

Higher Ground Academy
PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL DISTRICT #4027
SCHOOL YEAR 2025-2026
COMPREHENSIVE ACHIEVEMENT AND CIVIC READINESS & ANNUAL
REPORT



Higher Ground Academy

Home of the Panthers

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1. School Information

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GRADES SERVED - K - 12

YEAR OPENED - 1999 MISSION AND VISION

A. VISION STATEMENT:

Higher Ground Academy is committed to the proposition that all students can learn successfully that success results in further success and that schools create and control the conditions under which learners succeed.

Also parents, educators, learners, and the community share in the responsibility which treats all stakeholders as significant resources for every learner's successful education.

B. MISSION STATEMENT:

The mission of Higher Ground Academy is to prepare students to become successful, ethical, and responsible citizens who are ready for all the challenges of the twenty-first century. To that end, students graduating from the Academy will be college ready, stewards of the environment, and ethical citizens who value hard work, honesty, integrity, equity, and diversity.

AUTHORIZER INFORMATION

The authorizing mission of Osprey Wilds Environmental Learning Center is to ensure quality academic and environmental literacy outcomes for Minnesota students through effective charter school authorizing.

The authorizing vision of Osprey Wilds is to authorize a portfolio of high-performing charter schools that instill a connection and commitment to the environment in their school communities, while working towards a healthy planet where all people live in balance with the Earth.

Erin Anderson, Director of Charter School Authorizing

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Charter School Division

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ospreywilds.org/charter-school-division/

2. Implementation of Primary and Additional Statutory Purpose.

The primary purpose of HGA is to improve learning, achievement, and success of all students.

The primary purpose of Higher Ground Academy (HGA) is to improve learning and raise academic achievement for all students. While continuous improvement remains a priority, HGA's track record demonstrates measurable gains in student success. Notably, the school's high graduation rate, strong college acceptance rate, and the large proportion of students who remain enrolled in college for two or more years (see [Minnesota Department of Education Data](#)) provide clear evidence of this progress. To achieve its mission, HGA implements three key strategies:

A, Adoption and Implementation of Standards-Aligned Curriculum

HGA regularly reviews its curriculum and instructional resources to ensure they are rigorous, relevant, aligned with Minnesota standards, and responsive to student achievement data. Curriculum decisions are made collaboratively by teachers, instructional leaders, and administrators who examine student performance, evaluate available resources, and identify materials that best address student needs.

In response to state mathematics assessment results, HGA conducted a comprehensive K–6 mathematics curriculum review to strengthen standards alignment, instructional coherence, and support for identified areas of need. Similarly, during FY26, teachers and administrators at Higher Ground Academy Elementary (HGEA) collaboratively reviewed K–

5 literacy curricula and selected Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) as the district-adopted reading curriculum.

We believe that Amplify CKLA will strengthen HGA's literacy program through a coherent approach to foundational reading skills, knowledge building, vocabulary, comprehension, and language development. Its implementation will be supported through professional development, instructional coaching, teacher collaboration, and ongoing review of student achievement data to ensure the curriculum effectively supports the literacy development of all students.

B, High Expectations and Accountability

Higher Ground Academy operates with the conviction that all students can achieve Minnesota's academic standards when their academic, social, cultural, and learning needs are appropriately addressed. This belief is reflected in both our instructional practices and our system of accountability.

Teachers and staff make a deliberate effort to understand and respond to the diverse needs of students while maintaining high expectations for academic achievement. Students are provided multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery, complete assignments, receive feedback, and improve their work. At the same time, students are expected to take increasing responsibility for their learning and academic progress.

Accountability extends to HGA educators as well. Teacher evaluations incorporate multiple measures of instructional effectiveness, including student performance and growth on assessments. Through classroom observations, assessment data, professional collaboration, and ongoing feedback, teachers and school leaders work together to identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement.

C, Targeted and Personalized Support for At-Risk Students

HGA recognizes that high expectations must be paired with appropriate support. Through a data-driven Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), the school uses academic, behavioral, attendance, social-emotional, and other student data to identify students who are struggling or at risk and determine appropriate interventions.

Students receive targeted and increasingly individualized support through in-school, extended-day, and extended-year interventions. Progress is monitored regularly so interventions can be continued, adjusted, intensified, or discontinued based on student response.

For FY27, HGA has appointed an MTSS Coordinator to strengthen and coordinate this work schoolwide. The coordinator will support consistent identification of student needs, intervention selection, progress monitoring, data analysis, and collaboration among teachers, interventionists, administrators, and student-support staff.

HGA also integrates Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) into its broader MTSS framework to address behavioral, social-emotional, attendance, and academic needs. Together, MTSS and PBIS provide a continuum of support—from universal strategies to individualized interventions—with the goal of identifying needs early, responding effectively, and helping every student succeed academically, socially, and behaviorally.

Encourage the use of innovative teaching methods

HGA encourages innovation in teaching by providing teachers with the flexibility to supplement the district-adopted, standards-aligned curriculum with research-based strategies and resources they believe will enhance student learning. Teachers are also supported through peer review, mentorship, and professional development opportunities, creating a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement. By combining a rigorous, mandated curriculum with innovative instructional practices tailored to diverse student needs, HGA fosters creativity in teaching while ensuring alignment with state standards.

3. Student Enrollment & Demographics

Enrollment and Demographic Trends

An analysis of Higher Ground Academy's (HGA) student demographics indicates continued enrollment growth alongside a gradual broadening of the school's demographic profile. Overall enrollment increased steadily during the period under review, rising from 1,070 students in 2022–23 to 1,102 in 2023–24 and 1,194 in 2024–25. Enrollment continued to grow in 2025–26, although at a more modest rate (see Table I). Average Daily Membership (ADM) also increased during this period, from 1,049 in 2022–23 to 1,135 in 2024–25, reflecting continued student attendance and retention.

At the same time, HGA experienced a notable shift in the demographic composition of its student population. The proportion of students from non–East African backgrounds increased from approximately 5% in 2022–23 to about 9% in 2023–24 and continued to rise, reaching nearly 13% in 2025–26. This trend suggests that HGA's student population is becoming increasingly diverse. HGA attributes both the sustained enrollment growth and the expanding demographic diversity, in part, to the appointment of a new Marketing Director, whose efforts have increased the school's visibility and outreach among non–East African communities. To build on this progress, HGA engaged a marketing consultant during the reporting year to support the school's rebranding efforts and strengthen its outreach to an increasingly diverse range of communities.

The gender composition of the student population has remained relatively balanced. In 2025–26, the school enrolled 590 male students and 607 female students, with female students representing a slight majority. This distribution has remained generally consistent over time and indicates a stable gender balance within the student population.

Number of Students Enrolled	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Preschool or PreK	NA	NA	NA
Kindergarten	88	96	70
1st Grade	92	92	88
2nd Grade	85	94	90
3rd Grade	84	91	93
4th Grade	83	92	94
5th Grade	90	87	107
6th Grade	102	102	91
7th Grade	90	96	107
8th Grade	92	98	86
9th Grade	85	91	105
10th Grade	78	98	98
11th Grade	70	83	90
12th Grade	73	73	76
Total	1070	1193	1195

Number of Students Enrolled	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Total ADM (Average Daily Membership) for year	1049	1225	1235

Language Diversity

The English Language Learners (ELL/EL) population continues to grow significantly. In 2024–25, HGA enrolled 617 EL students, an increase of 101 students from the previous year. During the reporting year, an additional 45 new English Language Learners enrolled at the school. Many of these students are recent immigrants from countries such as Ethiopia, Syria, Libya, Sudan, Yemen, and Afghanistan. This continued growth underscores the academy's important role in serving newly arrived families and highlights the ongoing need for strong, responsive ELL programming to support students' academic and linguistic development.

Special Education

The Special Education (SPED) population experienced a steady decline over the reporting period. Enrollment decreased from 46 students in FY23 to 34 in FY24, 29 in FY25, and 24 in FY26, reflecting a year-to-year reduction in the number of students receiving specialized services.

Grade-Level Highlights

While overall enrollment was essentially stable between the last three school years, the grade-level distribution shifted. Notable increases occurred in grades 3–5, 7, and 9–11, while enrollment declined in kindergarten, grades 6, and 8.

Demographic Trends	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Total Enrollment	1102	1193	1195
Special Education	34	29	24
English Learners	516	617	652
Free/Reduced Priced Lunch	1016	1135	1144
Black, not of Hispanic Origin	1005	1081	1041
Hispanic/Latino	0	0	1
Asian/Pacific Islander	25	19	56
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0	0	0
White, not of Hispanic Origin	40	93	98
Two or more races	0	0	0

4. Student Attendance, Attrition & Mobility

Student Attendance

Although HGA is making progress toward its contractual goals, consistent attendance remains an area of concern. HGA's aggregate consistent attendance rate for FY25 and FY26 was 75.7%, just 0.3 percentage points below the state average of 76%. This small difference suggests that HGA's overall attendance rate is comparable to that of the state.

However, school-level data for FY26 reveal a significant disparity. The combined consistent attendance rate for HG Elementary Academy and HG Junior High was 81.9%, compared with 60.6% at HG Secondary Academy. HGA's internal assessment suggests that this disparity may partly result from weaknesses in attendance-recording procedures at the secondary level. Students who arrive late or attend Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) courses during the first class period may be incorrectly recorded as absent for the entire day because attendance recorded in Schoology does not automatically transfer to the school's student information system, JMC, or the state reporting system, MARSS.

Student Mobility (attrition) and Enrollment Stability

Student mobility has remained a significant factor affecting enrollment at Higher Ground Academy (HGA), with family relocation emerging as the primary reason for student attrition. Exit surveys and anecdotal information from the school indicate that many families relocate outside HGA's service area, often because rising rental costs across the Twin Cities metropolitan area have made housing increasingly inaccessible to the school's predominantly low-income population. Families frequently move to more affordable communities farther from HGA and subsequently enroll their children in schools closer to their new residences. This pattern has contributed to disruptions in student continuity and has also increased HGA's transportation costs as the school has expanded its service area to accommodate families who have relocated.

Despite this continuing challenge, student mobility improved considerably in 2025–26. The Mobility Index increased from 20% in 2023–24 to 22% in 2024–25 before declining to 15% in 2025–26. Total mid-year transfers followed a similar pattern, increasing from 220 in 2023–24 to 256 in 2024–25 and then declining substantially to 177 in 2025–26. Summer transfers also decreased, from 257 in 2024–25 to 204 in 2025–26. At the same time, October 1 enrollment continued to grow, increasing from 1,107 students in 2023–24 to 1,160 in 2024–25 and 1,180 in 2025–26.

Overall, the three-year data suggest that HGA has experienced greater enrollment stability during the most recent reporting year, even as family mobility remains a persistent concern. Continued enrollment growth, supported in part by summer transfers and new student enrollment, has helped offset the effects of student attrition. Nevertheless, housing-related family relocation continues to present challenges for student retention, continuity of enrollment, and transportation. HGA will continue to monitor mobility patterns and explore strategies to support student retention while responding to the changing residential patterns of the families it serves.

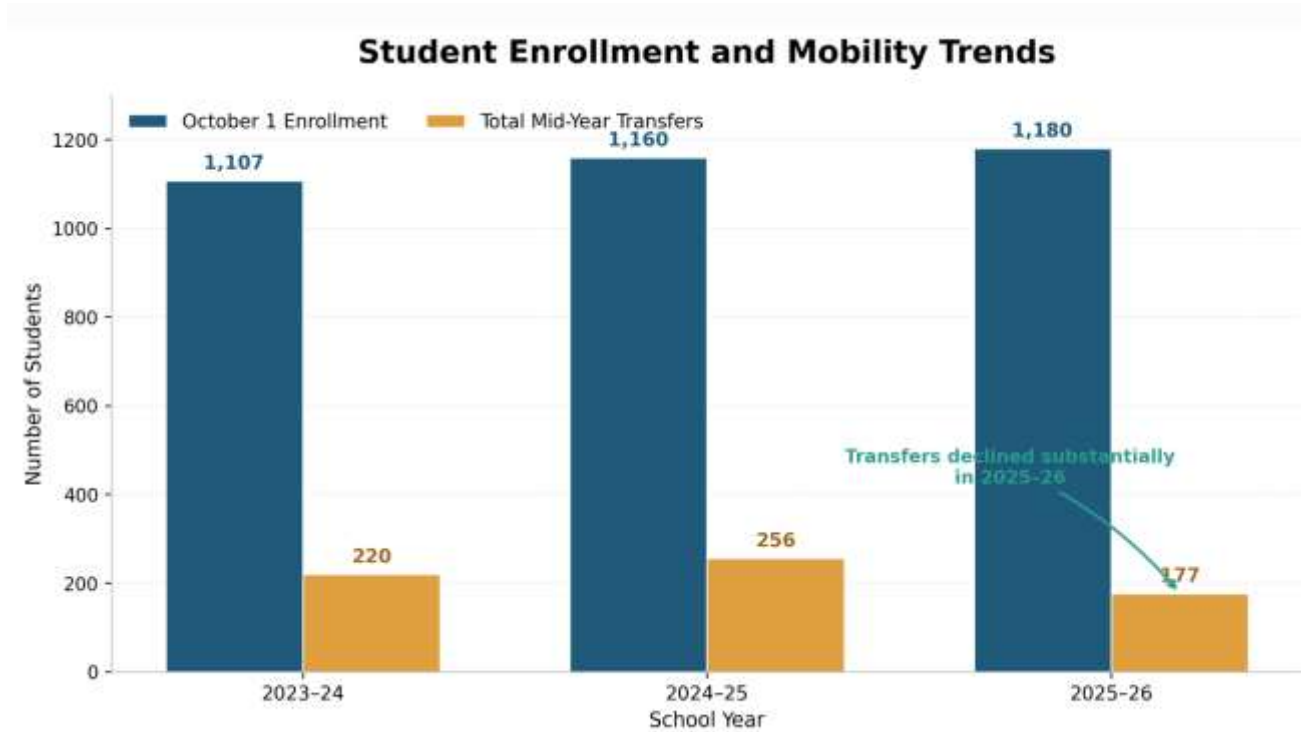
The following three tables present student mobility data for three consecutive school years, from FY23 through FY25.

	Summer Transfers In	Number of students on Oct. 1	Mid-year Transfers In	Mid-year Transfers Out	Total Mid-year Transfers	Mobility Index* (as a percent)
2023-24	152	1107	101	119	220	20%
2024-25	257	1160	143	113	256	22%
2025-26	204	1180	73	104	177	15%

*Total mid-year transfers (in and out) divided by number of students on October 1.

Percentage of students who were enrolled for 95% or more of the 2024-25 school year.	87.2%
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Percentage of students who were enrolled for 95% or more of the 2025-26 school year.	89%
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Source: HGA student enrollment and mobility data.

Note: This graph is AI generated using data provided by HGA

5. Educational Approach & Curriculum

Higher Ground Academy's Pedagogical Approach

Higher Ground Academy (HGA) adopts a student-centered, equity-driven, and standards-aligned pedagogical approach designed to prepare all learners for academic success, postsecondary readiness, and responsible citizenship. Instruction at HGA is guided by three core pillars: rigorous instruction, growth mindset, and student-centered learning.

Curriculum and Instruction

Higher Ground Academy (HGA) aligns its curriculum and instructional practices with the school's mission, vision, and purpose, providing students with the knowledge and skills needed for academic, professional, and civic success. HGA offers a comprehensive, standards-based curriculum aligned with the Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards established by the Minnesota Department of Education. The curriculum includes literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, the arts, technology, and physical education across all grade levels. High school students also have access to Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) courses. Although Advanced Placement (AP) courses were previously offered, they are not currently available due to limited student interest. Beginning in FY25, HGA expanded advanced learning opportunities by introducing honors-level courses. In FY26, 45 students participated in honors coursework.

HGA's instructional program is grounded in three interconnected principles: rigorous instruction, growth mindset, and student-centered learning. Together, these principles establish high expectations for all students while providing appropriate support, differentiation, and opportunities for advanced learning.

Rigorous, Standards-Based Instruction. Guided by Robert Marzano's Teaching and Learning Model (2017), HGA teachers design challenging, meaningful learning experiences aligned with state standards. Teachers analyze standards to identify the knowledge and skills students must master and establish clear learning targets organized into four levels of rigor:

- Levels 1.0–2.0: Development of foundational knowledge and skills.
- Level 3.0: Mastery of the benchmark at the intended level of rigor.
- Level 4.0: Application of knowledge and skills in complex or unfamiliar contexts.

This progression provides a framework for lesson planning, assessment, and differentiation. Teachers use scaffolding to support students who need additional assistance and provide enrichment for those ready to advance. The goal is to develop deep understanding, higher-order thinking, and the ability to apply learning in new and complex situations.

Growth Mindset and Student-Centered Learning.

HGA fosters a growth mindset by helping students understand their current levels of achievement, establish goals, monitor progress, and persevere through challenges. Clear learning targets enable students to recognize that mastery develops through continued effort, practice, and learning. Instruction is differentiated according to students' readiness levels, strengths, and learning needs. Consequently, students in the same classroom may work toward different learning targets across Levels 1.0–4.0. This approach allows teachers to provide individualized support while maintaining high expectations and ensuring that students have opportunities to progress toward mastery and advanced application. HGA also strives to make student voice, choice, and active engagement central to classroom experiences, fostering an environment in which students feel valued and take ownership of their learning.

