

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

HGA Soccer Team – 2025 – 26 City Conference Champions



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1. School Information

CONTACT INFORMATION

1381 Marshall Ave., Saint Paul, MN. 55104

Phone: 651 645 1000

Email Address: hga.org

Website

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

Osprey Wilds Environmental Learning Center

Charter School Division

1730 New Brighton Blvd

Suite 104, PMB 196

Minneapolis, MN 55413

(612) 331-4181

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:

1, Adoption and Implementation of Standards-Aligned Curriculum - All teachers are expected to deliver the district-adopted curriculum, which is fully aligned with Minnesota's state education standards. At the same time, teachers have the flexibility to supplement this curriculum with sound educational practices and resources that they believe will enhance student learning.

HGA regularly reviews and updates its curriculum to address areas of need. In FY25, teachers and administrators from HGEA elementary were engaged in review the For example, in response to student underperformance on state mathematics assessments, HGA recently completed a comprehensive revision of its kindergarten through grade six mathematics curriculum.

2, High Expectations and Accountability - HGA operates with the conviction that all students can achieve Minnesota's academic standards when their social, cultural, and learning needs are addressed. Teachers and staff make a deliberate effort to meet students' diverse needs, coupling this commitment with a system of accountability. Students are given multiple opportunities to complete and improve their work. Teacher evaluations incorporate student performance on assessments as one measure of effectiveness.

3, Targeted and Personalized Support for At-Risk Students - HGA uses a data-driven system to identify students who may be at risk of academic failure. Support is then provided through a variety of in-school and after-school programs.

Many at-risk students face social-emotional or behavioral challenges in addition to academic difficulties. To address this, HGA has implemented a Positive Behavior Intervention System of support (PBIS) designed to ensure that all students—particularly those facing significant challenges—have access to the resources they need to succeed academically and socially.

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

The 2019–20 school year marked the first time since 2003–04 that HGA failed to meet its enrollment target. This shortfall occurred because projected enrollment significantly exceeded the number of students on HGA’s waiting list. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic also contributed, as families faced challenges arranging childcare during remote learning. Many chose to send their children abroad where restrictions were less stringent. These same challenges persisted into the 2021–22 school year, resulting in another missed enrollment target.

Enrollment began to stabilize in 2022–23, when HGA’s student count reached 1,070, closely aligning with district projections. Growth continued in 2023–24 with 1,102 students, and by 2024–25, enrollment reached 1,194 students, exceeding projections by nearly 60 students (see Table I).

Another notable trend is the demographic shift. The percentage of non–East African students, which was less than 1% in 2022–23, has risen to about 18% in the reporting school year. The district attributes both the steady enrollment growth and the broader demographic reach to the appointment of a new marketing director, who has effectively promoted HGA among non–East African communities.

Number of Students Enrolled	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Preschool or PreK	NA	NA	NA
Kindergarten	94	88	96
1st Grade	77	92	92
2nd Grade	82	85	94
3rd Grade	81	84	91
4th Grade	82	83	92
5th Grade	76	90	88
6th Grade	84	102	101
7th Grade	91	90	96
8th Grade	100	92	97
9th Grade	87	85	93
10th Grade	76	78	97
11th Grade	76	70	84
12th Grade	64	73	73
Total	1070	1102	1194
Total ADM (Average Daily Membership) for year	1049	1081	1135

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Analysis of Higher Ground Academy’s (HGA) demographic characteristics reflects notable changes in the composition of the student population over the past three years.

Enrollment Trends - Overall enrollment has shown steady growth. The student body increased from 1,070 in 2022–23 to 1,102 in 2023–24, and further to 1,194 in 2024–25. Average Daily Membership (ADM) also grew during this period, from 1,049 in 2022–23 to 1,135 in 2024–25, reflecting consistent attendance and retention.

Gender Composition - The number of female students edged out their male counterparts by a small margin (545 males vs. 557 females). This balance has remained relatively stable over time.

