



# HGA Updates



The Higher Ground Academy Newsletter

QUARTER 3 | 2025 - 2026

## Romeo & Juliet : Loving Each Other, Loving the Earth



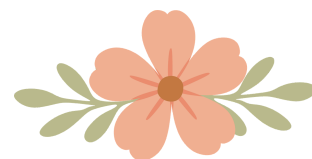
Our 9th Grade ELA students recently brought a creative and meaningful twist to Romeo and Juliet with their performance, *Romeo and Juliet: A Love Story for the Earth*. This unique presentation connected the timeless theme of love with an urgent modern issue, which is caring for our environment. The program was divided into three engaging parts. It began with heartfelt nature poems written and performed by students, highlighting the beauty and fragility of our planet. This was followed by a powerful choral reading and a reimagined balcony scene, where Romeo and Juliet expressed not only their love for each other, but also their commitment to protecting the Earth. Through unified voices and thoughtful dialogue, students emphasized the importance of action, responsibility, and environmental awareness. The event concluded with an interactive gallery walk featuring creative posters inspired by the play. Each piece encouraged viewers to reflect on environmental challenges and the role we all play in shaping a better future. The program ended on a hopeful note with a collective "Promise to the Earth," reminding us that, unlike the tragedy in Shakespeare's play, we still have time to choose a better ending for our planet. We are proud of our students for their creativity, courage, and commitment to making a difference.

*Unlike the tragedy in Shakespeare's play, we still have time to choose a better ending for our planet.*  
— 9TH GRADE ELA · "PROMISE TO THE EARTH"

## Editor's Note

**Kelsey Carlson**  
Newsletter Editor and High School ELA teacher.

Myself, staff, and administration are happy to present this Spring edition of the school newsletter! This school year has seen creative opportunities, academic successes, and a graduating class of future leaders. The articles shared here are only a fraction of the amazing things our students are doing, and we hope to see even more in the next school year!





**FEATURED EMPLOYEE — MS. TRACY CHAPMAN**



**Ms. Tracy Chapman**

**TIER 2 READING INTERVENTION • GRADES 3-5**

I would like to introduce everyone to one of our amazing staff members at Higher Ground Elementary School, and her name is Ms. Tracy Chapman. Everyone refers to her as “Miss Tracy.” Tracy started at HGA in 2018, and she worked as our building sub originally. For the past 2 years, she has worked in our tier 2 program for reading intervention with grades three through five students.

I have so many great things to tell you about Ms. Tracy. First, I will tell you about how she goes above and beyond her job duties. Ms. Tracy comes in before her job starts every morning and supervises students whose parents drop them off before school starts. She even sets up the tables in the cafeteria and our waste station. She does such a great job of it that when she is absent, the students go into the cafeteria and do what is expected without being told.

I can remember a few times when we had someone resign before the school year started, and she went in and cleaned the entire space, as well as setting it up for whoever would take over the space. She even takes all the lost and found items and sets them up before conferences so that parents might be able to locate them. The thing about Ms. Tracy is that when she sees a problem, she takes action and solves it.

When I told Tracy that I wanted her to teach Title 1, she said that she wanted to create an environment where the children loved coming to learn with her. When I enter her room, I see a person who is working hard, smiling and giving the children encouragement. This is because one of the things about Ms. Tracy is her heart. She truly cares about all of the children and wants what is best for them.

So, if you want to meet someone who is trustworthy, hardworking, caring, organized, and a problem solver - I know just the person. Her name is Ms. Tracy Chapman.

— Written by Laurie Mako, HGA Elementary Principal



HIGHER GROUND ACADEMY

*Congratulations*

**TO ALL OUR GRADUATES!**

Your hard work. Your dedication. Your future. Our commitment



THE FUTURE IS YOURS.  
KEEP RISING. KEEP LEADING.





## Higher Ground Academy students host a food drive.

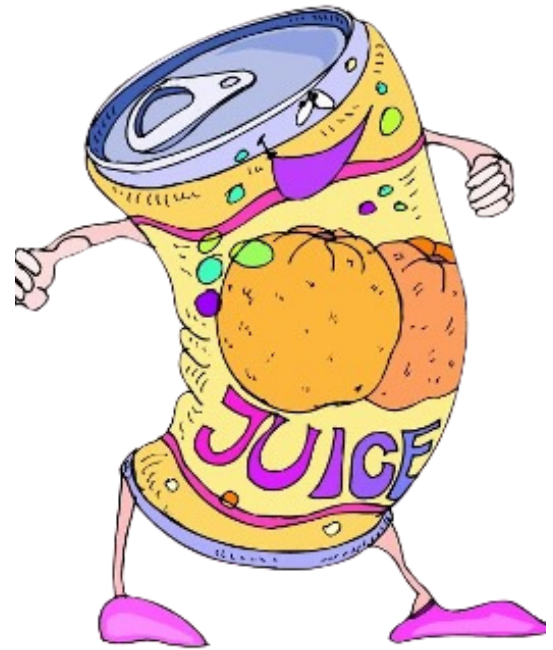
In 5 days' time, our K-7 HGA students collectively brought in 300lb of food and paper product donations to help people in need. Awesome work, students and staff. The food drive took place the week of April 6th through the 10<sup>th</sup>, 2026. The students in grades Kindergarten through 7th hosted a food drive for the St. Paul Midway area Keystone Community Food Center.