STEM, Environmental Education, and Multicultural Perspectives. HGA integrates Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) across the curriculum, embedding STEM concepts into mathematics and science instruction beginning in FY24 rather than teaching STEM as a standalone subject. Environmental education is taught at all grade levels and incorporated across subject areas, connecting academic learning to real-world issues and promoting environmental awareness, stewardship, responsibility, and critical problem-solving. HGA also intentionally integrates multicultural education throughout the curriculum. Recognizing the cultural and linguistic diversity of its students, the school affirms students' home cultures while helping them develop cultural competence, cross-cultural communication skills, and the knowledge needed to participate successfully in mainstream society and an increasingly interconnected world.

Student Support, Equity, and Continuous Improvement. HGA uses a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) to provide both remediation and acceleration, helping students access the assistance or enrichment appropriate to their needs. Data-driven processes, including FastBridge assessments and teacher observations, help identify learning needs and inform timely instructional interventions. These practices support HGA's commitment to educational equity by ensuring that students receive appropriate opportunities and support to meet or exceed state standards, regardless of their backgrounds or individual challenges.

Through its standards-aligned curriculum, structured instructional model, differentiated teaching practices, and comprehensive support systems, HGA seeks to provide a rigorous and equitable educational experience that prepares students for college, careers, lifelong learning, and responsible civic participation.

Empowering Student Success through Strategic Staffing at Higher Ground Academy

To achieve its mission, HGA has built a staffing model that balances instructional rigor, personalized support, and operational efficiency. HGA employs about 180 staff members, including licensed teachers, instructional specialists, student service professionals, and administrators, all working collaboratively to address the academic and social-emotional needs of approximately 1,200 students enrolled across grades K–12. In alignment with this commitment, HGA has made a significant investment in expanding its ELL program to meet the needs of its growing population of English Language Learners. The number of staff working in the ELL program has increased from 4 in FY20 to 19 in FY26, reflecting HGA's dedication to ensuring equitable access to high-quality instruction and support for all students. In addition, HGA has strengthened its capacity to support academically struggling students by hiring additional Title I teachers, paraprofessionals, and a reading specialist, ensuring targeted interventions and individualized support that promote student success across all grade levels.

Instructional Staff

At the heart of HGA's staffing approach are its licensed teachers, who provide rigorous, standards-based instruction aligned with the Minnesota Academic Standards. The school employs 70 licensed core subject teachers across literacy, mathematics, science, and social studies, maintaining a student–teacher ratio of approximately 1:20, which allows for meaningful differentiation and individualized support. In addition to core instruction, 9 specialist teachers deliver courses in arts, Arabic language, physical education, and technology, ensuring that students have access to a broad and well-rounded curriculum.

Support Staff for Student Learning

HGA recognizes that students come to school with diverse learning needs and has developed a comprehensive support system through its multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). The school employs 18 English Language Learner (ELL) specialists, teachers and highly qualified para-professionals, who serve the school's multilingual population, representing more than 45 percent of total enrollment. For students with disabilities, 4 licensed special education teachers and 12 paraprofessionals provide services in accordance with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), ensuring compliance with state and federal law while promoting inclusion. To support students struggling with literacy and math, 6 Title I teachers and 1 reading specialists provide targeted Tier II and Tier III interventions, with caseloads averaging 20–25 students. Additional paraprofessionals assist in classrooms across grade levels, providing individualized instruction and small-group support.

Student Services and Social-Emotional Support

Academic success is closely tied to students' social-emotional well-being, and HGA is committed to ensuring that students have access to the support they need to succeed both academically and personally. During FY26, the school employed one licensed counselor and two licensed social workers who assisted students with social-emotional and mental health needs and connected students and families with appropriate school and community resources. In addition, six behavioral specialists provided direct support to students who needed assistance with behavioral regulation and engagement. HGA also partnered with the Dreamline Foundation, a component of the Sanneh Foundation, which provided four mentors and coaches to support at-risk students during and after school.

Based on findings from student and parent surveys, as well as the school's analysis of student data and identified needs, HGA determined that additional capacity was needed to provide more comprehensive social-emotional support. Consequently, in FY27, HGA expanded its student support team by adding one counselor and two social workers, bringing the school's capacity to two counselors and four social workers. This investment is intended to increase the number of students who can receive timely and appropriate support and strengthen the school's ability to respond proactively to students' social-emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs.

Through this expanded staffing model, behavioral supports, mentoring services, and connections to community resources, HGA seeks to provide a more coordinated and responsive system of support that removes barriers to learning and helps more students remain engaged, healthy, and successful in school.

Administrative and Operational Staff

HGA's leadership team plays a vital role in aligning staffing and resources with the school's mission. The school is led by an Executive Director and supported by two principals overseeing the elementary, middle, and high school divisions. A Curriculum Director and five instructional coaches/team leads provide ongoing guidance to teachers, ensuring the consistent implementation of best practices. The Chief of Operations manages the school's daily operations, supported by five administrative assistants and six facilities staff who work to maintain a safe, efficient, and student-centered learning environment. Financial services, including oversight of budgeting, compliance, and grant management, are provided by a third-party vendor, Creative Planning. This structure allows instructional staff to remain focused on teaching and learning while ensuring strong organizational support.

Professional Development and Continuous Improvement

In addition to employing highly qualified staff, HGA invests significantly in ongoing professional development to strengthen instructional practice and promote continuous improvement. Teachers participate in approximately 40 hours of structured professional development annually, with training focused on standards alignment, culturally responsive teaching, technology integration, classroom management, and data-driven instructional strategies. Weekly professional learning communities (PLCs) provide teachers with dedicated time to collaborate, analyze student data, share effective practices, and refine instruction.

In addition, all teachers and administrators participated in training on effective peer observation, a key component of HGA's newly adopted Teacher Development and Evaluation Plan. The training focused on developing the skills necessary to conduct meaningful, evidence-based classroom observations and provide constructive professional feedback to colleagues. Staff also received training on the effective use of iObservation as a tool to support and guide the evaluation process, document observations, facilitate feedback, and promote professional reflection and growth.

Together, these professional learning opportunities strengthen a collaborative culture in which observation and evaluation are viewed not simply as accountability measures, but as tools for professional learning, instructional improvement, and shared responsibility for student success. HGA's sustained investment in professional development helps ensure that teachers and administrators are equipped to continually refine their practice and respond effectively to the evolving needs of students.

Remediation

It has been several years since HGA began implementing a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) to provide remediation for students requiring additional academic assistance. In its initial years, the structure of HGA's MTSS framework consisted of three tiers:

- Tier I: Classroom teachers deliver core instruction and provide immediate, in-class support to students as needed.
- Tier II: Remediation is delivered through mentors and coaches from HGA's partner organization, the Dreamline Foundation, a component of the Sanneh Foundation.
- Tier III: Licensed Title I teachers provide intensive, individualized support for students with the greatest academic needs.

In FY25, HGA transitioned to a revised MTSS model aimed at strengthening instructional capacity and improving student outcomes:

- Tier I remained under the responsibility of mainstream classroom teachers.
- Tier II was staffed by licensed Title I teachers (previously assigned to Tier III), thereby increasing professional expertise in this layer of support.
- Tier III was staffed by newly hired reading specialists, ensuring students requiring intensive interventions receive research-based, specialized instruction.

Student identification for remediation and acceleration is based on multiple sources of evidence, including teacher observations and standardized assessments. The primary tool guiding these decisions is the FastBridge Assessment, which classifies students into four categories: High Risk, Some Risk, Low Risk, and College Pathway. Students identified as “College Pathway” are placed in acceleration programs, while those in the other categories receive targeted remediation. The level of support is aligned with the degree of risk: High Risk students receive intensive, one-on-one support from specialists, whereas Some Risk and Low Risk students typically receive targeted support from classroom teachers and/or tutors.

In conclusion, HGA’s tiered, data-driven approach ensures every student receives the right level of support or acceleration, advancing equity, rigor, and long-term success.

English Language Learner (ELL) Program

Higher Ground Academy’s ELL Program equips students with the English language skills and confidence needed for academic, postsecondary, career, and community success while affirming their native languages and cultures. The program emphasizes academic language development, access to grade-level content, and culturally responsive support.

HGA uses a structured identification and placement process. All newly enrolled students complete a Home Language Survey (HLS). Students indicating the use of a language other than English are assessed in reading, writing, speaking, and listening using state-required English proficiency assessments, supplemented by teacher observations and relevant academic and educational data.

Trained staff review these data to determine eligibility and appropriate services. Eligible students receive English language development support from qualified ELL teachers while continuing to participate in general education classrooms. The frequency and intensity of services are differentiated according to students’ English proficiency levels and individual needs. All identified ELL students are appropriately coded in MARSS, including home language, LEP status, and service start date.

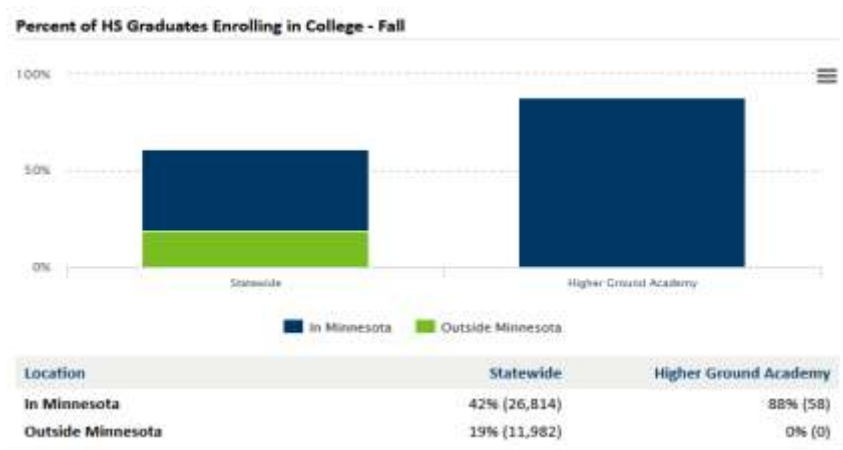
6. Innovative Practices & Implementation

Preparing Students for Post-Secondary Success

HGA distinguishes itself through a strong commitment to postsecondary success, aligned with its strategic priorities of Academic Goals and Equitable Outcomes. In 2025–2026, 66 of 157 juniors and seniors (42%) participated in PSEO, providing students with early access to rigorous college-level coursework.

This preparation is reflected in strong postsecondary outcomes. According to Minnesota Department of Education data published in 2026, 88% of HGA graduates remained enrolled in college two years after high school, compared with 61% statewide. These results demonstrate

the impact of HGA's high expectations, strong student supports, and commitment to equitable access to postsecondary opportunities.



A Culture of Professional Growth among Teachers

HGA is deeply committed to creating meaningful opportunities for teachers to grow professionally and advance in their careers. The school invests in building leadership capacity by providing ongoing professional development, mentoring, and opportunities for teachers to assume additional responsibilities. Educators are encouraged to share their expertise, collaborate with colleagues, and lead instructional initiatives—practices that strengthen the academic program while fostering a culture in which teachers feel seen, valued, heard, and respected.

This culture of professional growth benefits students through stronger instruction and directly supports the strategic priority of Equitable Outcomes, as effective teaching ensures that all students have access to high-quality learning experiences. It also nurtures a sense of ownership and pride among educators.

As a result of these intentional investments, many HGA teachers have advanced into leadership roles. Over the years, numerous teachers have become team leads, supporting their colleagues in curriculum development, instructional practices, and student support. To date, three former HGA teachers have gone on to serve as school principals, demonstrating that HGA not only advances its mission of academic excellence for students but also serves as a training ground for the next generation of educational leaders. This dual impact reflects the strategic plan's commitment to cultivating excellence and leadership at every level of the school community.

Culturally Responsive Staffing as an Innovative Approach

At Higher Ground Academy (HGA), a key driver of success is its commitment to embracing the cultures of the immigrant communities it serves. Rather than expecting families to conform to existing systems, HGA integrates cultural awareness into instruction, staffing, leadership, and family engagement—directly supporting its strategic priorities of Climate & Culture, Equitable Outcomes, and Academic Goals.

HGA intentionally recruits staff who reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds of its students. More than 50% of teachers, support staff, and administrators share these backgrounds, while over 60% of administrators share the racial and ethnic identities of the student body. This mission-driven approach prioritizes cultural alignment alongside professional qualifications, supporting high-quality, culturally responsive instruction.

A cornerstone of this strategy is HGA's "homegrown approach" to developing educators and leaders. Many staff members are HGA alumni who return to serve future generations. By creating pathways from support roles into teaching and leadership, HGA strengthens community connections, preserves cultural knowledge, and builds a sustainable pipeline of qualified, culturally connected professionals.

This cultural alignment helps foster trust, strengthen family relationships, and support rigorous, culturally responsive instruction. Students benefit from seeing role models who reflect their identities, while families feel valued and understood. Overall, HGA's culturally responsive staffing model creates an environment that promotes students' academic achievement, belonging, and social-emotional development.

Challenges

One of the most pressing challenges facing HGA today is the recruitment and retention of qualified teachers. Like many schools across the country, HGA competes in a highly competitive labor market where shortages in all subject areas, particularly math, science, elementary education, and English language instruction, are acute. Recruiting licensed teachers who are both academically strong and mission-aligned requires significant effort and resources. This challenge is further compounded by the need to support new teachers through mentorship and professional development to ensure long-term retention and success in the classroom.

A second major challenge is the shifting geography of HGA's student population. Increasingly, families are relocating to the outer rings of the metropolitan area, which has led to longer commutes and a rising cost of transportation. To ensure equitable access, HGA provides transportation services that cover these extended routes, but doing so comes at a significant financial cost.

In addition, HGA is experiencing increasing demand for enrollment from new immigrant communities who are drawn to the school's mission and supportive environment. While this growing interest affirms HGA's reputation as a welcoming and high-achieving school, it also creates additional needs. Many of these students require English Language Learner (ELL) support, which translates into a higher demand for ELL teachers and paraprofessionals. Meeting this need adds pressure to the school's staffing and budget, as hiring and training additional support staff requires sustained investment. Balancing the commitment to serving new immigrant families with the financial and human resource realities of expanding ELL services is a challenge that will require careful planning and prioritization.

7. Academic Performance: Goals & Benchmarks

PROGRESS ON OSPREY WILDS CONTRACTUAL ACADEMIC GOALS & CACR ALIGNMENT

It is fair to say that FY25 marked a year of significant academic recovery for HGA following the disruptions and learning setbacks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The school's enrollment was well above projections, and HGA demonstrated strong academic performance across the measures established in its contract with its authorizer, Osprey Wilds. The school's performance was particularly strong in mathematics. As shown in the table below, HGA met its targets on four of the nine academic performance indicators: Reading Growth, Math Growth, Science Proficiency, and Engagement. HGA exceeded its targets on the remaining five indicators: Mission-Related Outcomes, English Language Learner (ELL) Performance, Reading Proficiency, Math Proficiency, and Postsecondary Readiness.

Summary of Indicator Points

Indicator	Points Possible*	Points Earned	Performance Ranking	Percent Earned Through FY25	
1: Mission Related Outcomes	6	9	Exceeds	150%	
2: English Language Learners	5	6.25	Exceeds	125%	
3: Reading Growth and Progress	16	14.5	Meets	91%	
4: Math Growth and Progress	16	14.5	Meets	91%	
5: Reading Proficiency	16	23	Exceeds	141%	
6: Math Proficiency	15	19.5	Exceeds	130%	
7: Science Proficiency	8	8	Meets	100%	
8: Other Proficiency or	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
9: Post-Secondary Readiness	14	18	Exceeds	129%	
10: Engagement	5	5	Meets	100%	
Overall	101	117	Eligible for Fast-Track Renewal	116%	

Although FY26 presented some challenges, including disruptions associated with ICE enforcement activities in the community, HGA's academic performance remained relatively strong. In particular, the school appears to have experienced less disruption in its academic outcomes than some of its peer schools. Despite the challenges faced during the year, HGA continued to make progress toward its contractual academic performance goals.

This section reports on HGA's progress toward meeting the academic performance goals established in its contract with Osprey Wilds. The section is organized around the ten academic performance indicators included in the contract. Each indicator is presented as a separate section and is further divided into subsections addressing the individual measures associated with that indicator. For each measure, the four possible performance ratings—Exceeds, Meets, Partially Meets, and Does Not Meet—are presented, followed by HGA's results and the corresponding rating achieved.

At the end of each indicator section, a discussion provides an analysis of HGA's performance and explains the school's progress toward meeting the applicable contractual goals. Together, these sections provide an overview of HGA's academic performance during FY25 and FY26 and its progress during the first two years of the current improvement in mathematics was even more substantial—HGA reduced the gap from 16.3% in FY24 to just 7.1% in FY25, reflecting the impact of targeted instructional strategies and data-informed interventions.

Indicator 1: Mission Related Outcomes

Goal: Throughout the period of the contract, students of Higher Ground Academy (HGA) will demonstrate commitment and connection to their community through service.

CACR Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: All students are prepared to be lifelong learners.

Key Measures & Results for this Goal: From FY25 to FY30, the aggregate percentage of students that successfully participate in a community related project in each year will be at least 80%.

Exceeds - The aggregate percentage is at least 90%.

Meets Target - The aggregate percentage is at least 80%.

Approaches - The aggregate percentage is at least 70%.

Does Not Meet - The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above.