Ethnic and Language Diversity

HGA’s student population continues to be predominantly of African American/African descent. However, demographic shifts reflect increasing diversity. The number of students who identify as “White” and “Asian” grew from zero in 2022–23 to 18 in 2024–25, largely due to targeted outreach efforts by the district’s marketing director.

The English Language Learners (ELL/EL) group continues to grow significantly. In 2024–25, HGA enrolled 617 EL students, an increase of 101 from the previous year. Many of these students are new immigrants from countries such as Ethiopia, Syria, Libya, Sudan, Yemen, and Afghanistan. This trend highlights both the academy’s role in serving newly arrived families and the ongoing need for strong ELL programming.

Special Education

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

Grade-Level Highlights

Enrollment by grade level has generally increased across the board. For example, Kindergarten enrollment rebounded from 88 students in 2023–24 to 96 in 2024–25, signaling renewed interest at the entry level. Similarly, middle school grades showed steady gains, with 6th grade increasing from 84 students in 2022–23 to 101 in 2024–25. High school grades also reflect growth, particularly in 10th grade, which rose from 76 students in 2022–23 to 97 in 2024–25

Demographic Trends	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Total Enrollment	1070	1102	1194
Special Education	46	34	29
English Learners	474	516	617
Free/Reduced Priced Lunch	1034	1078	1135
Black, not of Hispanic Origin	1065	1080	1081
Hispanic/Latino	0	0	0
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0	19
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0	0	0
White, not of Hispanic Origin	5	22	93
Two or more races	0	0	0

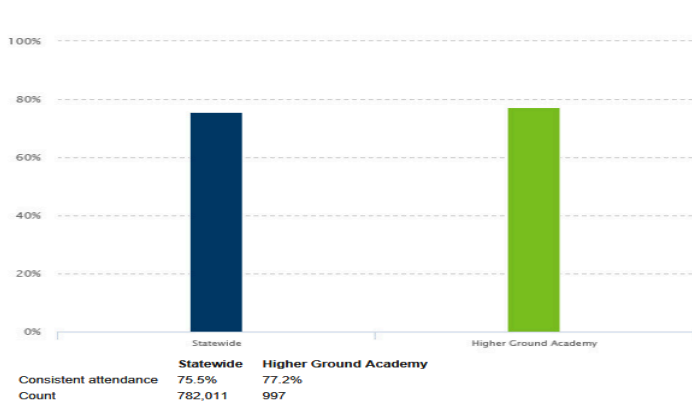
4. Student Attendance, Attrition & Mobility

Student Attendance

HGA’s contractual goal for consistent attendance is to meet or exceed the state’s rate. In FY25, HGA achieved a consistent attendance rate of 77.2%, which is 1.7% higher than the state average of 75.5% (see graph below). This represents a notable improvement from 73.8% in FY24, demonstrating progress toward greater consistency. Therefore, HGA met its attendance target.

At the same time, it is concerning that nearly 23% of students missed 10% or more of school days during the reporting year. Recognizing this, HGA has identified attendance as an area requiring greater attention. To address the challenge, the school will actively engage family liaisons and social workers and expand parent education efforts to strengthen awareness and support for regular attendance.

The number of students attending school regularly (2024)



This is a measure of students who attend school on a regular basis and are not frequently absent. A student is considered consistently attending if they attend more than 90 percent of the time the student is enrolled during the year.

Student Attrition

Student attrition remained a concern during the 2024–25 school year. Exit surveys indicate that the primary reason for attrition is family mobility. As families relocate to areas farther from the school’s service zone, students often transfer from HGA to school districts closer to their new residences. In recent years, rising residential rental costs in the Twin Cities have intensified this challenge. Many low-income families, including those with children enrolled at Higher Ground Academy, have been forced to move to more affordable areas located a considerable distance from HGA. Consequently, the school has experienced increased student withdrawals. In response, the district has expanded its service area; however, this adjustment has significantly increased HGA’s transportation costs.

