and will be shared publicly during school meetings and board sessions. The Community Advisory Committee—composed of parents, teachers, and support staff—will review the data and offer recommendations to leadership on instructional and cultural priorities.

3. Governance and Oversight

The Board of Directors will hold formal meetings where annual performance results, financial reports, and CACR progress updates will be reviewed. Meeting agendas, minutes, and financial statements will be posted publicly in compliance with the Minnesota Open Meeting Law. The Board will evaluate the school's performance against the indicators outlined in the CACR plan and will direct necessary revisions or resource adjustments to sustain progress.

4. Continuous Improvement Cycle

- Plan: Review CACR goals and identify priorities for the upcoming year.
- Implement: Integrate updates into professional development, curriculum design, and staffing plans.
- Monitor: Track progress through quarterly data reviews and ongoing classroom observations.
- Adjust: Use annual findings to refine instructional strategies and reallocate resources as needed.

This iterative process ensures that continuous improvement is embedded in the school's daily operations rather than treated as a separate, static initiative.