Result:

HGA exceeds this target. During each of the first two years of the current five years contract cycle, 100% of HGA students participated in the annual Earth Day project, helping to clean public spaces in the neighborhood surrounding the school. In addition, all HGA students participated in a food drive during FY26, further demonstrating the school's commitment to community service and civic engagement. The students collected 300 lbs of food to be donated to local food banks.

Indicator 2: English Language Learners

Goal: Throughout the period of the contract, English learners of HGA will demonstrate adequate progress towards English language proficiency.

CACR Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: All racial and economic achievement gaps between students are closed.

Key Measures & Results for this Goal:

Measure 1.1: The aggregate percentage of English Learners meeting target on the ACCESS test for all grades will be equal to or greater than that of the Saint Paul Public Schools percentage of English Learners meeting target.

Exceeds: The aggregate percentage is at least 10 percentage points greater than the state percentage of English Learners meeting target

Meets Target: The aggregate percentage is equal to or greater than the state percentage of English Learners meeting target

Approaches: The aggregate percentage is within 5 percentage points of the state percentage of English learners meeting target

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above

Result: The aggregate percentage of HGA English Language Learner (ELL) students meeting or exceeding their ACCESS targets in FY25 and FY26 is 23.3%, which was 0.2 percentage points above the SPPS average. Based on this performance, HGA is considered to be meeting this target during the current contract cycle.

Measure 2.2: The average progress toward target for English Learners in all grades on the ACCESS test will be equal to or greater than the Saint Paul Public (SPPS) Schools average progress toward target for a majority of years during the contract.

Exceeds: The percentage is equal to or greater than the state average progress toward target for 80% or more of the years of the contract.

Meets Target: The percentage is equal to or greater than the state average progress toward target for 50% or more of the years of the contract.

Approaches: The percentage is within 5 percentage points of the state average percentage of English learners making progress.

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above.

Result: HGA's aggregate FY26 and FY27 average Progress Towards Target rate is 39.3% which is slightly higher than that of the SPPS 38.5%. With these results, HGA meets the target.

Indicator 3: Reading Growth and Progress

Under the indicator Reading Growth and Progress, HGA is required to meet the three measures presented in this section. The first two of the measures are based on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) while the third one is based on the locally administered Fastbridge assessment.

Goal: All racial and economic achievement gaps between students are closed.
CACR Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: All students are career- and college-ready before graduating from high school.

Key Measures & Results for this Goal:

Measure 3.1: The overall percentage of students whose achievement level on the statewide assessments for reading (as measured by North Star Academic Progress) improved on statewide assessments is equal to or greater than the state percentage.

Exceeds: The school achieves an overall percentage greater than 10 percentage points over that of the state

Meets Target: The school achieves an overall percentage equal to or greater than that of the state

Approaches: The school achieves an overall percentage that is within 10 percentage points of the state

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above

Result: Data for this measure are not available for comparison because Minnesota transitioned from the MCA III to the MCA IV in FY26. As a result, FY25 and FY26 assessment results are not directly comparable, as the assessments administered in the two years were different.

Measure 3.2: The overall percentage of students whose achievement level decreased or stayed "does not meet standards" on statewide assessments for reading (as measured by North Star Academic Progress) is equal to or less than the state.

Exceeds Target: The school achieves overall percentage at least 10 percentage points less than that of the state

Meets Target: The school achieves an overall percentage less than or equal to that of the state

Approaches Target: The school achieves an overall percentage that is no more than 10 percentage points greater than that of the state

Does Not Meet Target: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above

Result: Data for this measure are also not available for comparison because Minnesota transitioned from the MCA III to the MCA IV in FY26. As a result, FY25 and FY26 assessment results are not directly comparable, as the assessments administered in the two years were different.

Measure 3.3: From FY25 to FY29, the aggregate percentage of students who meet the college pathway score, or increase their scale score on the Fastbridge assessment from fall to spring by at least 50% of the points needed to qualify as college pathway, will be at least 60%.

Exceeds Target: The aggregate percentage is at least 70.0%.

Meets Target: The aggregate percentage is at least 60.0%.

Approaches Target: The aggregate percentage is at least 50.0%.

Does Not Meet Target: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above.

Result: To date, the aggregate percentage of students who are meeting the college pathway score, or increase their scale score on the Fastbridge assessment from fall to spring by at least 50% of the points needed to qualify as college pathway, is 64.6%. Therefore, HGA is meeting this Target.

Analysis: In FY26, the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA III) was replaced by the MCA IV. The MCA IV is aligned with the current English Language Arts (ELA) standards, which took effect in July 2025, whereas the MCA III was aligned with the previous standards. Because the assessments are based on different standards, year-to-year comparisons cannot be made. Therefore, growth data are not available for the first two measures under this indicator.

However, data are available for the third measure, which is based on the internally administered FastBridge assessment. The data show that a majority of HGA students (64.6%) have made adequate progress during the current contract cycle. This is encouraging and indicates that most students are making expected academic gains. Students who have not made adequate progress are predominantly newcomers with limited or no English proficiency.

As noted previously, HGA has been working to strengthen the quality of services provided to these students, including reducing the teacher-to-student ratio. Nevertheless, the fact that a significant number of students in this group are not making adequate progress indicates that additional improvements are needed, particularly in curriculum and instructional practices. HGA will continue to examine these areas and identify strategies to accelerate student growth.

Indicator 4: Math Growth and Progress

HGA has to meet targets on three measures under this indicator. Two of the measures are based on North Star Academic Progress (NSAP), and one is based on the FastBridge assessment, a nationally normed assessment. The table below, derived from data published on *mde.org*, serves as the source for responding to the two of the measures that are based on statewide assessment.

Goal: All racial and economic achievement gaps between students are closed.

CACR Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: All students are career- and college-ready before graduating from high school.

Measure 4.1: The overall percentage of students whose achievement level on the statewide assessments for math (as measured by North Star Academic Progress) improved on statewide assessments is equal to or greater than the SPPS percentage.

Exceeds: The school achieves an overall percentage greater than 10 percentage points over that of the state

Meets Target: The school achieves an overall percentage equal to or greater than that of the state

Approaches: The school achieves an overall percentage that is within 10 percentage points of the state

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above

Result: By achieving a result 14.8 percentage points higher than the SPPS average—25.1% for HGA compared to 10.3% statewide—HGA exceeded this target. This margin of outperformance demonstrates HGA's effectiveness in implementing targeted instructional strategies and support systems that promote student growth.

Measure 4.2: The overall percentage of students whose achievement level decreased or stayed "does not meet standards" on statewide assessments for math (as measured by North Star Academic Progress) is equal to or less than the state.

Exceeds: The school achieves overall percentage at least 10 percentage points less than that of the state.

Meets Target: The school achieves an overall percentage less than or equal to that of the state.

Approaches: The school achieves an overall percentage that is no more than 10 percentage points greater than that of the state.

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above

Result: HGA is meeting this target. So far, 37.9% of HGA students demonstrated either a decrease or no change in achievement level, compared to 44.9% of students of the SPPS. This represents a performance that is 7 percentage points stronger than the state average, indicating that HGA students were less likely to stagnate or decline in proficiency relative to their peers across Minnesota.

Measure 4.3: From FY25 to FY30, the aggregate percentage of students who meet the college pathway score or increase their scale score on the Fastbridge assessment from fall to spring by at least 50% of the points needed to qualify as college pathway will be at least 60%.

Exceeds Target: The aggregate percentage is at least 70.0%.

Meets Target: The aggregate percentage is at least 60.0%.

Approaches Target: The aggregate percentage is at least 50.0%.

Does Not Meet Target: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above.

Result: HGA is meeting this target. On average, 64.9% of HGA students made adequate progress toward grade-level proficiency, according to data from internally administered FastBridge assessments.

Analysis: Of the three measures under this indicator, HGA is meeting its targets on two and exceeding its target on the remaining measure. Given the school's struggles to meet these targets during the previous contract cycle, this represents a positive development. HGA attributes this progress, in part, to the additional academic support provided through the newly introduced Extended Day and Extended Year programs, among other initiatives.

Indicator 5: Reading Proficiency

Goal: All racial and economic achievement gaps between students are closed.

CACR Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: All students are career- and college-ready before graduating from high school.

Goal: All racial and economic achievement gaps between students are closed.

CACR Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: All students are career- and college-ready before graduating from high school.

Effective July 1, 2023, the READ Act replaces the Read Well by Third Grade goal in World's Best Workforce (MN Stat. 120B.12). The legislature seeks to have every child reading at or above grade level every year, beginning in kindergarten. Because the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments measure reading proficiency for the first time in third grade, reporting on third grade reading proficiency serves as a proxy for determining if the school is meeting the READ Act literacy goal.

CACR Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: All students are career- and college-ready before graduating from high school.

Key Measures & Results for this Goal:

Measure 5.1: From FY25 to FY29, the school's aggregate proficiency index score for grade 3 students is equal to or greater than the SPPS.

Exceeds: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is at least 10 points greater than the state's score

Meets Target: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is equal to or greater than the state's score

Approaches: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is within 10 points of the state's score

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above

Result: Currently, HGA exceeds the target on this measure by 14.9 index points compared with SPPS. HGA's aggregate FY25 and FY26 Grade 3 reading proficiency index score is 40.5, compared with 25.9 for SPPS.

Measure 5.2: The aggregate proficiency index score in reading for [all students; FRP; SPED; etc.] in [3rd grade; 4-8 grades; etc.] is equal to or greater than the SPPS for the same student group and same grades.

Exceeds: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is at least 10 points greater than the state's score

Meets Target: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is equal to or greater than the state's score

Approaches: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is within 10 points of the state's score

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above

Result: HGA is meeting this target. There is a 9.3-index-point gap in HGA's favor on this measure.

Measure 5.3: From FY25 to FY29, the school's aggregate proficiency index score for the FRP subgroup is equal to or greater than that of the state for the same subgroup and the same grades (3-8, 10).

Exceeds: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is at least 10 points greater than the district's score

Meets Target: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is equal to or greater than the district's score

Approaches: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is within 10 points of the district's score

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above

Result: For the FRP group, HGA's aggregate reading proficiency index score over the previous two fiscal years was 54 points, which was 9.8 index points higher than the corresponding score for SPPS. Therefore, HGA is meeting this target.

Measure 5.4: From FY25 to FY29, the school's aggregate proficiency index score for the FRP subgroup is greater than that of the resident district (ISD 625 – St. Paul Public Schools) for the same subgroup and the same grades (3-8, 10).

Exceeds: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is at least 10 points greater than the district's score

Meets Target: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is equal to or greater than the district's score

Approaches: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is within 10 points of the district's score

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above

Result: For the FRP group, HGA's aggregate reading proficiency index score over the previous two fiscal years was 54.0 points, which was 21.1 index points higher than the corresponding score for SPPS. Therefore, HGA is exceeding this target.

Measure 5.5: The aggregate proficiency index score in reading for English Learners in all grades is equal to or greater than the SPPS for the same student group and same grades.

Exceeds: The school's aggregate proficiency index score for English Learners is at least 10 points greater than the state's score

Meets Target: The school's aggregate proficiency index score for English Learners is equal to or greater than the state's score

Approaches: The school's aggregate proficiency index score for English Learners is within 10 points of the state's score

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above.

Result: The difference between HGA's proficiency index score of 34.4 and the state's score of 17 for the ELL group is double, in favor of HGA. This outcome indicates that HGA clearly exceeds the target on this measure.

Measure 5.6: From FY25 to FY29, the school's aggregate proficiency index score for the Special Education subgroup is greater than that of the resident district (ISD 625 – St. Paul Public Schools) for the same subgroup and the same grades (3-8, 10).

Exceeds: The school's aggregate proficiency index score for English Learners is at least 10 points greater than the state's score

Meets Target: The school's aggregate proficiency index score for English Learners is equal to or greater than the state's score

Approaches: The school's aggregate proficiency index score for English Learners is within 10 points of the state's score

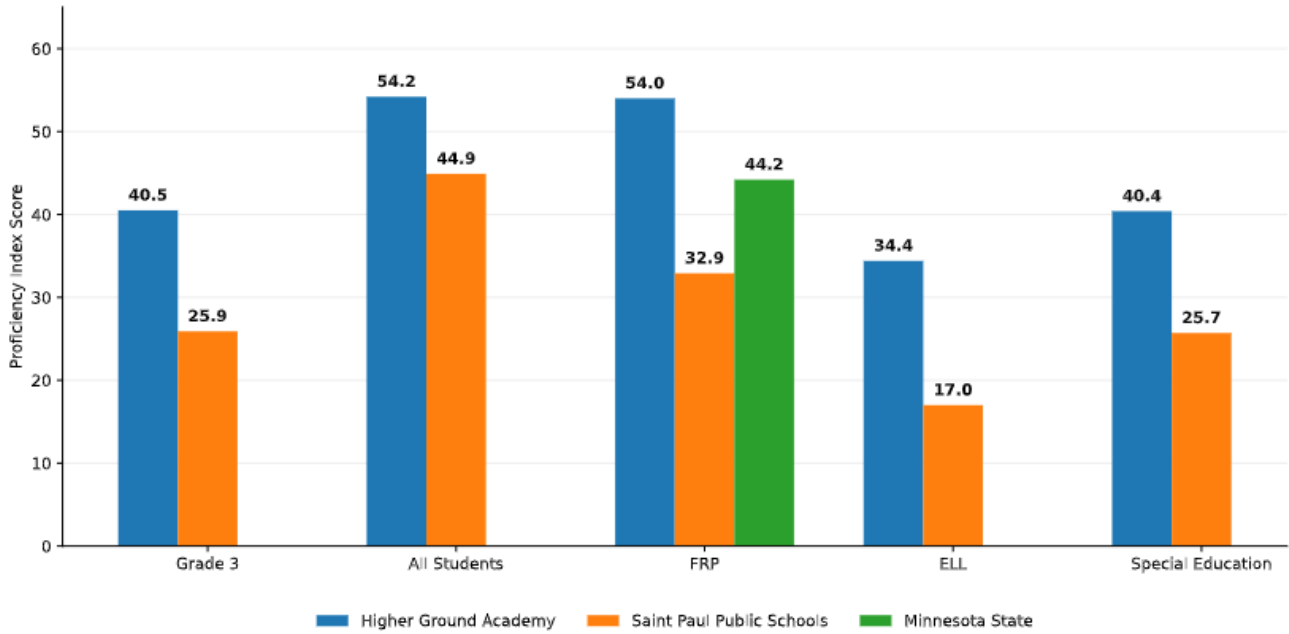
Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above.

Result: HGA is exceeding this target. To date, HGA's aggregate proficiency index point in reading for the Special Education group is 40.4 points. That of the SPPS, for the same group, is 25.7 points. The difference between the two is 14.7 index points.

Analysis: As previously discussed, the MCA IV is a new assessment. Historically, when a new version of the MCA is introduced, student performance tends to decline initially. The experience with MCA IV appears to follow this pattern. However, compared with its peers, HGA appears to have performed relatively well. Consequently, the school is exceeding its targets on four of the measures under the reading proficiency indicator and meeting its targets on the remaining measures.

Nevertheless, HGA recognizes that significant challenges lie ahead and will require sustained attention in the coming years. Moving forward, the school will need to prioritize curriculum alignment, staff development, and strategies to strengthen student motivation to improve academic outcomes and sustain progress.

2026 MCA Reading Proficiency Index Scores



Source: Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), 2026 MCA Reading data. Statewide comparison was provided in the source table for FRP only.

Indicator 6: Math Proficiency

CACR Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: All students are career- and college-ready before graduating from high school.

Key Measures & Results for this Goal:

Measure 6.1: The aggregate proficiency index score in math for [all students; FRP; SPED; etc.] in grades 4–8 and 11 is equal to or greater than the Saint Paul Public Schools for the same student group and same grades.

Exceeds: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is at least 10 points greater than the state's score

Meets Target: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is equal to or greater than the state's score

Approaches: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is within 10 points of the state's score

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above

Result: HGA's aggregate proficiency index score in mathematics for FY25 and FY26 is 49.6, which is 11.2 index points higher than the SPPS score. Therefore, HGA is exceeding this target.

Measure 6.2: The aggregate proficiency index score in math for the FRP group in grade; 3-8 and 11 is equal to or greater than the State for the same student group and same grades

Exceeds: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is at least 10 points greater than the district's score

Meets Target: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is equal to or greater than the district's score

Approaches: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is within 10 points of the district's score

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above.

Result: HGA is exceeding this target. There is a 10.9-index-point gap between HGA and the state, with HGA performing higher.

Measure 6.3: From FY25 to FY29, the school's aggregate proficiency index score for the FRP subgroup will be greater than that of the resident district (ISD 625 – St. Paul Public Schools) for the same subgroup and the same grades (3-8, 11).

Exceeds: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is at least 10 points greater than the district's score

Meets Target: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is equal to or greater than the district's score

Approaches: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is within 10 points of the district's score

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above.

Result: HGA is exceeding this target. HGA's aggregate score for the said group is 19.4 index points higher than that of the Saint Paul Public Schools.

Measure 6.4: From FY25 to FY29, the school's aggregate proficiency index score for the ELL subgroup will be greater than that of the resident district (ISD 625 – St. Paul Public Schools) for the same subgroup and the same grades (3-8, 11).

Exceeds: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is at least 10 points greater than the district's score

Meets Target: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is equal to or greater than the district's score

Approaches: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is within 10 points of the district's score

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above.

Result: HGA is exceeding this target. There is a 20.4-index-point difference between HGA and SPPS, with HGA scoring 37.3 index points compared with 16.9 for SPPS.