Student Enrollment

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)
2022-23	163	1054	33	152	185	18%
2023-24	152	1107	101	119	220	20%
2024-25	257	1160	143	113	256	22%

*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.	<u>89</u>
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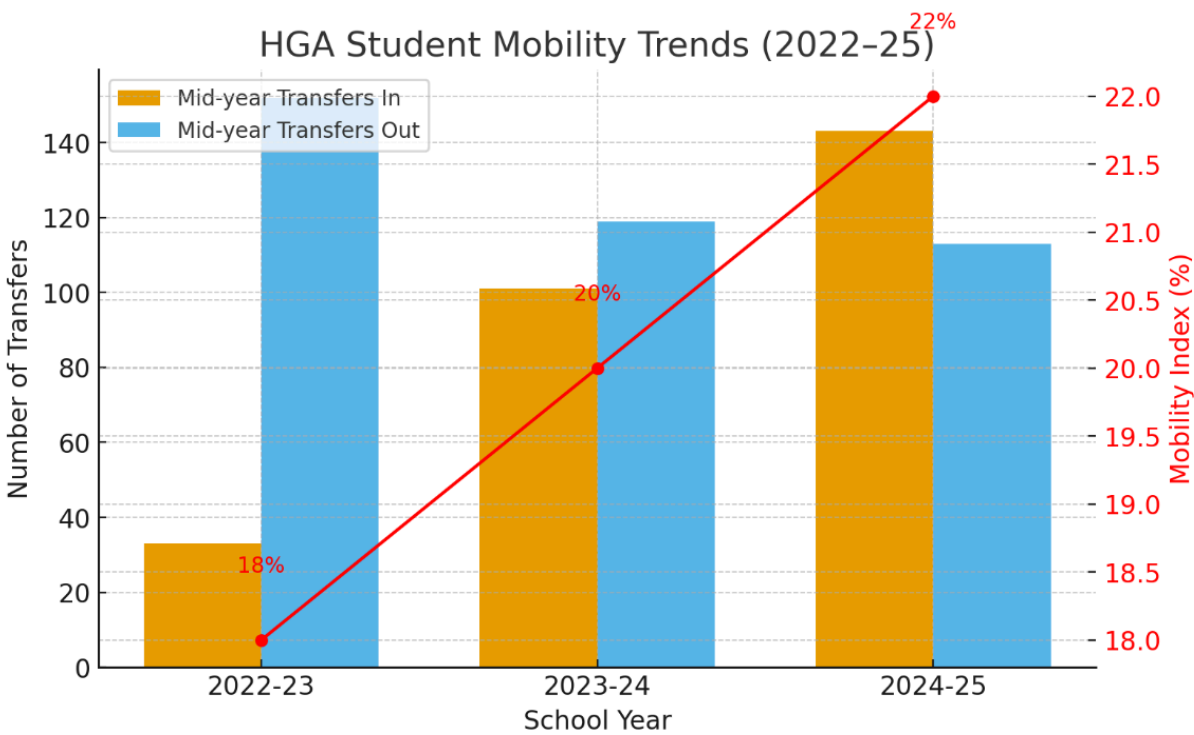
Student mobility has remained a persistent challenge at HGA, primarily driven by family relocation due to rising housing costs in the Twin Cities. Exit surveys confirm that the majority of student attrition stems from families moving outside the school’s service area and enrolling their children in districts closer to their new residences.

2022–23: HGA reported 185 mid-year transfers (33 in, 152 out), resulting in a mobility index of 18%.

2023–24: Transfers increased to 220 mid-year moves (101 in, 119 out), raising the mobility index to 20%. HGA began the year with 1,107 students.

2024–25: Mobility climbed further, with 256 mid-year transfers (143 in, 113 out), and a mobility index of 22%. Enrollment on October 1 stood at 1,160 students.