Yearly, Higher Ground Academy classrooms complete a community project. The food drive idea originally came from Kindergarten through 2nd-grade teachers and students. Our teachers and students in grades 3 through 7 wanted to join in and make this drive a school-wide event. Our students brought flyers home informing their parents, and they went to work gathering items to bring to school.

Families and individuals who are struggling financially for whatever reason can go directly to the food banks to pick up healthy food. Food drives are a critical source of food for the food banks. Participating in food drives educates our children about local hunger challenges, builds stronger connections to the community, and promotes a sense of responsibility by engaging in community service and charitable giving.

Thank you, our HGA staff, students, and parents,

– By Pamela LaManna, Educator at HGA



<b>300lb</b> FOOD COLLECTED	<b>5</b> DAYS	<b>K-7</b> GRADES
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## YOUTH EMPOWERMENT CLUB — A GLOBAL IMPACT

Each month, our Youth Empowerment Club gathers every Friday to build leadership skills, strengthen connections, and serve others. One Friday each month is dedicated specifically to

On April 24, 2026, 46 of our students participated in our monthly service initiative at Feed My Starving Children. During their volunteer session, they packed an impressive 19,872 meals—enough to feed 54 children for an entire year.

We are incredibly proud of our students for dedicating their time and energy to making a real global impact. Their commitment to leadership, compassion, and service truly reflects the mission of the Youth Empowerment Club. Beyond the measurable results, the experience strengthened our students' sense of purpose and deepened their understanding of what it means to serve others.

Moments like these remind us that even small acts, when done together, can change lives around the world.

– By Huda Abdullahi



<b>46</b> STUDENTS	<b>19,872</b> MEALS	<b>54</b> CHILDREN FED
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## IN LOVING MEMORY OF MASLAH KHALIF

### Maslah Khalif

JULY 21, 2006 · March 14, 2026

Maslah Khalif was born in Kenya on July 21, 2006. In December 2009, he immigrated to the United States with his family and settled in Fargo, North Dakota, where he began his educational journey. From an early age, Maslah was known as a bright, respectful, and compassionate young man who consistently excelled in school. During his freshman year of high school, Maslah and his family moved to Minnesota, where he became part of the Higher Ground Academy community. He attended Higher Ground Academy throughout all four years of high school and graduated with the Class of 2024 on June 9, 2024. Maslah had a deep love for basketball and treasured spending time with his family. According to his mother, he was always willing to step up and help with family responsibilities, including assisting her with school applications and important paperwork for his younger siblings. He cared deeply for his family and especially enjoyed spending time with his brothers and sisters, who admired him greatly and loved being around him.

Following graduation, Maslah began working as a PCA worker on July 30, 2024, and later entered the field of security work in 2025. He was known as a responsible, hardworking, and dependable young man who was always willing to support others.

His mother described him as “the light of our home.” Whenever Maslah walked through the door, he brought joy, peace, and comfort to everyone around him. Soft-spoken and thoughtful, he often offered advice with kindness and sincerity. He regularly checked on his mother and family to make sure they were doing well and felt supported.

To his mother, Maslah was more than a son — he was her firstborn, her confidant, and her best friend. She shared that whenever life became overwhelming, he would step in without hesitation to help care for the family and ensure she was okay. Family was always his highest priority.

Maslah’s memory will continue to live on through the love, kindness, and compassion he shared with his family, friends, and community. He touched many lives during his time at Higher Ground Academy and beyond, and he will be remembered with deep love and admiration by all who knew him.

— By Ahadu Tesfaye, Social Worker



Your light will shine forever in our hearts.



**Advocating for Equity: HGA Students Meet with Representative Meg Luger-Nikolai**



On March 3, 2026, students from Higher Ground Secondary Academy—Sufian Nazir, Samsam Salad, Munira Abdullahi, and Riyak Ahmed—joined Executive Director Samuel Yigzaw and School Counselor Fosi Hassan in participating in Charter School Day at the Capitol, an event organized by the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools (MACS). The event brought together charter school students, educators, and leaders from across Minnesota to advocate for issues affecting charter school communities while providing students with firsthand exposure to the legislative process. As part of the day's activities, HGA students had the opportunity to meet with Meg Luger-Nikolai (fourth from the left in the accompanying photograph) in her office at the Minnesota State Capitol.