Measure 6.5: From FY25 to FY29, the school's aggregate proficiency index score for the Special Education subgroup will be greater than that of the resident district (ISD 625 – St. Paul Public Schools) for the same subgroup and the same grades (3–8, 11).

Exceeds: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is at least 10 points greater than the district's score

Meets Target: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is equal to or greater than the district's score

Approaches: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is within 10 points of the district's score

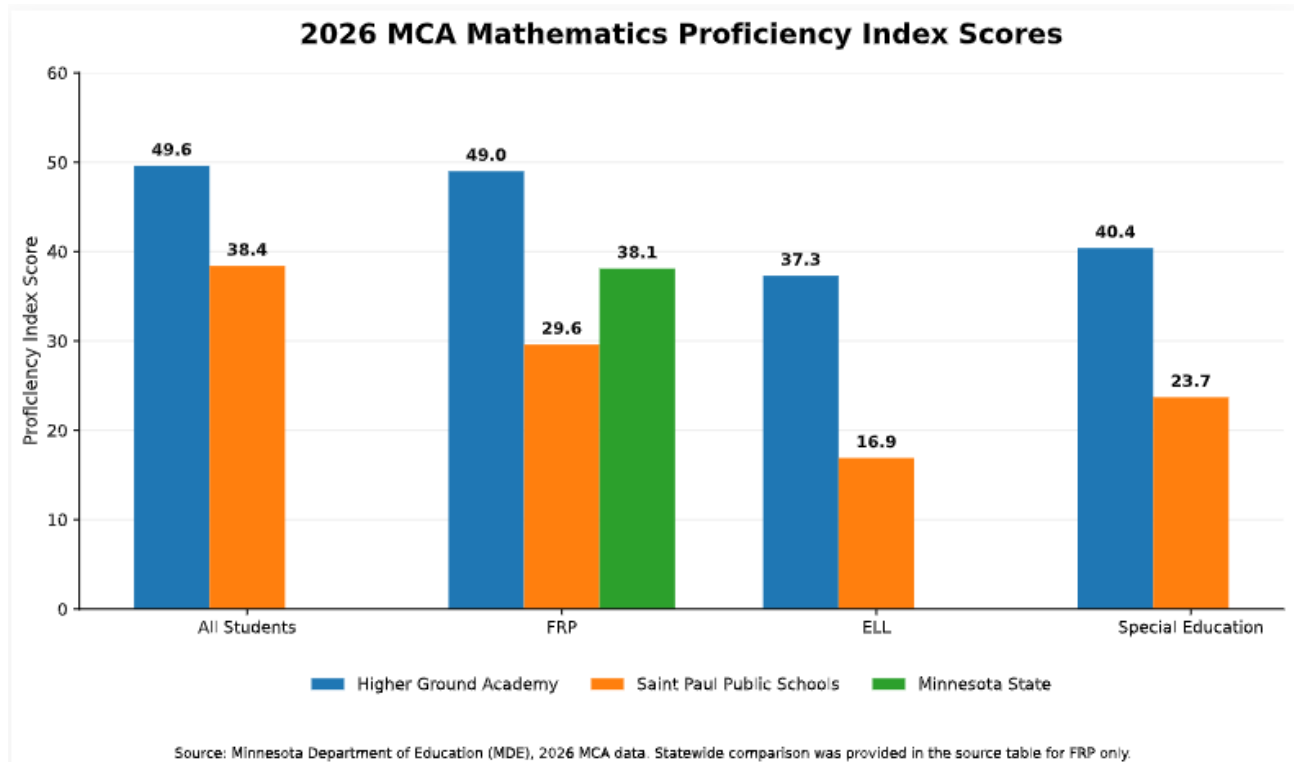
Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above.

Result: HGA's aggregate proficiency index score for the Special Education group is 40.4 points, compared with 23.7 points for the same group at SPPS. This represents a 16.7-index-point difference in favor of HGA. Therefore, HGA is exceeding this target.

Analysis: Currently, HGA is exceeding its targets on four of the six measures under Indicator 6, Math Proficiency, and meeting its targets on the remaining two. This is an encouraging achievement. Since the analysis is based on HGA's performance relative to that of peer schools, these results suggest that the school is making meaningful progress toward fulfilling its commitment to equalize educational opportunities for all students.

Despite this progress, a significant concern remains: approximately 40% of HGA students did not meet mathematics proficiency standards in both FY25 and FY26. This highlights the need for additional and more targeted support for students who continue to struggle academically. In FY25, HGA introduced two programs to address this need: the Extended Day program, which provides after-school academic support, and the Extended Year program. Undoubtedly, students who participated consistently benefited from these additional learning opportunities. However, both programs faced challenges related to low student participation and attendance, limiting their overall reach and potential impact.

Moving forward, HGA will explore additional strategies to ensure that struggling students will receive the support they need to succeed. In particular, the school will need to strengthen its capacity to provide targeted academic interventions during the regular school day, when students can be reached more consistently. By building on the lessons learned from its existing programs and expanding access to effective instructional support, HGA aims to improve mathematics proficiency and ensure that more students meet established academic standards.



Indicator 7: Science Proficiency

CACR Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: All students are career- and college-ready before graduating from high school.

Key Measures & Results for this Goal:

Measure 7.1: From FY25 to FY29, the school's aggregate proficiency index score will maintain or increase from the baseline proficiency index score (FY22-FY24 Baseline: 43.5) OR be equal to or greater than that of the district for the same grades (5, 8, HS).

Exceeds: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is at least 10 points greater than the state's score

Meets Target: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is equal to or greater than the state's score

Approaches: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is within 10 points of the state's score

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above.

Result: HGA partially meets this target. The school's aggregate proficiency index score is 0.5 index points below that of the SPPS.

Measure 7.2: From FY25 to FY29, the school's aggregate proficiency index score for the FRP subgroup is equal to or greater than that of the state for the same subgroup and the same grades (5, 8, HS).

Exceeds: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is at least 10 points greater than the district's score

Meets Target: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is equal to or greater than the district's score

Approaches: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is within 10 points of the district's score

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above

Result: HGA is partially meeting this target. The difference between HGA's index score and the state's index score is 3.7 points, which is within the 10-point threshold.

Measure 7.3: From FY25 to FY29, the school's aggregate proficiency index score for the FRP subgroup is greater than that of the resident district (ISD 625 – St. Paul Public Schools) for the same subgroup and the same grades (5, 8, HS).

Exceeds: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is at least 10 points greater than the district's score

Meets Target: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is equal to or greater than the district's score

Approaches: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is within 10 points of the district's score

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above

Result: HGA meets this target, outperforming SPPS by 4.6 index points.

Measure 7.4 [AGC]: From FY25 to FY29, the school's aggregate proficiency index score for the ELL subgroup will be greater than that of the resident district (ISD 625 – St. Paul Public Schools) for the same subgroup and the same grades (5, 8, HS).

Exceeds: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is at least 10 points greater than the district's score

Meets Target: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is equal to or greater than the district's score

Approaches: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is within 10 points of the district's score

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above

Result: HGA meets this target, outperforming the SPPS by 4.9 index points.

Measure 7.5 [AGC]: From FY25 to FY29, the school's aggregate proficiency index score for the Special Education subgroup will be greater than that of the resident district (ISD 625 – St. Paul Public Schools) for the same subgroup and the same grades (5, 8, HS).

Exceeds: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is at least 10 points greater than the district's score

Meets Target: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is equal to or greater than the district's score

Approaches: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is within 10 points of the district's score

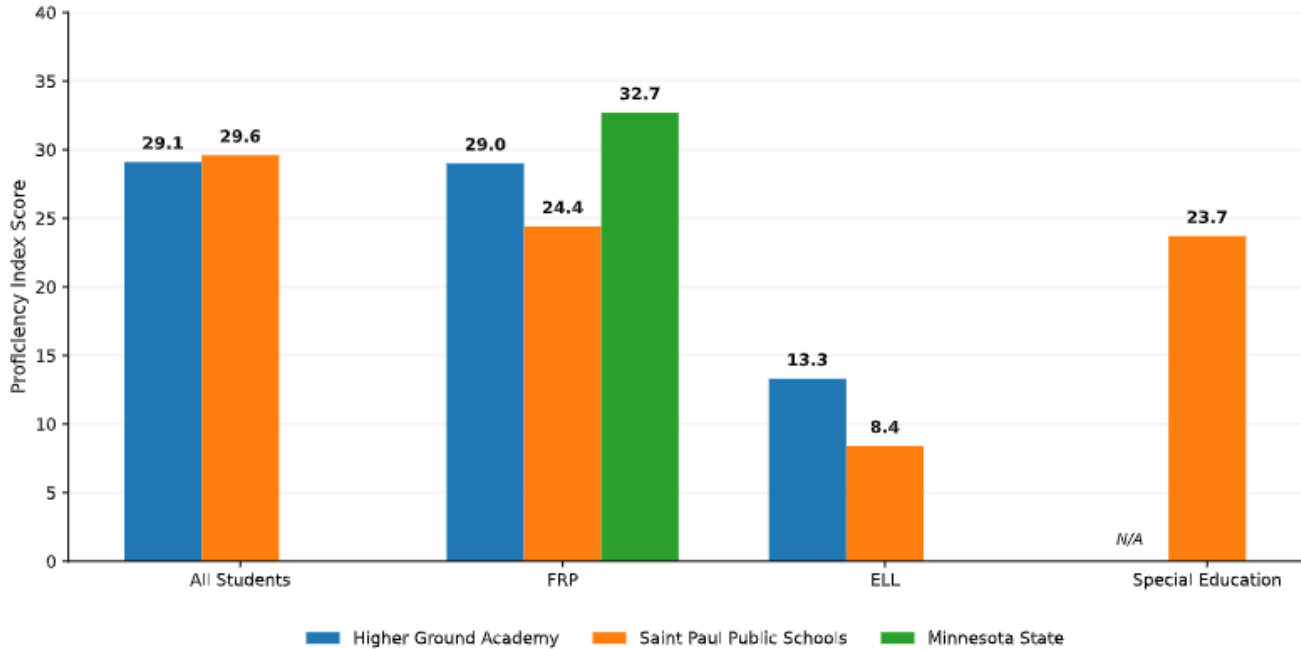
Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above

Result: No data are reported for HGA for this target due to the small cell size.

Analysis: In FY25, Minnesota schools were required to fully implement the newly adopted science standards for the first time. Consequently, the MCA science assessments differed from those administered in previous years. As is often the case when new standards and assessments are introduced, proficiency scores declined across the state. The FY25 MCA science results reflected this trend: the state's average proficiency index score dropped by more than 10 points, falling to 40. Similarly, HGA's proficiency index score declined by 11.6 points, from 44.4 to 32.8.

In FY26, overall proficiency index scores improved slightly for both the state and Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS). Unfortunately, HGA did not experience a similar improvement. Nevertheless, when the results were disaggregated by student subgroups, HGA performed better than both the state and SPPS in several areas (see graph below). While these results are encouraging, the HGA community recognizes that science education requires greater attention and focused improvement efforts. In FY27, teachers, principals, and curriculum leaders will work collaboratively to strengthen science instruction, address identified areas of weakness, and reverse the downward trend in student performance.

2026 MCA Science Proficiency Index Scores



Source: Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), 2026 MCA Science data. HGA Special Education data were not available in the source table.

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

Goal: All racial and economic achievement gaps between students are closed.

CACR Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: All students are career- and college-ready before graduating from high school.

Key Measures & Results for this Goal: Provide data and an analysis of the school's performance on this goal, addressing key measures.

HGA does not have a contractual goal in this optional indicator area.

Indicator 9: Post-Secondary Readiness

CACR Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: All students graduate from high school.

Key Measures & Results for this Goal:

Measure 9.1: The aggregate 6-year graduation rate as reported by MDE will be [equal to; greater than; etc.] that of the state.

Exceeds: The school's aggregate graduation rate is at least 10 percentage points greater than the state's graduation rate

Meets Target: The school's aggregate graduation rate is equal to or greater than the state's graduation rate

Approaches: The school's aggregate graduation rate is within 10 percentage points of the state's graduation rate

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above

Result: HGA's FY25 & FY26 6-year graduation rate is 95.9%. That is 8.4% higher than that of the state. Therefore, HGA meets this target.

Measure 9.2: From FY24 to FY29, the school's aggregate 4-year graduation rate will be greater than the rate of the resident district (ISD 625 – St. Paul Public Schools).

Exceeds: The school's aggregate graduation rate is at least 10 percentage points greater than the state's graduation rate

Meets Target: The school's aggregate graduation rate is equal to or greater than the state's graduation rate

Approaches: The school's aggregate graduation rate is within 10 percentage points of the state's graduation rate

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above

Result: HGA is exceeding this target. The schools average 4-year graduation rate between FY25 and FY26 is 89.6% whereas that of the SPPS is 77.1%. The difference between the two is 12.5%.

Measure 9.3: From FY25 to FY29, the aggregate percentage of graduating students achieving an assessment score on a college entrance or placement exam (ACT or Accuplacer) that would place them at college or career ready on at least 50% of the exam sections (e.g. English, Reading, Science, Math, Writing on the ACT or Language Arts, English, Math on the Accuplacer) will be at least 70%

Exceeds: The aggregate percentage is at least 80%

Meets Target: The Aggregate percentage is at least 70%

Approaches: The aggregate percentage is at least 60%

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above

Result: During this period, the average percentage of HGA students who based on their performance on the Accuplacer test were placed on college level courses is 96.5%. Therefore, HGA exceeds this target.

Measure 9.4: From FY25 to FY29, the aggregate percentage of graduates that earned college credit prior to graduation will be at least 50%.

Exceeds: The aggregate percentage is at least 60%

Meets Target: The Aggregate percentage is at least 50%

Approaches: The aggregate percentage is at least 40%

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above.

Result: The aggregate percentage is 49.3%

Measure 9.5 [CCR]: From FY25 to FY29, the aggregate percentage of graduates that are accepted into at least one college prior to graduation will be at least 60%.

Exceeds: The aggregate percentage is at least 100%

Meets Target: The Aggregate percentage is at least 80%

Approaches: The aggregate percentage is at least 60%

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above

Result: 100% of the graduating students are accepted into a college prior to graduation. However, some of the graduates still had a few more courses to complete before enrolling in college.

This success reflects the individualized attention and support that HGA staff provide to every student. Teachers, mentors, and administrators work closely with students and their families to monitor academic progress, identify and address challenges early, and provide the support necessary for students to remain on track toward graduation. This collaborative approach, combined with a supportive learning environment, contributes significantly to HGA's consistently high graduation rate.

Indicator 10: Engagement

Goal: All racial and economic achievement gaps between students are closed.

CACR Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: All students are career- and college-ready before graduating from high school.

Key Measures & Results for this Goal:

Measure 10.1: The aggregate of the school's annual consistent attendance rates is equal to or greater than that of the state.

Exceeds: The aggregate of the school's annual consistent attendance rates is 5 percentage points greater than that of the state

Meets Target: The aggregate of the school's annual consistent attendance rates is equal to or greater than that of the state

Approaches: The aggregate of the school's annual consistent attendance rates is within 5 percentage points of the state

Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above

Result: HGA's aggregate consistent attendance rate for FY25 and FY26 was 75.7%, only 0.3 percentage points below the state average of 76%. Given this minimal difference, HGA considers its consistent attendance rate comparable to the state average and, therefore, is meeting this target.

Conclusion: Progress Toward Meeting Contractual Academic Goals

The current five-year contract cycle, which began in FY25, is progressing well. Based on the data available to date and the school's internal assessment of its progress toward meeting contractual academic goals, HGA is meeting or exceeding its targets across all ten indicators. This achievement is particularly noteworthy given that some targets, especially those related to reading and mathematics growth, proved challenging during the previous contract cycle. HGA's progress in these areas demonstrates the school's renewed commitment to continuous academic improvement and its mission to provide all students with equitable opportunities for success.

This progress reflects the concerted efforts of the entire school community, including students, teachers, support staff, administrators, and parents. While HGA has reason to celebrate its accomplishments, several significant challenges remain. Three areas require particular attention: consistent attendance, English Language Learner (ELL) proficiency and growth, and science proficiency.

Consistent Attendance

Although HGA is making progress toward its contractual goals, consistent attendance remains an area of concern. The school's internal assessment suggests that some of the reported attendance challenges may stem from weaknesses in attendance-recording procedures, particularly at HG Secondary Academy.

In FY26, the combined consistent attendance rate for HG Elementary and HG Junior High was 81.9%, compared with 76.5% for the state—a difference of 15.4 percentage points in HG Elementary and HG junior's favor. In contrast, HG Secondary Academy reported a consistent attendance rate of 60.6%, which was 21.3 percentage points below the state average.

The school's review identified a potential problem with how attendance is recorded and reported at HG Secondary Academy. Currently, teachers take attendance during the first class period, and this information is entered into MARSS, Minnesota's statewide student data reporting system. Teachers also record attendance for every class period in the school's learning management system, Schoology. However, attendance information recorded in Schoology does not automatically transfer to JMC, the school's student information system, or subsequently to MARSS.

Consequently, students who arrive late, a relatively common occurrence at the secondary level, may be recorded as absent for the entire school day. Similarly, students participating in Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) courses during the first class period may be incorrectly recorded as absent for the day. These procedures can result in attendance records that do not accurately reflect students' actual attendance.

HGA recognizes that this is a significant administrative shortcoming that must be corrected. Accordingly, the school has revised its attendance-taking procedures for FY27 to improve the accuracy of attendance records and reporting. Counselors and social workers have also been directed to pay closer attention to attendance concerns and work with students and families to address barriers to regular attendance. The school will monitor the effectiveness of these measures as part of its ongoing efforts to improve consistent attendance.