This three-year trend demonstrates, see graph below, a gradual but steady rise in student mobility, from 18% in 2022–23 to 22% in 2024–25. While summer transfers and new enrollments have helped maintain overall enrollment growth, the ongoing movement of families continues to disrupt student continuity and drive up HGA’s transportation costs, as the service area has had to expand to accommodate displaced families.



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.

Rigorous Instruction

HGA ensures that all students engage in challenging, standards-based learning experiences aligned with the Minnesota Academic Standards. Teachers employ Robert Marzano’s instructional model, emphasizing “planning with scales and targets” to guide lesson design. This framework ensures that students develop higher-order thinking skills while receiving appropriate scaffolding to support their progress. Rigorous instruction at HGA promotes depth of understanding and prepares students to apply knowledge in new and complex contexts.

Growth Mindset

Central to HGA’s pedagogy is fostering a growth mindset among students. Teachers encourage learners to view challenges as opportunities for growth and to track their progress along learning targets that move from foundational knowledge (Levels 1.0–2.0) toward mastery (Level 3.0) and extension (Level 4.0). This approach empowers students to take ownership of their learning, set goals, and persist through challenges with the belief that effort leads to improvement.

Student-Centered Learning

HGA has made significant strides toward creating a student-centered approach to instruction, where learning is tailored to individual readiness levels and personal strengths. In practice, this means classrooms often include students working toward different learning targets, with teachers differentiating instruction to ensure that every learner can succeed. Moreover, HGA strives to cultivate a learning environment where student voice, choice, and active engagement are central to every experience—fostering a culture in which all students feel valued, empowered, and deeply motivated to learn.

Integration of STEM, Environmental Education, and Multicultural Perspectives

To prepare students for the demands of the 21st century, HGA embeds STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and Environmental Education across the curriculum. Literacy, mathematics, and science lessons are connected to real-world contexts, including environmental stewardship, to cultivate responsibility and critical problem-solving skills. Additionally, HGA integrates multicultural education, recognizing that many students navigate multiple cultural identities. By affirming home cultures while building skills to thrive in mainstream society, HGA equips students to succeed in a diverse and interconnected world.

Support Systems and Equity Focus

HGA uses a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) to provide both remediation and acceleration.

Data-driven processes, including FastBridge assessments and teacher observations, help identify students' needs and ensure timely interventions. This reflects HGA's commitment to equity: every student is supported to meet or exceed state standards, regardless of background or challenges.

Curriculum

The curriculum at Higher Ground Academy (HGA) is intentionally designed to reflect the mission, vision, and purpose of the school. It equips students with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in the twenty-first century, providing a strong foundation for academic, professional, and civic life.

HGA offers a comprehensive, standards-based curriculum that includes literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, arts, technology, and physical education across all grade levels. At the high school level, students have access to additional opportunities, including enrollment in Post-Secondary Enrollment Option (PSEO) courses. Although Advanced Placement (AP) courses were offered in the past, they are not currently available due to limited student interest. Beginning in FY25, the school expanded opportunities by offering honors-level classes for the first time.

Recognizing the growing importance of careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, HGA has prioritized the integration of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education throughout its curriculum. In previous years, STEM was taught as a standalone subject. However, beginning in FY24, HGA began embedding STEM concepts into existing coursework, particularly in mathematics and science, to enhance relevance and application.

Environmental stewardship is another key pillar of HGA's curriculum. Environmental Education (EE) is taught at all grade levels and is embedded across multiple subject areas. For example, in literacy classes, students engage with texts that highlight environmental themes. This approach ensures that students develop a strong sense of responsibility for the environment alongside their core academic skills.

HGA serves a culturally and linguistically diverse student body. Most students come from non-mainstream cultural backgrounds and navigate daily between their home culture and the broader mainstream culture. To prepare students for success in this context, multicultural education is intentionally infused throughout the curriculum. This approach fosters cultural competence, equips students with skills for effective communication across cultural boundaries, and prepares them to thrive in an increasingly globalized society.