During the meeting, students and school leaders discussed the importance of ensuring equity in school safety funding between charter schools and traditional public schools. The group advocated for fair access to resources that support school security, student mental health services, violence prevention initiatives, counseling programs, and other critical safety measures.

Executive Director Samuel Yigzaw emphasized that all public school students deserve equal access to safe and supportive learning environments, regardless of the type of public school they attend. The discussion provided students with a meaningful opportunity to engage in civic advocacy, share their perspectives with policymakers, and gain a deeper understanding of how public policy decisions affect education and school communities.

The experience exemplified Higher Ground Academy's commitment to developing informed, engaged citizens who are prepared to advocate for themselves and their communities.

*All public school students deserve equal access to safe learning environments regardless of the type of public school they attend.*

— **SAMUEL YIGZAW, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**



## A Special Day at HGA: Remembering Bill Wilson and Welcoming Senator Junge

On May 21, 2026, Higher Ground Academy had the honor of welcoming former Minnesota State Senator Ember Reichgott Junge to the school. Her visit coincided, by remarkable coincidence, with the day former Minnesota Governor Arne Carlson dedicated as Bill Wilson Day in recognition of the late Bill Wilson, former Executive Director of Higher Ground Academy and a respected leader in Minnesota’s charter school movement. Senator Junge reflected on Bill Wilson’s legacy with great admiration and respect, noting the important role he played in advancing educational opportunities for students and families. During her visit, Senator Junge expressed deep appreciation for the work being carried out at Higher Ground Academy and praised the school’s continued commitment to serving its students and community. She shared her enthusiasm for the school’s vision and expressed interest in supporting Higher Ground Academy as it continues its efforts to grow and expand its impact. Her visit served as both a celebration of the school’s history and an encouragement for its future.



## A New Chapter Begins. Our Commitment Continues.



HIGHER GROUND ACADEMY  
★  
**New Logo**  
*Same Values.*  
ROOTED IN COMMUNITY • SHAPING TOMORROW





## SPORTS HIGHLIGHTS — A HISTORIC SEASON FOR THE PANTHERS

The 2025–2026 school year was one of the most successful athletic seasons in the history of the Higher Ground Panthers. Under the leadership of Athletic Director Bilal Muhammad, the school’s boys soccer, boys basketball, and girls basketball programs achieved major milestones while demonstrating leadership, teamwork, discipline, and sportsmanship. Multiple teams captured conference championships, student-athletes earned significant individual honors, and the athletic department continued building a strong culture of excellence both on and off the field and court.

The boys soccer team, led by Head Coach Kassim Tilmo, completed a historic season with a 9–3–2 overall record and earned the program’s first-ever conference championship before advancing to the section quarterfinals. Key leaders included senior captains Sakariya Ahmed, Sufyan Nazir, and Adnan Bashir, while sophomores Hamza Ahmed and Shermark Mohamed led a dynamic offense. The boys basketball team also enjoyed an outstanding season, finishing 21–9 overall and winning another conference championship before reaching the section semifinals. Senior co-captains Abdiaziz Abdi and Sakariya Ahmed each surpassed 1,000 career points, earning major conference and team honors for their performances and leadership. The girls basketball team also excelled under first-year Head Coach Marion Gilchrist (“Coach Chubb”), posting an 18–10 overall record and winning its second consecutive conference championship. Sophomore star Jamila Mohamed emerged as one of Minnesota’s top young players, leading the team, conference, and section in points, rebounds, and blocks while earning Conference MVP and Team MVP honors. Throughout all programs, Panther student-athletes displayed commitment, resilience, academic balance, and pride in representing Higher Ground Academy. The season not only produced championships and awards, but also strengthened the school’s athletic culture and established a strong foundation for future success.



### Conference Champions × 3

Under the leadership of Athletic Director **Bilal Muhammad**, three Panthers programs — boys soccer, boys basketball, and girls basketball — achieved major milestones while demonstrating leadership, teamwork, discipline, and sportsmanship.

#### BOYS SOCCER

**9 - 3 - 2**

First-ever conference championship. Section quarterfinalists. Coach Tilmo.

#### BOYS BASKETBALL

**21 - 9**

Conference champions. Section semifinalists. Abdiaziz Abdi & Sakariya Ahmed each surpassed 1,000 career points.

#### GIRLS BASKETBALL

**18 - 10**

2nd straight conference championship. Coach Chubb. Jamila Mohamed — Conference MVP.

#### HIGHER GROUND ACADEMY

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