English Language Learner (ELL) Proficiency and Growth

ELL instruction remains another important area for improvement. Although HGA is currently meeting its contractual targets for ELL proficiency and growth, ACCESS assessment results indicate that substantial challenges persist. In FY26, 76.2% of HGA's English learners did not meet the applicable proficiency standard, while 78.9% did not meet the expected growth standard. These results are concerning and underscore the need for additional support to help English learners develop the language skills necessary for academic success.

One of the most significant challenges is the high student-to-teacher ratio in the ELL program, which is currently approximately 60 students per teacher. Such a ratio limits the extent to which teachers can provide the individualized instruction and targeted support that English learners, particularly newcomers, often require.

HGA has been gradually increasing the number of teachers assigned to its ELL program, and this effort will continue in FY27. In addition, the school will invest in professional development to strengthen teachers' capacity to deliver effective language instruction and support English learners across academic subjects. Through these efforts, HGA aims to improve both English language proficiency and student growth over the remainder of the current contract cycle.

Science Proficiency

Science proficiency is a third area of concern. Following the introduction of the MCA IV science assessment, HGA experienced a substantial decline in its reported science proficiency results, reaching levels not previously observed by the school. Although HGA's performance relative to peer schools may appear comparatively strong, the results from the past two consecutive school years are not acceptable and should not be regarded as a normal or satisfactory outcome.

The school recognizes that these results may reflect weaknesses across several aspects of the educational process, including curriculum alignment, instructional practices, the use of assessment data, and the effectiveness of interventions designed to address students' learning needs. HGA will therefore take a comprehensive approach to improving science achievement, beginning with a thorough review of the science curriculum.

To this end, the Curriculum Director has made science curriculum development and alignment a priority for FY27. The school will also examine instructional practices and the use of student performance data to identify gaps in learning and determine appropriate interventions. HGA is committed to addressing these challenges systematically and improving science outcomes in the coming years.

Looking Ahead

HGA's progress during the first two years of the current five-year contract cycle is encouraging. Meeting or exceeding contractual targets across all ten academic indicators represents a significant accomplishment, particularly in areas that challenged the school during the previous contract cycle. At the same time, the school recognizes that meeting contractual targets does not eliminate the need for continued improvement. Attendance-recording accuracy, English language development, and science achievement require sustained attention and targeted action.

In FY27, HGA will build on its existing strengths while addressing these challenges through improved procedures, additional instructional support, professional development, and closer monitoring of student outcomes. The school remains committed to strengthening academic performance, ensuring that all student groups receive the support they need, and sustaining progress toward its contractual goals throughout the remainder of the current contract cycle.

Federal and State Accountability

High Quality Charter School Status

The data presented throughout this report demonstrate that Higher Ground Academy (HGA) is a strong and effective school serving a highly diverse student population. More than 95% of HGA students come from low-income families, over 45% are English Language Learners, and approximately 82% were students of color in FY25. Despite the educational barriers often associated with these demographic factors, HGA students have consistently demonstrated strong academic and postsecondary outcomes. The school's success has earned recognition as a *"Beat the Odds"* school by the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* and as one of Minnesota's strong-performing schools by *U.S. News & World Report*.

HGA also came very close to being identified as a High Quality Charter School (HQCS). The minimum consistent attendance rate required to qualify was 75%, while HGA's attendance rate for the applicable school year was 73%—only two percentage points below the threshold. Importantly, HGA met the other qualifying criteria. Thus, the school narrowly missed HQCS designation because of this single measure rather than a broader concern with its academic performance or overall effectiveness. This near qualification further underscores the strength of HGA's performance while identifying attendance as an important area for continued improvement.

Looking ahead, HGA's strategic plan envisions relocating its middle school to a separate site during the upcoming contract cycle. This initiative is intended not simply to increase enrollment, but to create a more developmentally appropriate learning environment, expand access to HGA's educational program, and strengthen academic and student support. If implemented, the initiative is projected to increase enrollment across HGA's three schools to approximately 1,500 students. Combined with HGA's continued emphasis on instructional excellence, equitable outcomes, attendance, and accountability, this growth will further advance the school's mission and expand its impact on the students and communities it serves.

ESSA Identification

HGA is not identified for comprehensive support or additional targeted support.

8. Comprehensive Achievement and Civic Readiness Strategic Plan Report

A. Assessing Student Progress and Instructional Effectiveness

Assessing Student Progress: HGA uses a multi-layered assessment system aligned with Minnesota state standards and local academic expectations. Students participate in state assessments, including the MCA and ACCESS for ELLs, as well as FastBridge benchmark assessments, classroom-based assessments, and curriculum-embedded measures. Students identified as high risk through FastBridge receive additional literacy screening through CAPTi ReadBasix, while tools such as CBM FastBridge, Lexia, Read Live, and IXL provide ongoing progress monitoring. Assessment results are used to identify strengths and needs, adjust instruction, and provide targeted interventions.

Disaggregating Data and Promoting Equitable Outcomes: HGA disaggregates student achievement data by home language/national origin, ELL status, grade level, gender, and special education designation. Administrators, team leaders, and teaching teams review these data throughout the year to identify achievement gaps and differences in progress among student groups. Findings inform instructional planning, professional development, interventions, and resource allocation. For example, FY26 MCA results showed that ELL students made less progress than their non-ELL peers, prompting additional ELL staffing and professional development for mainstream teachers to strengthen support for English learners.

Gifted and Talented Education: HGA identifies students for advanced learning and acceleration using multiple measures, including MCA performance, FastBridge results, classroom performance, and parent and teacher recommendations. Identified students may receive differentiated instruction, flexible grouping, grade acceleration, honors coursework, and PSEO opportunities, as appropriate.

Evaluating Instruction and Curriculum: HGA evaluates instructional effectiveness through analysis of state and local assessment data, classroom observations, formal teacher evaluations, stakeholder surveys, teacher reflection, and professional learning communities. These processes help identify instructional strengths and areas for improvement. Curriculum effectiveness is assessed through student achievement data and curriculum-embedded assessments; when patterns of underperformance emerge, HGA examines instructional strategies and curriculum alignment and uses the findings to adjust instruction, provide targeted professional development, and better support student progress toward college and career readiness.

Continuous Improvement: HGA brings assessment results, disaggregated data, classroom evidence, stakeholder feedback, and teacher evaluations together to support data-informed decision-making. This ongoing process guides interventions, professional development, instructional adjustments, and resource allocation with the goal of improving student achievement, promoting equitable outcomes, and ensuring that students are prepared for future academic, career, and civic opportunities.

B. Curriculum and Instruction Review System

Instruction and curriculum are reviewed regularly through a multi-layered system of oversight and evaluation. Teachers are required to submit lesson plans, which are supervised 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 integration of technology—are consistently applied across classrooms.

The school's evaluation system also emphasizes student outcomes. Data from both internal benchmarks and state assessments, including the MCA and FastBridge, are analyzed to measure academic growth and identify trends across grade levels and student groups. These data are supplemented by student, parent, and teacher surveys, which provide valuable insights into instructional quality, curriculum effectiveness, and

overall school climate. This feedback loop ensures that decisions regarding curriculum adjustments and instructional priorities are grounded in evidence and responsive to community needs.

Equity and representation are central to HGA's mission and vision. The school actively recruits and supports teachers from diverse racial, ethnic, and national backgrounds. In FY 25, more than 70% of the school's licensed staff come from diverse groups, closely reflecting the demographics of HGA's student body, where over 95% are from low-income families, more than 80% are students of color, and more than 45% 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. Such representation not only builds cultural awareness but also strengthens the school's capacity to deliver equitable outcomes for all learners.

Looking ahead, HGA is committed to deepening these strategies in the next contract cycle. The school will continue refining its use of data to identify gaps in achievement and to drive instructional decisions, ensuring that every student remains on track for postsecondary success. Expanded professional development will strengthen teachers' ability to implement culturally responsive practices and integrate technology in ways that personalize learning and enhance student engagement. The school also intends to build on its success in recruiting diverse educators by developing more intentional "homegrown" pipelines to prepare alumni for careers in teaching and leadership. Through these efforts, HGA aims not only to sustain its record of strong student outcomes but also to position itself as a model of equity, innovation, and excellence in preparing students for college, careers, and civic readiness.

C. Equitable Distribution of Teachers

Higher Ground Academy (HGA) is committed to ensuring that its teachers are highly qualified, effective, and diverse. Each year, HGA conducts a review of staffing assignments to examine teacher experience, licensure, and diversity. The data from FY25 indicate that HGA maintains strong staffing stability and alignment: 97% of teachers are licensed, 93% have more than three years of experience, 97% are working within their licensure area, and 65% hold advanced degrees. In addition, 73% of HGA's teachers identify as racially or ethnically diverse, which reflects and affirms the cultural backgrounds of the student population. These indicators demonstrate that HGA's students are not taught by inexperienced, unlicensed, or teachers teaching "out-of-field."

HGA's long-term strategic plan emphasizes recruitment and retention strategies designed to sustain equity and strengthen instruction. To expand the pool of highly qualified candidates, the school actively recruits educators from diverse countries, including Kenya, Ghana, the Philippines, Pakistan, and Egypt. This approach not only fills vacancies with licensed professionals but also supports the school's mission of building a staff that mirrors the racial and cultural diversity of its students. In addition, HGA has implemented a "Grow Your Own" strategy, offering assistance to former HGA students who serve as teacher aides and aspire to enter the teaching profession. By investing in this pipeline, HGA cultivates future educators who are deeply rooted in the community and culturally responsive to its families.

Through these deliberate strategies, HGA ensures equitable access to experienced, licensed, and diverse educators while aligning with Minnesota's statutory requirement to promote achievement and civic readiness for all students. The school's comprehensive, long-term planning process integrates teacher quality, cultural responsiveness, and professional development to sustain a learning environment where every student is supported by highly qualified teachers.

	Licensed Educators (% of total)	3+ Years' Experience (% of total)	Working in Area of Licensure (% of total)	Advanced Degrees (% of total)	Racially / Ethnically Diverse (% of total)
Teachers	97%	93%	97%	65%	73%

	Licensed Educators (% of total)	3+ Years' Experience (% of total)	Working in Area of Licensure (% of total)	Advanced Degrees (% of total)	Racially / Ethnically Diverse (% of total)
Admin Staff	57%	100%	75%	100%	72%

D. Education Effectiveness Practices

At the center of HGA's long-term strategic plan to support and improve teaching and learning is a commitment to educational effectiveness. This commitment integrates rigorous, culturally sustaining instruction with practices that affirm and build upon the strengths of the diverse community HGA serves.

HGA integrates high-quality instruction, technology, and curriculum across all grade levels to ensure rigor, student-centered learning, and alignment with Minnesota standards. Curriculum materials are selected carefully to identify and eliminate bias. The school library is intentionally assembled with books that reflect the diverse cultures and lived experiences of its learners, reinforcing inclusivity and representation. Teachers are trained to leverage technology not only as a learning tool but also as a platform for equity—supporting differentiated instruction, expanding access to advanced coursework, and enabling real-time assessment of student progress.

The school also ensures that learning and work environments validate and embrace cultural and community strengths. With a student body composed largely of immigrant and refugee families, HGA actively incorporates cultural perspectives into instruction, communication, and family engagement. A majority of the staff share racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds with students, which further affirms identity and strengthens relationships.

Finally, HGA fosters a collaborative professional culture designed to retain a highly qualified, diverse staff and continuously develop teacher effectiveness. The school's "Grow Your Own" approach provides pathways for HGA alumni and teacher aides to become licensed educators, reinforcing both staff diversity and community connection. These practices ensure that HGA retains educators who are both racially and ethnically diverse and effective in supporting the success of all learners.

9. Student & Parent Satisfaction

Parent/Guardian Satisfaction Survey Report

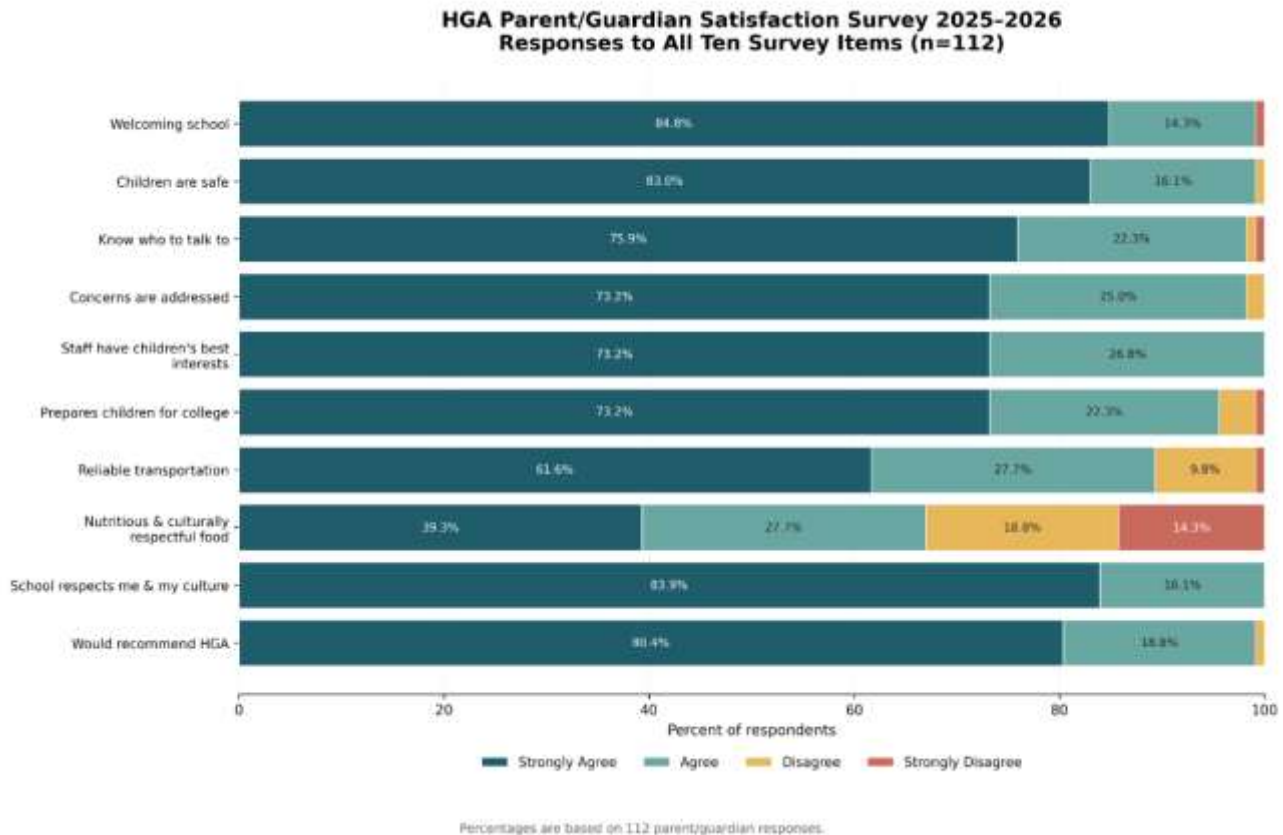
Parent Survey

A parent survey was administered during the parent-teacher conferences at the end of the first semester. The survey consisted of ten opinion statements rated on a five-point scale: *strongly agree*, *agree*, *neutral*, *disagree*, or *strongly disagree*. A total of 112 of 463 parents (24%) participated, representing a decline from the 36% response rate in the previous school year.

The exact reason for the lower participation rate in FY26 is unknown. However, one possible contributing factor was the heightened concern within immigrant communities related to immigration enforcement activity occurring in the Twin Cities around the time of the conferences. Overall attendance at the parent-teacher conference was also lower than in

previous years, suggesting that the decline in survey participation may have been related, at least in part, to the lower conference attendance. Because the school did not formally assess the reasons for the decline, this explanation should be viewed as a possible contributing factor rather than a confirmed cause.

The survey gathered parent and guardian feedback on key aspects of Higher Ground Academy, including school climate, safety, communication, cultural respect, student preparation, transportation, and cafeteria services. The following section summarizes the survey results and highlights areas of strength as well as opportunities for improvement.



Note: The graph is generated using artificial intelligence (AI) tools.

Key Findings

1. Higher Ground Academy is a very welcoming school.

Parents expressed exceptionally positive views of HGA's welcoming environment. Of the 112 respondents, 95 (84.8%) strongly agreed and 16 (14.3%) agreed, resulting in a 99.1% positive response rate. Only one parent disagreed. This suggests that families overwhelmingly experience HGA as a welcoming and inclusive school community.

2. My children are safe at Higher Ground Academy.

Parents also demonstrated a high level of confidence in student safety. 93 parents (83.0%) strongly agreed and 18 (16.1%) agreed, for a combined positive response of 99.1%. Only one respondent disagreed. The results indicate that parents overwhelmingly view HGA as providing a safe environment for their children.