The curriculum at HGA is fully aligned with the Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards, as outlined by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). The school holds high expectations for all learners, ensuring that each student meets or exceeds state standards appropriate for their grade level. Through this alignment, HGA guarantees academic rigor, consistency, and equitable preparation for college, careers, and lifelong learning.

Instruction

The instructional program at Higher Ground Academy is grounded in three core pillars: rigorous

instruction, growth mindset, and student-centered learning. Together, these pillars ensure that every student is challenged, supported, and equipped for academic success.

Rigorous Instruction - Rigorous instruction at HGA refers to the deliberate design of lessons in which all students are engaged in challenging, meaningful activities. The ultimate goal is to foster higher-order thinking while providing appropriate scaffolding for students who require additional support.

This approach is guided by Robert Marzano's Teaching and Learning Model (2017), with its central practice of "*planning with scales and targets.*" The model is particularly effective in standards-based teaching environments. Teachers begin by analyzing benchmarks or clusters of benchmarks, identifying the nouns (knowledge students must acquire) and verbs (skills students must master). For example, if a benchmark requires students to *analyze the life cycle of an organism*, the teacher ensures that students understand the factual content (organisms, life cycles) while also learning the skill of *analysis*.

Once benchmarks are analyzed, teachers develop learning targets across four levels of rigor:

- Levels 1.0 and 2.0: Focus on foundational skills such as recalling, identifying, and restating factual information or steps of a process.
- Level 3.0: Represents the benchmark itself, where students demonstrate mastery at the intended level of rigor.
- Level 4.0: Extends beyond the benchmark, requiring students to apply their knowledge and skills in more complex or unfamiliar contexts.

This progression ensures that all students have access to both scaffolding and enrichment opportunities.

Growth Mindset - The second pillar, growth mindset, fosters a culture in which students understand their current level of learning while maintaining focus on future goals. Within the Marzano framework, students are consistently made aware of the benchmarks and learning targets they are working toward.

For instance, a student working at a Level 1.0 target is encouraged to recognize that progress toward Level 4.0 mastery is possible, but only by successfully completing Levels 2.0 and 3.0 along the way. This structured approach instills perseverance, encourages self-reflection, and nurtures resilience in the face of academic challenges.

Student-Centered Learning - At HGA, student-centered learning refers to an instructional approach in which students work at their individual readiness levels within a classroom. At any given time, different students may be working on activities at Levels 1.0 through 4.0, depending on their progress toward mastery.

This model allows instruction to be responsive to the unique needs of each learner, ensuring that students are appropriately challenged without being overwhelmed. By aligning tasks with readiness levels, HGA creates learning environments that are dynamic, inclusive, and firmly centered on student growth.

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 170 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 18 today, 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 60 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, 10 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 40 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 social-emotional well-being, and HGA employs a range of staff dedicated to supporting students in this area. The school employs 1 licensed counselor. In addition, 2 licensed social workers assist with mental health needs and connect families with external resources, while 6 behavioral specialists provide direct support for students who need help with behavioral regulation and engagement. The school also partners with the Dreamline Foundation, a component of the Sanneh Foundation, which provides 8 mentors and coaches to support at-risk students during and after 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 heavily in professional development. Teachers participate in approximately 40 hours of structured training annually, with sessions focused on standards alignment, culturally responsive teaching, technology integration, classroom management, and data-driven instructional strategies. Weekly professional learning communities (PLCs) provide teachers with time to collaborate, analyze student data, and refine their practice. This commitment to professional growth creates a culture of continuous improvement and ensures that staff are equipped to meet 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.

Service for English Learners (ELL)

The mission of Higher Ground Academy’s English Language Learner (ELL) Program is to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to achieve both communicative and academic success in English. The program affirms and values each student’s native language and culture while fostering the academic English proficiency necessary for full participation in the K–12 educational setting and for future success in higher education, careers, and the broader community.

