Upcoming Events:
- **Feb 17:** No School—President’s Day observed
- **Feb 24-28:** Spirit Week
- **Feb 28:** Pennies for Patients campaign ends
- **Mar 20:** Quarter 3 ends
- **Mar 23-27:** No School—Spring Break

February 2020

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March 2020

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Inside this issue:

- Letter from Executive Director, Dr. Yigzaw
- Alumni Feature: Maxamed Ahmed
- Bill Wilson, Before HGA (part 1 of a memoriam)
- Mock Trial: We Rest Our Case
- Student Council Update
- Robotics Club: Melanin Minds

Newest HGA addition: Our newsletter!

On August 26, 2020, The Higher Ground Secondary Academy welcomed its first students into the new Bill Wilson Building in the Como neighborhood of Saint Paul.

Now that we are entering the second semester, the staff and students of HGSA are hitting their stride with new courses, clubs, and a desire to really make the school their own. As a part of this effort, we have added a monthly school newsletter.

Our school newsletter will be a way to share news with parents, family, friends, and the greater community. Here we can create a space to celebrate achievements, inform about upcoming events, and feature stories about our after-school clubs and student council initiatives.

This newsletter will also present stories about the staff and faculty of our school, including words from HGA alumni and a letter from our Executive Director, Dr. Samuel Yigzaw.

In addition, we will also honor the memory of Higher Ground Academy’s founder, Mr. Bill Wilson, who envisioned a school and a community that takes care of the children first—especially children who have been left behind by the achievement gap.

We encourage HGA students and families to participate in the newsletter not just by reading, but by sharing your own ideas about what news and features you would like to in future editions of the newsletter. Let’s truly make this our space.
Maxamed Ahmed is an HGA graduate and a member of the current administration. Before coming to the US, he learned a few words of English from a private school in Mogadishu, Somalia, whose organizers wanted to create a new Somali generation who could speak English and communicate with the rest of the world. However, learning a new language is not easy, and he struggled because of a lack of resources and security.

Maxamed’s quest for education continued at Higher Ground Academy. His first goal was to learn English very quickly. HGA provided him all the services that he needed to learn the language, starting with an EL class. The EL teacher taught Maxamed new skills and helped him gain the confidence to develop his English language. Additionally, the school provided lessons in the after school program to expand his English. He was also part of the mainstream classroom where he could interact with students already fluent in English.

According to Maxamed, Higher Ground Academy was the right fit for him because it values students individually and collectively. “Its expectations are built on experiences, and that experience teaches immediately.” And HGA adequately prepared him to face the next challenge: college.

After graduating from HGA with a good GPA, Maxamed attended Normandale Community College and transferred to Metropolitan State University, from which he received a Bachelor of Science degree in Accounting. His quest for higher education persisted, and he earned a Master’s degree in Business Administration with a concentration in Project Management because he was interested in improving his opportunities, acquiring new skills, gaining knowledge, and of course, earning a financial reward.

A combination of hard work, perseverance, and grassroots education along with a mindset of intellectual and leadership development that he gained from Higher Ground Academy helped Maxamed achieve his goals.

In 2014, he joined the HGA staff as a STEAM Lab tech/facilitator with additional responsibilities in data management. He was later promoted to serve as an Assistant to the Executive Director of HGA. Currently, he is Chief Operation Officer of Higher Grand Academy.
Bill Wilson, Before HGA
(Part I of a special feature in remembrance)
By Emilia Effiom, HGA Human Resources

William Lee (Bill) Wilson was born in Evansville, Indiana in 1940. He moved to Saint Paul in the early 1960s and worked as a waiter on the Great Northern Railroad. He worked hard, earning his way through school.

In 1968, he cofounded the Inner City Youth League, working with at-risk youths in Saint Paul. The following year he became Coordinator of the Inter-Cultural Programs in the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs at the University of Minnesota, and later earned a Bachelor's and Master's degree.

In 1975, he was appointed Commissioner of the MN Department of Human Rights by Governor Wendell Anderson and continued this position under Gov. Rudy Perpich until 1979.