3. If I have a concern, I know who I can talk to.

The results indicate strong confidence in access to school personnel. 85 parents (75.9%) strongly agreed and 25 (22.3%) agreed, producing a 98.2% positive response rate. Only two parents expressed disagreement. This suggests that HGA has established effective channels through which families can raise questions or concerns

4. If I have a concern and let the school know about it, I know that they will address it.

Parents were similarly positive about the school's responsiveness to concerns. 82 respondents (73.2%) strongly agreed and 28 (25.0%) agreed, resulting in 98.2% positive responses. Only two parents disagreed. These results suggest a strong level of parent trust in the school's willingness to respond when concerns are brought forward

5. I believe that the staff at Higher Ground Academy has the best interest of my children.

This was one of the strongest-rated areas of the survey. All 112 respondents expressed a positive opinion, with 82 (73.2%) strongly agreeing and 30 (26.8%) agreeing. The 100% positive response rate reflects a particularly strong level of trust in HGA staff and their commitment to students

6. Higher Ground Academy prepares my child/children to be successful in college.

Parents expressed strong confidence in HGA's preparation of students for postsecondary success. 82 parents (73.2%) strongly agreed and 25 (22.3%) agreed, resulting in a 95.5% positive response rate. Five respondents expressed disagreement. While the results are highly favorable, this item received slightly less agreement than measures related to school climate and staff commitment.

7. Higher Ground Academy has a reliable transportation service.

Transportation received generally positive ratings but showed greater variation than most other areas. 69 parents (61.6%) strongly agreed and 31 (27.7%) agreed, resulting in an 89.3% positive response rate. Twelve parents, or 10.7%, expressed dissatisfaction. Although nearly nine out of ten respondents viewed transportation positively, the results identify transportation as an area warranting continued monitoring and improvement. HGA utilizes the services of a school bus transportation company for transporting students. The current company won a public bid to serve the school three years ago. Unfortunately, the school has had many negative experiences with the school. Some of which include, being late to pick-up and drop-off students, missing bus stops, and bad relationships with parents and school staff. As a result, HGA ended its business partnership with the company and after going through a fully transparent bidding process, HGA signed a contract with a new vendor.

Additionally, HGA will be utilizing the services of CESO for the management of its transportation program. Given their experience in managing student transportation programs in many other schools and districts, we believe CESO will make our program very efficient.

8. The school cafeteria provides food that is both nutritious and respectful of my cultural norms.

Cafeteria services received the lowest ratings among the ten survey items. 44 parents (39.3%) strongly agreed and 31 (27.7%) agreed, resulting in an overall positive response rate of 67.0%. In contrast, 21 parents (18.8%) disagreed and 16 (14.3%) strongly disagreed, meaning that approximately one-third of respondents (33.0%) expressed dissatisfaction. These results identify food service as the most significant area for improvement based on parent feedback.

Like student transportation, HGA's food service program had been outsourced to a third-party provider for many years. Over time, the school received recurring concerns from parents, students, and staff regarding the quality and acceptability of meals served. The parent survey results reinforced these concerns and highlighted the need for a different approach.

In response, HGA has made a significant change to its food service model. Beginning in FY27, the school will transition from an outsourced model to an in-house food service program, giving HGA greater oversight of meal quality, nutrition, cultural responsiveness, and overall program operations. To support this transition, HGA has contracted with CESO to assist with establishing the in-house program and managing its implementation and operations.

Through these changes, HGA seeks to respond directly to stakeholder feedback and provide meals that are nutritious, appealing to students, and responsive to the cultural backgrounds and preferences of the families the school serves. The school will continue to monitor parent and student feedback to evaluate whether the new model results in improved satisfaction with cafeteria services.

9. The school respects me and my culture.

Cultural respect was among HGA's strongest areas. 94 parents (83.9%) strongly agreed and 18 (16.1%) agreed, resulting in a 100% positive response rate. No respondents disagreed. This finding is particularly significant given HGA's culturally diverse student and family population and indicates that parents strongly perceive the school as respectful of their cultural identities.

10. I would recommend Higher Ground Academy to a friend.

Parents demonstrated very strong overall confidence in the school. 90 respondents (80.4%) strongly agreed and 21 (18.8%) agreed, producing a 99.1% positive response rate. Only one respondent disagreed. The willingness of virtually all participating parents to recommend HGA provides a strong overall indicator of parent satisfaction

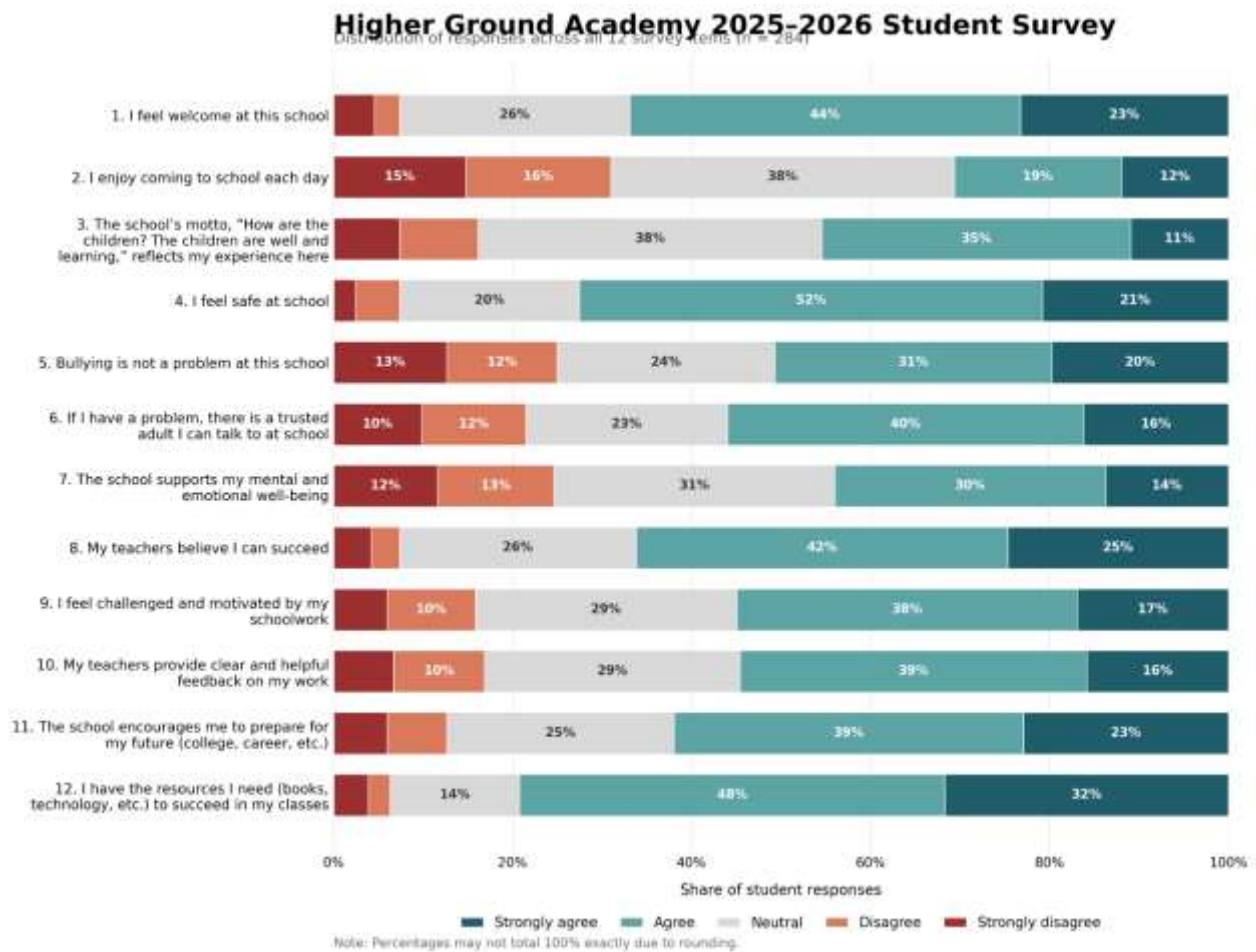
Overall Interpretation

The survey results present a strongly positive picture of parent perceptions of HGA. Particularly noteworthy are the 100% positive ratings for staff having students' best interests in mind and respect for parents and their cultures, along with the approximately 99% positive ratings for school climate, safety, and willingness to recommend HGA. Parents also expressed strong confidence in communication, responsiveness to concerns, and college preparation.

At the same time, the results provide useful direction for continuous improvement. Transportation, while viewed positively by nearly 90% of respondents, received somewhat lower ratings than most other areas. Cafeteria services stand out as the primary area of concern, with one-third of respondents expressing dissatisfaction. These findings provide HGA with clear information for prioritizing improvements while building upon the high levels of parent trust and satisfaction evident throughout the survey.

Student Survey

Higher Ground Academy administered its 2025–2026 student survey to gather students' perspectives on school climate, safety, belonging, academic support, relationships with adults, and preparation for the future. A total of 284 students responded to the survey. Students rated 12 statements using a five-point scale ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*. Overall, the results identify several important strengths, particularly access to learning resources, school safety, teachers' belief in students' ability to succeed, and preparation for the future. At the same time, the survey identifies areas that warrant continued attention, most notably students' enjoyment of school, mental and emotional well-being, bullying, and the extent to which students feel connected to the school's motto and overall school experience. The students' responses to the survey items are displayed in the graph below.



Note: The graph is generated using artificial intelligence (AI) tools.

The 2025–2026 student survey provides valuable insight into students' perceptions of their academic experience, school climate, and overall well-being at Higher Ground Academy. Overall, the results reveal several important strengths. Students reported particularly positive experiences with access to instructional resources (79.2%), school safety (72.5%), feeling welcomed at school (66.9%), teachers believing they can succeed (66.2%), and preparation for college and careers (62.0%). These findings indicate that HGA has established many of the foundational conditions necessary for student success: students generally feel safe and welcomed, believe their teachers have confidence in their abilities, have access to the resources they need to learn, and recognize the school's commitment to preparing them for their futures. Positive responses regarding academic challenge, teacher feedback, and access to trusted adults further suggest that many students experience a supportive and academically focused learning environment.

At the same time, the survey identifies several areas that warrant continued attention. Most notably, only 30.6% of students indicated that they enjoy coming to school each day, while 31.0% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 38.4% were neutral. This finding is particularly significant when considered alongside the comparatively strong ratings for safety, resources, and teacher expectations. It suggests that providing a safe and academically supportive environment does not, by itself, ensure that students feel deeply connected to or enthusiastic about their school experience. Similarly, fewer than half of students responded positively

regarding mental and emotional well-being (44.0%) and whether the school's former motto reflected their experience (45.4%). Bullying also remains an area requiring attention, with one-quarter of respondents indicating that bullying is a problem, while approximately one in five students reported that they do not have a trusted adult at school whom they can approach when they have a problem. The relatively high percentage of neutral responses across several items also suggests that HGA has an opportunity to move more students from uncertainty or limited connection toward stronger engagement, belonging, and positive relationships with the school community.

HGA has taken the students' feedback seriously and is using the survey results to inform its continuous-improvement efforts. Moving forward, the school will seek to preserve its demonstrated strengths in safety, instructional resources, high expectations, and college and career readiness while placing greater emphasis on student belonging, engagement, social-emotional well-being, trusted adult relationships, and bullying prevention. As one concrete response, HGA has strengthened student-support capacity in the secondary program by adding one school psychologist and two social workers to work directly with students. These additional resources are intended to increase students' access to caring adults and strengthen academic, behavioral, social, and emotional supports.

12. Governance & Management

Board of Directors

The HGA Board of Directors is composed of seven dedicated members who bring a wide range of professional expertise and community perspectives to their governance roles. Among them, one member is a parent of an HGA student, and another is a licensed teacher, ensuring that both family and educator voices are represented in the decision-making process. The remaining members are community professionals whose backgrounds contribute to a rich and balanced board composition. Collectively, the board includes individuals with experience in law, banking, higher education, engineering at a Fortune 500 company, and social services. This diversity of professional backgrounds enhances the board's capacity to approach issues from multiple angles, fostering thoughtful discussions and well-rounded decisions that support the school's mission and strategic growth.

Equally noteworthy is the strong continuity of board membership. Five out of the seven members have served more than two consecutive terms, a reflection of their deep commitment and long-term investment in the success of HGA and its students. This stability has provided the school with consistent leadership, institutional knowledge, and a shared vision that sustains progress over time. The board's blend of professional diversity and enduring dedication exemplifies the collaborative spirit that defines HGA's governance model and underpins its continued success.

Board Members

Member Name	Board Position	Affiliation	Most Recent Date Elected	Most Recent Date Seated	Term End Date	Email Address
Dan McGrath	Chair	Community Member	5/19/2026	7/1/2026	6/30/2029	dan@hgacademy.org
Denise Tousaint	Vice Chair	Community Member	5/20/2025	7/1/2025	6/30/2028	denise@hgacademy.org
Brian Swerine	Secretary	Community Member	5/21/2024	7/1/2024	6/30/2027	brians@hgacademy.org
Mary Tate	Member	Community Member	5/21/2024	7/1/2024	6/30/2027	mary@hgacademy.org
Liban Ahmed	Member	Teacher	5/21/2024	7/1/2024	6/30/2027	libana@hgacademy.org
Shannon Tanghe	Member	Community Member	5/19/2023	7/1/2026	6/30/2029	shannont@hgacademy.org
Abdiwali Guled	Member	Parent	5/20/2025	7/1/2025	6/30/2028	g_abdi@hotmail.com
Samuel Yigzaw	Ex-Officio	School Leader	NA	NA	NA	Samuel@hgacademy.org

Board Training

Training Prior to Being Seated				
Board Member Name	Original Date Seated	Board's Role & Responsibilities	Open Meeting Law*	Data Practices Law*
Liban Ahmed	06/18/2024	06/27/2024 Osprey Wilds, Recorded	08/12/2024 Osprey Wilds, Recorded	06/27/2024 Osprey Wilds, Recorded
Abdiwali Guled	10/15/2024	11/17/2024 Osprey Wilds, Recorded	11/17/2024 Osprey Wilds, Recorded	01/21/2025 James Martin

New Board Member Training

New Board Member Training				
Board Member Name	Original Date Seated	Board's Role & Responsibilities Regarding Student Success, Achievement, and Performance*	Employment Policies & Practices	Public School Funding & Financial Management
Liban Ahmed	06/18/2024	06/04/2025 Osprey Wilds, Recorded	07/02/2024 Osprey Wilds, Recorded	08/17/2024 Osprey Wilds, Recorded
Abdiwali Guled	10/15/2024	11/17/2024 Osprey Wilds, Recorded	01/25/2025 Jim Martin	12/17/2024 Ryan Schmidt

Annual Assessment of Training Needs

In FY25, the board had discussions about training needs. However, the board did not conduct an assessment of its training needs.

Annual Training

Annual Training – FY25			
Board Member Name	Date of Training	Training Title or Topic	Presenter or Trainer
Dan McGrath	01/21/2025	Data Practice	Jim Martin
Denis Toussaint	01/21/2025	Data Practice	Jim Martin
Mary Tate	01/21/2025	Data Practice	Jim Martin
Brian Swerine	01/21/2025	Data Practice	Jim Martin
Shannon Tanghe	01/21/2025	Data Practice	Jim Martin
Abdiwali Guled	01/21/2025	Data Practice	Jim Martin
Liban Ahmed	01/21/2025	Data Practice	Jim Martin
Samuel Yigzaw	01/21/2025	Data Practice	Jim Martin

Annual Training – FY25

Annual Training – FY25			
Board Member Name	Date of Training	Training Title or Topic	Presenter or Trainer

Annual Training – FY25			
Dan McGrath	01/21/2025	Minnesota Employment Law	Jim Martin
Denis Toussaint	01/21/2025	Minnesota Employment Law	Jim Martin
Mary Tate	01/21/2025	Minnesota Employment Law	Jim Martin
Brian Swerine	01/21/2025	Minnesota Employment Law	Jim Martin
Shannon Tanghe	01/21/2025	Minnesota Employment Law	Jim Martin
Abdiwali Guled	01/21/2025	Minnesota Employment Law	Jim Martin
Liban Ahmed	01/21/2025	Minnesota Employment Law	Jim Martin
Samuel Yigzaw	01/21/2025	Minnesota Employment Law	Jim Martin

Annual Assessment of the Board's Performance

In response to the Board's request, HGA contacted Osprey Wilds to obtain a template for conducting a Board self-assessment. Osprey Wilds provided a comprehensive template designed to help the Board evaluate its performance, responsibilities, and compliance with applicable charter school requirements.

The Board subsequently established a committee to review the self-assessment template and determine which responsibilities and duties the Board was currently fulfilling, as well as identify any areas requiring additional attention. The committee consisted of Shannon Tanghe, Mary Tate, and Denise Toussaint. Samuel Yigzaw assisted the committee with coordinating its initial meeting.

The committee met on February 9, 2026, to review the template and assess whether the Board was fulfilling the responsibilities and functions required under Minnesota charter school law and HGA's charter contract with Osprey Wilds. The committee reviewed the Board's performance in the following areas:

1. Board composition and capacity requirements
2. Decision-making and oversight responsibilities
3. Management and accountability requirements
4. Budgeting and enrollment variance compliance
5. Financial audit compliance

Based on its review, the committee determined that the Board was fulfilling its required responsibilities in these areas. The committee presented its findings to the full Board at the February 2026 monthly Board meeting. This self-assessment process provided the Board with an opportunity to review its governance practices, confirm compliance with its responsibilities, and identify areas for continued improvement and professional development.