This mission is accomplished through:

- Respecting and integrating students’ native languages and cultural backgrounds.
- Providing the content knowledge and background information needed to meaningfully engage with the curriculum.
- Developing the academic language skills essential for success in school and beyond.

Identification Process

Higher Ground Academy (HGA) uses a multi-step process to identify students who require English language support.

Step 1: Home Language Survey (HLS)

The Home Language Survey (HLS) is administered to all students upon enrollment, as required by state law. When necessary, the survey is translated into the languages spoken by HGA families to ensure accessibility and accuracy.

The primary purpose of the HLS is to determine whether a language other than English is spoken at home, which may indicate the need for further assessment of English proficiency. In addition, the survey gathers important personal and educational background information that helps staff design appropriate instructional support.

The HLS is administered by trained professionals, and the results are formally documented in each student’s record.

Step 2: English Proficiency Assessment

Students identified through the HLS are assessed in the areas of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. HGA administers state-mandated assessments such as the WIDA-Model or W-APT to determine English proficiency. To ensure a more accurate evaluation, additional data sources are also considered. These

include oral language interviews and teacher observations, social data (e.g., prior school experiences and peer interactions), and academic data (e.g., classroom grades, standardized test scores, and FastBridge results).

Step 3: Determination of Eligibility

Trained professionals review assessment results along with other relevant data to determine eligibility for ELL services. Once eligibility is established, individualized academic support plans are developed to ensure that identified ELL students make steady progress toward English proficiency.

Step 4: Placement in Services

Students determined to be eligible are placed in instructional programs that integrate subject matter learning with English language development. Instruction is delivered by highly qualified ELL teachers and is tailored to each student's proficiency level:

- Level 1 (“Entering”): Students remain in their general education classroom and receive additional individualized or small-group instruction from an ELL teacher, as needed.
- Levels 2 (“Beginning”) through 4 (“Expanding”): Students continue in their general education classrooms while receiving targeted support from ELL teachers. The frequency and intensity of services are adjusted based on individual student needs.

Step 5: Coding in MARSS

All identified ELL students are coded in the Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System (MARSS). The coding includes the student's home language, Limited English Proficiency (LEP) status, and the start date of services.

6. Innovative Practices & Implementation

Preparing Students for Post-Secondary Success

HGA distinguishes itself through a strong focus on preparing students for postsecondary success, a goal directly tied to its strategic priorities of Academic Goals and Equitable Outcomes. A central element of this strategy is active participation in Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO). In the 2024–2025 school year, 66 of 157 juniors and seniors (42%) enrolled in PSEO courses—one of the highest participation rates in Minnesota. This achievement reflects HGA's commitment to expanding access to rigorous college-level coursework while students are still in high school. Such early exposure not only builds academic confidence but also aligns with the mission of equipping students to thrive in their futures.

The impact of this preparation is evident in postsecondary outcomes. According to the Minnesota Department of Education, 85% of HGA graduates remained enrolled in college 16 months after high school, compared to 60% statewide. Graduates also demonstrate strong persistence and above-average college completion rates, evidence that HGA's strategic investment in rigor, equity, and student readiness yields long-term success.

These outcomes validate HGA's mission-driven approach to preparing students for success in the 21st

century. By fostering a culture of high expectations, maintaining strong support systems, and communicating the value of academic pathways like PSEO, HGA ensures equitable access to higher education and creates opportunities for all students to succeed beyond high school.

Creating a Positive School Environment

Creating a positive school environment where students respect school rules and aspire to be responsible, ethical citizens is a central commitment of HGA, as expressed in its mission statement. To fulfill this commitment, the district has invested significant time, effort, and resources over the past four school years to improve student behavior and address social-emotional needs.

Through collaboration among administrators, teachers, and the citizenship development team, HGA implemented a multi-tiered Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) system in FY22. The program's primary goal is to reduce out-of-class and office discipline referrals. Students facing behavioral or social-emotional challenges are identified early and provided with coaching and mentorship. Support is delivered through a combination of classroom teachers, mentors from partner organizations, and district-employed social workers.