He was the first African American elected to the Saint Paul City Council and was reelected several times city wide. He was elected as President of the City Council and served in that position until 1993. In 1994, Governor Arne Carlson proclaimed May 21 as Bill Wilson Day in Minnesota.

After he left political office, Bill Wilson returned to the University of Minnesota and worked as Coordinator of Diversity Programs in the college of Education and Human development until 1988, when his old love of helping at-risk youth was reignited. It was at this time that he met a young graduate, Samuel Yigzaw, and they talked about his vision.

Mock Trial: We Rest Our Case
By Catherine Eisele, social studies teacher

The High School Mock Trial teams just wrapped up their 5th season of competition. Mock Trial is a high school academic team that is given a fictional court case with witness statements and evidence. The students act as witnesses and attorneys. We compete against other schools in front of judges at the Ramsey County Courthouse for four weeks in January and February. It is coached by Catherine Eisele (high school social studies teacher) and Matt Nichols (third grade teacher).

This year’s case had students try the defendant, Sam Soto, for third degree murder. The question was if Sam Soto gave his friend, Brandon Webster, opioids that resulted in Mr. Webster’s death from overdose. Depending on the week, the students had to prove that Sam Soto did give the opioid pills to Mr. Webster or that Sam Soto did not give the pills.

This year, HGA had two teams made up of six or seven members each. It was a young group, with more ninth graders than eleventh and twelfth graders combined. Practices were once a week for the two months leading up to the season starting, and there was one weekend scrimmage tournament.

All the practice and preparation paid off. Walking into the courthouse can be intimidating, yet the teams rose to the challenge. Overall, It was a really difficult season. We competed against some of the best teams in the state. But we have learned to celebrate our hard work and rejoice in our moments of victory despite an overall loss in the score. We honor our mistakes as opportunities for learning and glorify our teammates’ successes through sharing brownies. We are already anticipating next year’s case, and next year’s Mock Trial team.
**Student Council Updates**

**Pennies For Patients** raises funds in support of The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, whose mission is to cure leukemia, lymphoma, Hodgkin’s disease, and myeloma, and to improve the quality of life of patients and their families.

HGSAs Pennies for Patients campaign runs **February 3rd to the 28th**. If the middle and high school reach their goals of collecting $1500, Mr. Kevin and Mr. Johnson will sleep on the roof of one of the HGA buildings for one night. The classroom that collects the most will win a Pizza Party and get a trophy to keep until next year’s pennies for patients’ campaign.

To wrap up the Pennies for Patients campaign, High School Student Council is organizing a **Spirit Week February 24-28:**

- Monday: Pajama Day
- Tuesday: Twin Day
- Wednesday: Wacky Day
- Thursday: Color Day
- Friday: Culture Day

**Robotics Club:**

**Melanin Minds**

*By Najma Mumin, HGA student*

This year our students will be competing in the annual FIRST Robotics Competition. Robotics club allows our students to work on skills such as financing, critical thinking, team building, and problem-solving. As a team, we meet every Friday and have fun working together to build an amazing robot for the competition.

We are split into 3 teams, which are business, programming, and build team. The business team focuses on raising money for our robot, making connections with other teams, building a team brand, and including our community in our work. The programming team works on coding and making sure our robot works when we get to the competitions. The build team plays the most crucial role in our team, which is the actual creation of our robot and getting it to function.

We are mentored by Ms. Muna, and Ms. Johnson, who are both middle school teachers. We also have mentors from outside of the school helping us out with the building and programming of the robot, like Thanasi Pantazides who has been a great help to the programming and build team. Hmong College Prep and Eagan High School’s Blue Twilight have stepped in to help our team get started. We have also received grants from 3M and from FIRST Robotics competition.

We strive to inspire and create a path for future intelligent and talented students in the Robotics League. Our 31 members are all high school students dedicated to reaching our goals, and we hope to keep growing.

Our business team organized two extremely successful bake sales and baggings at local Cub Foods. They have gone to many different events to make helpful connections. Our programming team successfully learned to code on a website called Codecademy. Our build team is very productive and finished the base of our robot. They are currently working on the electrical part of the robot and getting it to move and do what is required of it in the competition and more.

When completed, we hope to bring back a win for Higher Ground Secondary Academy!