Management

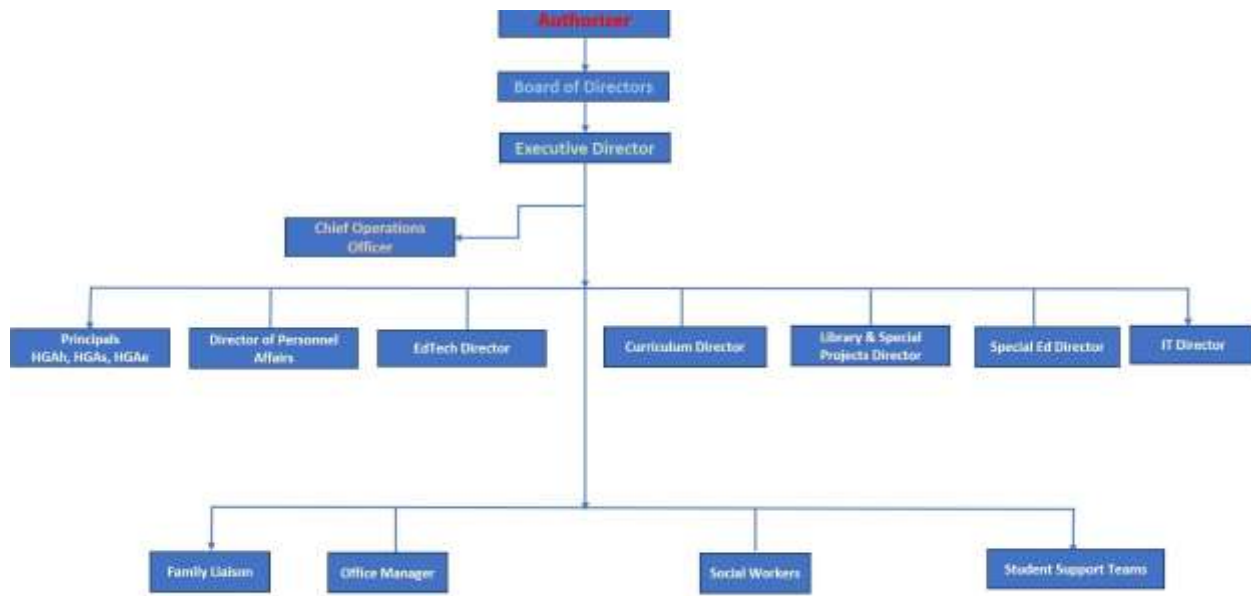
The Executive Director of Higher Ground Academy (HGA) is Samuel Yigzaw, who has been with the school since its first year of operation in 1999. Over the years, Yigzaw has served in multiple roles, including teacher, Director of Curriculum and Assessment, and principal. In the fall of 2018, the HGA Board of Directors appointed him as Executive Director for a two-year term. His contract was renewed in 2020 for five years and again in 2025 for a term beginning July 1, 2025.

To support the day-to-day operations of the Academy, Yigzaw has built a leadership team that includes a Chief of Operations, two principals, a Director of Curriculum, and a Director of Personnel Affairs. In the spring of 2020, in response to the shift to distance learning, HGA created a Director of Instructional Technology position. That role has since been reduced to 60% following an assessment of the school's evolving needs.

HGA is organized into three schools: HGA Elementary Academy (HGEA), HGA Junior High Academy (HGJHA), and HGA Secondary Academy (HGSA). HGEA and HGJHA currently share the Marshall Avenue campus, while HGSA operates from the Brewster Avenue campus. Enrollment has grown steadily from nearly 1,000 students in FY20 to more than 1,200 students in FY25, and the school continues to maintain a substantial waitlist. This sustained enrollment growth has created a need for additional space and a more developmentally appropriate learning environment for HGA's junior high students.

To address this need, HGA submitted an application to the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) seeking approval to add a third site that would serve as a dedicated home for HGJHA. The proposed expansion was not approved for FY27. Consequently, HGJHA will continue to operate at the Marshall Avenue campus with HGEA during FY27. Although the expansion was not approved for the upcoming school year, HGA remains committed to its long-term plan of establishing a separate facility for its junior high program. Thus, HGA will continue working with MDE and its authorizer, the Osprey Wilds, to address the issues associated with the previous application and pursue approval for the additional site for FY28.

Organizational Structure



ADMINISTRATORS

Samuel Yigzaw

- Job title: Executive Director
- Education: Ph.D. in Education
- Licensure: MN K–12 Admin, MN Social Studies All, Grades: 5-12, MN Superintendent license

- Professional Experience: Educator since 1982. Classroom teacher, curriculum director, principal, school board member.
- Teaching experience include middle school, high school, and post-secondary (Adjunct faculty at the University of MN from 1998–2002 and Associate Professor of Education at St. Mary's University of Minnesota, 2006–2018)

Maxamed Ahmed

- Job Title: Chief of Operations
- Education: MBA in Organizational Management
- Professional Experience: Facilitator of STEAM Lab, assistant to the Executive Director in school year 2018–19, HGA COO, fall 2020-present

Abdulcadir Mohamud

- Job Title: Principal, HGA Secondary Academy
- Education: M.A. in Electrical Engineering, Ph.D. in Education
- Licensure: MN 5–12 mathematics, MN K–12 administrative, MN Superintendent license
- Professional experience (only those that are relevant to current job): Taught high school mathematics, lead teacher, principal fall 2021-present

Laurie Mako

- Job Title: Principal, HGA Elementary
- Education: M.A. in Education
- Licensure: MN K-6 (elementary) teaching license, MN K-12 administrative
- Professional Experience: Taught various grade levels, mostly grade 3, lead teacher grades 3–5, principal fall 2021-present

Abeer Aburia

- Job Title: Director of Human Resources
- Education: Education Specialist
- Licensure: MN K–6 (elementary) teaching license, MN K-12 administrative
- Professional Experience: Taught various grade levels, mostly grade 6, lead teacher grades K-2, principal winter 2020-present

Robert Andersen

- Job: Director of Instructional Technology
- Education: MA in Electrical Engineering
- Professional Experience: 27 years of experience as an adjunct faculty and instructional technology leader, Director of Instructional Technology - HGA

Professional Development Completed By the Executive Director

HGA's Executive Director holds Minnesota administrative license for principalship and superintendency. Regardless he participated on a number of staff development opportunities provided by Osprey Wilds, Volunteers of America and MSBA in FY27.

Name of School Leader: Samuel Yigzaw		
License: K–12 Admin, Social Studies All, Grades: 5-12, Superintendent license, folder # 336710		
Training Topic:	Date of Training	Hours of Training
A number of topics related to charter school leadership including AI and school safety, Organized by Volunteers of America	6/9/26 – 6/10/26	10
		Total Hours: 10

2024-25 Other Licensed (non-teaching) Staff			
Name	License and Assignment	2024-25 Status*	Comments
Samuel Yigzaw	336710/Executive Director	R	
Laurie Mako	410554/Principal	R	
Abeer Aburia	418975/Curriculum Director	R	
Abdulcadir Mohamud	405305/Principal	R	

* R = Returning, NR = Not Returning

13. Staffing

HGA is committed to ensuring that every student is taught by a highly qualified teacher. At HGA, being highly qualified means more than holding the appropriate licensure; it encompasses effective classroom experience, strong instructional practice, cultural competence, and a genuine commitment to student success. Given the diversity of HGA's student population, the school places particular emphasis on recruiting educators who can build trusting relationships with students and families, employ culturally responsive practices, and effectively integrate technology and evidence-based instructional strategies. The great majority of HGA teachers meet or exceed these expectations, while those who are still developing in these areas receive ongoing professional development, coaching, and district support.

Teacher Retention

Percentage of Licensed Teachers from 2025-26 not returning in 2026-27 (non-returning teachers/total teachers from 2025-26 x 100)	<u>7.8%</u>
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Teacher retention showed significant improvement in FY25, when the attrition rate declined from 11% to 6.5%. In FY26, however, the attrition rate increased modestly to 7.8%. None of the FY26 departures resulted from an adverse employment decision by the school; rather, employees left for a variety of personal or professional reasons. Despite the continuing challenge of recruiting and retaining qualified educators in a competitive employment environment, HGA views teacher recruitment, development, and retention as an essential work for ensuring that every classroom is led by an effective, culturally competent, and student-centered educator.

FY26 Licensed Staff List

2025-26 Licensed Teaching Staff

Name	File #	License and Assignment (subject/grades)	2026-27 Status*	Comments
Abdullahi, Riad	476320	Math Teacher	R	
Ahmed, Omar	451277	World Language	R	
Ahmed, Ahmed Y	1032703	Substitute	R	
Amberong, Apryl	1038662	Social Studies 11th	R	
Andrews, Daniella	1017748	Language Arts 12th	R	
Yves, Atienza	1030378	Physical Education	R	
Bermudez, John	1038668	Physical Education	R	
Beyene, Endale	433578	STEAM Specialist	R	
Carlson, Kelsey	1000169	Language Arts 9th	R	
Corn, Jeannette	444063	Language Arts 8th	R	
Cuyos, April	1046628	ELL Teacher	R	Out of Field
Denker, Joseph	463239	Social Studies 12th	R	
Eisele, Catherine	445546	Social Studies 9th	R	
Galea, Neil	1038661	ELL	R	Out of Field
Haji, Abdiweli	1047656	World Language	NR	
Hassan, Fosi	504110	Counselor	R	
Jama, Mohamed	1008226	Sub	NR	
Kavita, Beilah	1030129	Language Arts 10th	R	
Kedir, Abdurezak	443793	Chemistry	R	
Kogo, Kenneth	1046634	Biology	R	
McDermott, Jena	1018652	ELL	NR	
Mohamud,Abdulcadir	405305	Principal	R	
Mohamed, Mohamed A	1041204	ELL	R	
Mohamed, Mubaarak	101167	Sped	R	

2025-26 Licensed Teaching Staff

Napoles, Dennis	1030376	Science 8th	R	Out of Field
Owusu, Kwaku	1038660	Math 10th	R	
Quidato, Stanely	1030377	Sped Teacher	R	
Tesfaye, Ahadu	31640	Social Worker	R	
Schreurs, Ellie	1018098	Social Studies 9th	R	
Sikuku, Agnes	1038671	Social Studies 8th	R	
Sontag, Eli	512808	Physics	R	
Tkachenko, Neliya	381773	ELL	R	
Viado, Lou Ann	1048817	Math 9th	R	
Wako, Faisal	414899	Math 11th	R	
Wilson, Bert	1010103	Tech, Career Crusi..	R	
Yigzaw, Samuel	336710	Professional Admin	R	
Aburia, Abeer	418975	Professional Admin	R	
Abdirahman, Ahmed I	515225	Arabic	R	
Adop, Michael	103866	6th Grade Teacher	R	
Ahmed, Liban	1002989	Director Of Special Ed	R	
Ateyah, Suad	516887	Substitute	R	
Balke, Keith	509822	2nd Grade Teacher	R	
Bartolome, Reyjay	1029880	4th Grade Teacher	R	
Bontong, Agnes	1038649	1st Grade Teacher	R	
Caugawan, Rosalyn	1038669	4th Grade Teacher	R	
Calamcan, Jermaie	1038653	PE Teacher	R	
Cordero, Joselito	1038663	Kindergarten Teacher	R	
Daba, Dereje	396910	2nd Grade Teacher	R	
Dahlen, Kyle	481121	4th Grade Teacher	R	
Davis, Bailey	1043337	Kindergarten Teacher	R	
Delmoro, Joyce	1029889	Art Teacher	R	

2025-26 Licensed Teaching Staff

Belotindos, Edlynn	1038659	ELL	R	Out of Field
Faye, Aida	490548	Sped Teacher	R	
Feria, Josiephine	1029868	3rd Grade Teacher	R	
Geedi, Mohammed	1029982	Arabic Teacher	R	
Gross, Broc	506749	ELL	NR	
Herer, Abdihlim	1039279	Special Education	R	
Heiderman, Heidi	1000382	ELL Teacher	R	
Hussein, Awil	1032711	Substitute	R	
Jabagat, Marilyn	1038672	4th Grade Teacher	R	
Kemp, Ernestine	400778	Title 1	R	Elementary Education
LaManna, Pamela	418545	Title 1	R	
Langala, Odessa	1038650	Kindergarten Teacher	R	
Limbo, Ruby	1029864	7th Grade Teacher	R	
Lumahan, Cristopher	1029885	3rd Grade Teacher	R	
Mambaje, Odilon	1046630	7th Grade Teacher	R	
Mako, Laurie	410554	Principal	R	
Mangalino, Maria	1038673	2nd Grade Teacher	R	
Ramirez, Alexia Manjarrez	1012330	ELL	NR	
Marqueses, Krizzia	1038664	3rd Grade Teacher	R	
Martin, Mitzi	1029876	3rd Grade Teacher	R	
Domingo, John Rick Melo	1046632	5th Grade Teacher	R	
Murray, Trina	489643	1st Grade Teacher	NR	
Narvaez, Doreen	1038674	Kindergarten Teacher	R	
Nyakundi, Poline	1038652	7th Grade Teacher	R	
Richards, Spencer	518676	Phy Ed	R	
Sabang, Shela	1038666	ELL Teacher	R	Out of Field

2025-26 Licensed Teaching Staff

Sathoff, Michael	1043994	6th Grade Teacher	NR	
Saye, Cassandra	486466	1st Grade Teacher	R	
Smith, Victoria	1004390	1st Grade Teacher	R	
Solayao, Christian	1029871	Physical Education	R	
Spychalla, Aloysious	436880	Physical Education	R	
Tollefson, Jenna	1004348	Title 1	R	
Stampley, Destiny	1001913	5th Grade Teacher	R	
Tamonan, MarJonh	1029888	6th Grade Teacher	R	
Urevig, Andrew	1007210	5th Grade Teacher	NR	
Vicente, Derosé	1038651	6th Grade Teacher	R	
Waters, Sang Yong	518071	ELL Teacher	R	
Yusuf, Adan	1030139	ELL Teacher	R	

* R = Returning, NR = Not Returning

2024-25 Teacher Professional Development Activities: HGA maintained a comprehensive professional development program during the 2025–26 school year, providing staff with ongoing opportunities to strengthen instructional practices, develop professional skills, and remain current with school policies and student-support practices. The staff development calendar included 43 training sessions covering 37 distinct topics and approximately 52.5 hours of professional learning. Professional development was provided throughout the school year, with particularly intensive training occurring at the beginning of the year to support new staff and establish consistent expectations across the school.

The training program addressed a broad range of instructional and student-support priorities. New teachers received orientation and training in HGA's teaching and learning principles, lesson planning, classroom management, PBIS, technology systems, English learner services, environmental education, bullying prevention, and school policies and procedures. Continuing professional learning included curriculum implementation and review, STEM instruction, ELA resources, sensory-inclusive classrooms, supporting students with accommodations and modifications, cultural competency, ELL strategies, literacy programs, and the use of instructional technology and data tools. Several sessions were specifically designed for paraprofessionals and specialized staff, including training in ReadAct, CPI, confidentiality, student accommodations, classroom and behavior management, and their roles and responsibilities.

HGA also emphasized professional development related to student safety, legal compliance, and effective school operations. Staff participated in training related to health and safety, mandatory reporting, CPR and AED awareness, Title IX, confidentiality and privacy requirements, attendance procedures, digital accessibility, and other school-wide policies and procedures. The variety of training topics and the participation of staff across different grade levels and roles demonstrate HGA's commitment to continuous professional growth and to maintaining a knowledgeable, well-prepared staff. The ongoing nature of the professional development program also supports the school's broader goal of improving instructional quality and ensuring that staff have the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to meet the diverse needs of HGA students.

2025-26 Non Licensed Staff			
Name	License and Assignment (subject/grades)	2026-27 Status*	Comments <i>Include information regarding special licensure (e.g., Community Expert) or other relevant information.</i>
Abdi, Afifa	3rd Grade TA	R	
Abdi, Ubah	2nd Grade TA	R	
Abdirahman, Mohamed D	Receptionist	R	
Abdirahman, M Ahmed	Sped Para	R	
Abdirahman S Ahmed	Parent liaison	R	
Abdulkadir, Fousia	Health Aid	R	
Abdullahi, Huda	Human Resources	R	
Abdullahi, Ruweyda M	Sped Para	R	
Abdulle, Marian	Kitchen	R	
Ahmadi, Raz Mohammad	ELL Support Staff	R	
Ahmed, Maxamed D	COO	R	
Ali, Fartun	2nd Grade TA	R	
Ali, Fatuma	Cafeteria Staff	R	
Ali, Nasteha	Citizenship	R	
Ali, Ruweyda	2nd Grade TA	R	
Ali, Sumeya	Compliance Officer	R	
Anderson, Bernadine	Data Analyst	R	
Anderson, Robert	Technology	R	
Ankhu-Ra, An-her	Security	R	
Digaffe, Elizabeth	Student Support	R	
Dilsooz, Hashmatullah	ELL Para	R	

2025-26 Non Licensed Staff			
Egal, Hawa	Kindergarten TA	R	
Fazly, Aziz Mohamed	ELL Para	R	
Garar, Nimo	Kitchen	R	
Gedi, Fahimo	Citizenship	R	
Gure, Hinda	Citizenship	R	
Hasan, Brenda	Librarian	R	
Hassan, Hassan K	Sped Para	R	
Hassan, Halimo	1st Grade TA	R	
Hassan, Maryan	Citizenship	R	
Hassan, Ubah	Kindergarten TA	R	
Ibrahim, Khalid	Sped Para	NR	
Jama, Mohamed	5th Grade TA	NR	
Jama, Zahra	Student Support	R	
Jimale, Mohamed	Security	R	
Kadir, Zakariyya	IT Support	R	
Kalid, Fartun	1st Grade TA	R	
Kasim, Mohammed	IT Support	R	
Langala, Rufus	Sped Para	R	
McCastle, Alice E	Office Manager/ Secretary	R	
McGuire, Molly	2nd Grade	R	
McKenzie, Wanda	Library Assistant	R	
Meeson, Thomas	ELL Para	R	
Mohamed, Faduma	Kitchen Staff	R	
Mohamud, Mohamud	Marketing/ Parent Liaison	R	
Mohamed, Sakariya	Transportation	R	
Mohamed, Salman	Citizenship	R	
Mohamed, Samsam	Kindergarten TA	R	
Mohmuud, Foosia	Citizenship	R	

2025-26 Non Licensed Staff			
Mohammad, Shaheed	Sped Para	R	
Munye, Hawa	Kitchen Staff	R	
Olad, Layla	Kindergarten TA	NR	
Omar, Osman	4th Grade TA	NR	
Omar, Shamsadiin	IT Support	R	
Othman, Safiya	Sped Para	NR	
Rihla, Rihla	Sped Para	R	
Safi, Kahadim Hussain	ELL Para	R	
Salad, Abdishakur	Sped Para	R	
Saleh, Saleh	Dean of Citizenship	R	
Tahiro, Hawe	Citizenship	R	
Tilmo, Kassim	Dean of Citizenship	R	
Ulfat, Aminullah	ELL Para	R	
Williams, Omarr	Support Staff	R	
Warsame, Kadija	Support Staff	R	
Wordofa, Fekadu	Building Maint	R	
Yusuf, Hani	2nd Grade TA	R	
Yusuf, Zamzam	Custodian	R	

* R = Returning, NR = Not Returning

14. Operational Performance

Rebranding Higher Ground Academy: Rooted in Community, Shaping Tomorrow

Higher Ground Academy's story is rooted in a commitment to educational opportunity, social justice, and service to the community. The school's founder was a passionate advocate for civil and human rights who actively participated in the Civil Rights Movement and held significant public leadership positions in Minnesota. Throughout his public service, he was known as a strong voice for individuals and communities whose concerns were too often overlooked.

That commitment to equity extended deeply into public education. HGA's founder believed that public schools had not adequately served many students from low-income families, communities of color, and other historically underserved groups. When Minnesota became the first state in the nation to enact a charter school law, he saw an opportunity to help create a school where educational excellence, equity, opportunity, and community would be at the center of the mission. Working with other committed community members, he helped establish Higher Ground Academy.

A School and Community Transformed

Higher Ground Academy has been serving students and families since September 1999. Over its history, the school has experienced many changes, but the transformation of the past several years has been particularly significant.

During this period, HGA expanded to a second campus and enrollment grew from approximately 725 students to more than 1,150 students. Just as importantly, the community itself became increasingly diverse. In 2018–19, HGA's student population consisted almost entirely of students from East African backgrounds, primarily Somali and Ethiopian. By the reporting year, more than 13 percent of HGA students came from Afghanistan and Syria, and the school also welcomed students and families with roots in Egypt, Bangladesh, Sudan, the Philippines, Yemen, and other parts of the world.

The HGA experience has expanded as well. In 2018–19, the school did not have an interscholastic athletics program or a school newsletter—two examples of activities that can help create a shared sense of identity, belonging, and school pride. Today, these and other opportunities are part of the HGA experience. Our athletic program has grown substantially, with HGA soccer and basketball teams becoming strong competitors within their conferences.

These changes represent more than enrollment growth. They reflect HGA's evolution into an increasingly diverse, vibrant, and connected school community.

A New Identity for a New Chapter

As HGA continued to evolve, we recognized that our public identity should evolve with us. During the reporting year, the school embarked on a comprehensive rebranding initiative designed to honor our history while better representing who we are today and where we are headed.

HGA engaged a consultant with expertise in marketing and branding and undertook a thoughtful, collaborative process to develop a refreshed visual identity. The result was a new HGA logo that reflects the strength, growth, and aspirations of our school community. In addition to the overall HGA identity, individual logos were developed to give each of our schools its own distinct identity while maintaining a clear connection to the larger Higher Ground Academy family.



Our rebranding effort also provided an opportunity to revisit the words that express who we are.

For many years, HGA's motto was "How Are the Children? The Children Are Well and Learning." Inspired by an African tradition, the motto reflected both our commitment to children and the cultural heritage of the community that HGA primarily served during much of its history.

As our student body has become increasingly diverse—with families whose backgrounds now span Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and beyond—we wanted language that could embrace every member of our growing community while preserving the values on which HGA was founded.

Our new motto is: Rooted in Community: Shaping Tomorrow!

Rooted in Community recognizes that HGA's greatest strength has always been its students, families, staff, and the communities we serve. It honors our history and affirms our belief that strong schools are built through relationships, belonging, partnership, and shared responsibility.

Shaping Tomorrow expresses our commitment to the future. Our responsibility is not simply to educate students for today, but to prepare them with the knowledge, skills, confidence, character, and opportunities they need to shape their own futures and contribute meaningfully to the world around them.

Our new logo and motto therefore represent more than a change in appearance. They reflect the continuing evolution of Higher Ground Academy—a school that remains grounded in the principles of equity, opportunity, educational excellence, and community upon which it was founded, while confidently embracing the increasingly diverse community we serve and the future we are building together.

14. Operational Performance

Dissemination Activities Log

Method of Dissemination / Event	Date of Activity	Languages Used	Targeted Group Addressed
HolyLand Grocery Store	02/27/2025	English, Arabic, Pashto, Dari, Somali	Multilingual Learners, students of color, low-income families
The Wilder Center	3/20/2026	English, Spanish, Somali, Oromo	Multilingual Learners, students of color, low income families

Dissemination Narrative: HGA has long been committed to making its programs accessible to learners and families from diverse backgrounds and communities. To strengthen these efforts, the school recently hired a Marketing Director, enabling HGA to expand its outreach and increase awareness of the school among a broader range of families. During FY26, HGA implemented a wide range of outreach activities designed to increase the school's visibility and make its programs more accessible to diverse communities.

These efforts included participating in community events and distributing flyers at local grocery stores and other locations frequented by community members. HGA also hosted a carnival for families in the surrounding neighborhood. Families who attended the carnival received information about the school and its programs, including flyers provided in multiple languages. These initiatives helped HGA build stronger connections with the community and expand awareness of the opportunities available at the school. HGA will continue to strengthen and expand these outreach efforts during FY27.

Food Service

In FY23, Minnesota enacted legislation providing free school meals to all students regardless of family income. HGA had provided free meals to all enrolled students since its founding, a particularly important commitment given that more than 95% of its students qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

During FY26, HGA continued to use Saint Paul Restaurants and Catering (SPRC) as its meal vendor. However, student and parent feedback identified ongoing concerns regarding meal quality, variety, and overall appeal. In

response, HGA will transition from vended meals to an in-house food service program in FY27. The school will hire an in-house chef and food service workers to prepare and serve meals on-site, giving HGA greater control over quality, menus, and responsiveness to students' cultural and dietary needs.

HGA anticipates that freshly prepared, more culturally responsive and appealing meals will increase student participation in the meal program. The school will monitor participation and gather student and family feedback to evaluate the effectiveness of the new program and make improvements as needed.

Student Transportation

Student transportation continued to be one of HGA's largest and most complex operational responsibilities in FY26. The school transported more than 1,100 students to and from school each day, using 26 buses and 14 vans. In addition, approximately 10 buses were used to provide specialized transportation for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Coordinating this level of service across HGA's programs represented a significant logistical and financial undertaking.

Transportation costs also continued to rise. In FY26, HGA's total transportation expenditures exceeded \$2 million for the first time, reflecting a broader statewide trend of increasing student transportation costs. Nearly one out of every ten dollars in HGA's budget was devoted to transportation. Despite this substantial investment, transportation remained an area of concern for students and families. Complaints included late buses and, on some occasions, buses failing to arrive as scheduled. These concerns became more significant following a serious bus accident in late spring, which heightened parent concerns regarding transportation safety and reliability.

In response, HGA determined that significant changes were necessary. The school terminated its contract with its transportation provider and conducted a competitive bidding process that resulted in contracts with new providers for FY27. HGA also entered into an agreement with CESO to provide additional oversight and support for the transportation program. Through these changes, HGA seeks to strengthen safety, reliability, accountability, and overall service quality.

Athletics

The 2025–2026 school year marked one of the most successful athletic seasons in Higher Ground Academy history. Across boys soccer, boys basketball, and girls basketball, Panther student-athletes demonstrated excellence, leadership, perseverance, teamwork, and sportsmanship. The season was highlighted by multiple conference championships and significant individual achievements, reflecting the continued growth of an athletic culture built on discipline, hard work, and pride in representing Higher Ground Academy.

The boys soccer team made history by capturing the program's first-ever conference championship, finishing with a 9–3–2 overall record and advancing to the section quarterfinals under Head Coach Kassim Tilmo. The boys basketball team also enjoyed an outstanding season, finishing 21–9 overall and 12–1 in conference play, winning the conference championship and advancing to the section semifinals. Senior co-captains Abdiaziz Abdi and Sakariya Ahmed each surpassed the remarkable milestone of 1,000 career points, while Abdi earned Team MVP, All-Conference, and Conference MVP honors.

The girls basketball program continued its success under first-year Head Coach Marion Gilchrist, finishing 18–10 overall and 10–1 in conference play while capturing its second consecutive conference championship. Sophomore captain Jamila Mohamed emerged as one of Minnesota's outstanding young players, leading the team, conference, and section in points, rebounds, and blocks while earning Team MVP, All-Conference, and Conference MVP honors. Collectively, the accomplishments of HGA's athletes and coaches extended well beyond wins and championships. Their commitment, sportsmanship, and pride strengthened the sense of community at Higher Ground Academy and demonstrated that Panther athletics can help develop young leaders while building a lasting tradition of excellence both on and off the field of play.

15. Finances

For questions regarding school finances and for complete financials for 2024-25 and/or an organizational budget for 2025-26, contact:

Name: Dustin Reeves

Position: Controller, Outsourced Business Accounting

Contact info: Creative Planning

Phone: 952.563.6834

Email: dustin.reeves@creativeplanning.com

Business Services provides accounting services for Higher Ground Academy.

Information presented below is derived from preliminary audit figures. The full financial audit will be completed and presented to the Minnesota Department of Education and Osprey Wilds Environmental Learning Center no later than December 31, 2025.

FY26 Finances	Fund 1	Fund 2	Fund 4
Total Revenues	\$19,985,794	\$1,152,720	N/A
Total Expenditures	\$20,165,508	\$1,212,415	N/A
Net Income	(\$179,714)	(\$59,695)	N/A
Total Fund Balance	\$13,092,804	\$143,558	N/A

Overview

Higher Ground Academy closed FY26 (fiscal year ended June 30, 2026) in a sound financial position, though operations produced a modest deficit on a preliminary, unaudited basis. Enrollment finished slightly below the original budget: Average Daily Membership (ADM) was 1,147 actual versus an original budget of 1,200 and a working budget of 1,149 (Weighted ADM of 1,249 versus 1,302 budgeted). Because state aid is enrollment-driven, the shortfall reduced revenue relative to the approved budget. Revenues came in at 98% of budget and expenditures at 99% of budget, resulting in a net deficit of \$239,408 for all funds compared with an original budgeted surplus of \$204,119 and a working budget surplus of \$79,090. The school remained highly liquid, ending the year with a cash balance of \$11,547,839 and 197 days cash on hand, well above the 60-day minimum bond covenant, with a projected debt service coverage ratio of 1.10 that meets the 1.10x covenant minimum. The current-year state holdback receivable is estimated at \$1,646,894 and the prior-year holdback is estimated at \$0. These results are preliminary and unaudited; the FY26 audit is scheduled for October 19-23, 2026, and results are expected to improve once funds are analyzed for Maintenance of Effort, which will allow the school to draw more of its 100%-reimbursed federal special education allocation.

Revenues

Total FY26 revenues across all funds were \$21,138,515, or 98% of the \$21,588,155 working budget (\$21,962,132 approved budget). State revenues of \$19,611,705 (99% of budget) made up approximately 91% of total revenue, federal revenues of \$1,335,941 (77% of budget) about 8%, and local revenues of

\$190,869 (150% of budget) about 1%. Fund 1 (General Fund) generated \$19,985,794, or 98% of its \$20,496,290 working budget, consisting of state revenues of \$19,223,986 (99%), federal revenues of \$648,154 (62%), and local revenues of \$113,653 (89%). The largest single source was General Education Aid of \$16,268,855, followed by Building Lease Aid of \$1,645,393 and Special Education Aid of \$1,190,306. Federal receipts trailed budget largely in Title I (\$459,983, 69% of budget), Title II (\$12,000, 20%), Title III (\$47,004, 71%), and federal special education (Program 419 at \$69,632, 33%), reflecting timing of grant drawdowns and Maintenance of Effort analysis still in process. Local revenue benefited from interest earnings of \$82,435 plus fees, rent, and contributions. Fund 2 (Food Service Fund) generated \$1,152,720, or 106% of its \$1,091,865 working budget, including state revenues of \$387,718, federal child nutrition revenues of \$687,786, and USDA commodities of \$77,216, which came in well above the nominal commodities budget. Fund 4 (Community Service Fund) had no budgeted or actual activity reported for FY26.

Expenses

Total FY26 expenditures across all funds were \$21,377,923, or 99% of the \$21,509,065 working budget (\$21,758,013 approved budget). Salaries and benefits of \$11,448,171 (102% of budget) were the largest cost area at roughly 52% of total spending, followed by purchased services of \$5,872,539 (97%), special education and Title grants of \$2,466,482 (104%), supplies and materials of \$1,390,273 (88%), equipment of \$145,040 (89%), and dues, memberships, and other costs of \$55,418 (43%). Fund 1 (General Fund) expenditures totaled \$20,165,508, or 100% of the \$20,241,436 working budget. By program area: Regular Instruction \$9,383,374 (98% of budget); Sites and Buildings \$2,994,343 (95%), which includes building lease costs of \$1,841,826, contracted facilities services of \$686,586, and utilities of \$327,026; Administration and Support Services \$2,702,508 (97%); Pupil Support Services \$2,442,092 (105%), driven by student transportation of \$2,065,638 (105% of budget) and field trip transportation of \$23,673; Special Education Services \$1,821,018 (115%), reflecting higher state special education salaries and benefits and \$268,210 of special education transportation; Instructional Support Services \$716,358 (94%); and Fiscal and Other Fixed Costs, including property and liability insurance of \$105,815 (106%). Special education and transportation were the primary drivers of overspending relative to budget, partially offset by underspending on contracted services, technology equipment, supplies, and dues and memberships. Fund 2 (Food Service Fund) expenditures totaled \$1,212,415, or 96% of the \$1,267,629 working budget, consisting of salaries and benefits of \$247,851, food supplies and materials of \$950,215, contracted services of \$8,347, and capitalized expenses of \$6,002. Fund 4 (Community Service Fund) had no reported expenditures in FY26.

Net Surplus or Deficit and Fund Balance

On a preliminary, unaudited basis, FY26 operations produced a net deficit of \$239,408 across all funds, compared with an approved budget surplus of \$204,119 and a working budget surplus of \$79,090. Fund 1 (General Fund) recorded a deficit of \$179,714 and Fund 2 (Food Service Fund) a deficit of \$59,695; there was no transfer out to the Food Service Fund during the year. Beginning fund balance for all funds was \$13,475,771 per the compliance report (\$13,272,518 in Fund 1 and \$203,253 in Fund 2), producing an ending total fund balance of \$13,236,362, of which \$13,092,804 is in Fund 1 and \$143,558 in Fund 2. Total fund balance equals approximately 62% of total FY26 expenditures, far exceeding the school's ongoing fund balance goal and providing 197 days of cash on hand against a 60-day bond covenant minimum. The deficit is driven primarily by lower enrollment-based state aid and by federal special education and Title revenue recognized below budget; management expects the final audited result to improve once Maintenance of Effort analysis allows additional use of the fully reimbursed federal special education allocation. The school remains committed to maintaining a fund balance well above bond covenant requirements while making targeted investments in instruction and student support.

Comprehensive Achievement and Civic Readiness Annual Budget

[To be completed by the school: the June 2026 preliminary financial report does not separately identify the budget allocated to the Comprehensive Achievement and Civic Readiness (CACR) plan. Relevant FY26

spending that supports CACR activities includes Regular Instruction of \$9,383,374, Instructional Support Services of \$716,358, Pupil Support Services of \$2,442,092, and Special Education Services of \$1,821,018.]

16. Future Plans

Over the past eight school years, Higher Ground Academy's enrollment has grown from approximately 750 to 1,200 students, a 60% increase, while the school's waiting list has also continued to grow. Seven years ago, HGA responded to similar growth by adding a second campus to accommodate additional students and relieve overcrowding.

Today, both campuses are again operating near capacity, with more students on the waiting list than HGA can accommodate. Following careful deliberation and stakeholder consultation, HGA decided to pursue the addition of a third campus.

HGA submitted an expansion proposal to its authorizer, Osprey Wilds Environmental Learning Center, which determined that the school had demonstrated a valid need and a feasible expansion plan and submitted the request to the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). Although MDE did not approve the initial application, it provided feedback and invited a revised submission. Osprey Wilds is currently revising the application for resubmission. If approved, HGA plans to open its third campus in fall 2027.