This effort has proven highly effective. Schoolwide out-of-class discipline referrals have steadily declined over the past three years, reflecting the success of PBIS in promoting positive behavior and fostering a supportive learning environment.

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, guiding their colleagues in curriculum design, instructional practices, and student support. Some have even gone on to serve as principals—evidence that HGA not only delivers on its mission of academic excellence for students but also acts as a training ground for the next generation of school leaders. This dual impact reflects the strategic plan's vision of cultivating excellence at every level of the school community.

Culturally Responsive Staffing as an Innovative Approach

At Higher Ground Academy (HGA), a key factor in the school's success is its ability to adapt to and embrace the cultures of the immigrant communities it serves. Rather than expecting families and students to conform entirely to existing systems, HGA has pioneered innovative approaches that integrate cultural awareness into every aspect of school operations. This philosophy shapes not only instructional delivery but also the hiring, development, and support of staff, directly aligning with the strategic priorities of Climate & Culture and Equitable Outcomes.

A cornerstone of this approach is the intentional recruitment of teachers who share the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds of HGA's students. Currently, more than 50% of the staff i.e., teachers, support staff, and administrators, reflect the backgrounds of the students they serve, and over 60% of administrators share the same racial and ethnic identities as the student body. These outcomes reflect deliberate, mission-driven hiring practices that prioritize cultural alignment alongside academic and professional qualifications, advancing HGA's priority of Academic Goals by ensuring high-quality, culturally relevant teaching.

One innovative strategy contributing to these results is HGA's "homegrown approach" to developing educators and leaders. A significant portion of HGA's teaching and administrative staff are proud alumni who have returned to serve the next generation. By first recruiting graduates to work as support staff and then intentionally creating pathways for them to advance as educators and leaders, HGA sustains cultural awareness and strengthens community ties across generations. The school also hopes that this approach will help address future recruitment challenges by establishing a reliable pipeline of qualified, culturally connected professionals.

Moreover, the impact of this cultural alignment is profound. HGA's experience affirms that teachers and administrators who share the lived experiences of students are better able to build trust, foster strong family relationships, and design instruction that is both rigorous and culturally responsive. The students are benefiting from seeing role models who reflect their own identities, affirming their sense of belonging and strengthening academic confidence. The parents are more engaged, knowing the school values and understands their cultural perspectives.

In sum, HGA's commitment to culturally responsive staffing represents an innovative and effective model for serving diverse student populations. By leveraging cultural awareness as a foundation for instruction, leadership, and community engagement, HGA has created an educational environment where students are empowered to thrive academically and socially.

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

The 2024–2025 school year marked a strong period of academic performance for HGA, particularly in meeting its contractual academic performance goals. The school continues to exceed standards in *Mission-Related Outcomes* and *Career and College Readiness*, demonstrating its ongoing commitment to preparing students for postsecondary success. HGA also maintained proficiency standards in reading, mathematics, and science, as well as “growth” in reading. Notably, unlike in previous years, the school met the standards for mathematics growth and achieved both proficiency and growth benchmarks for its English Language Learner (ELL) population.

One of the most significant achievements for HGA in FY25 was the measurable reduction in the performance gap between the school and the state. In FY24, the gap in reading proficiency rates between HGA and the state stood at 5.1% in favor of the state; by FY25, that gap had narrowed to 3.3%. The 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.

A detailed academic progress report, broken down by key performance indicators, provides further evidence of HGA’s progress and continued focus on academic excellence. This comprehensive analysis highlights the school’s success in strengthening instruction, supporting diverse learners, and advancing toward its long-term academic goals.

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 exceeded this target. All 1,173 students (100%) participated in our annual Earth Day project, helping to clean public spaces in the neighborhood surrounding our school.

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:

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 state 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

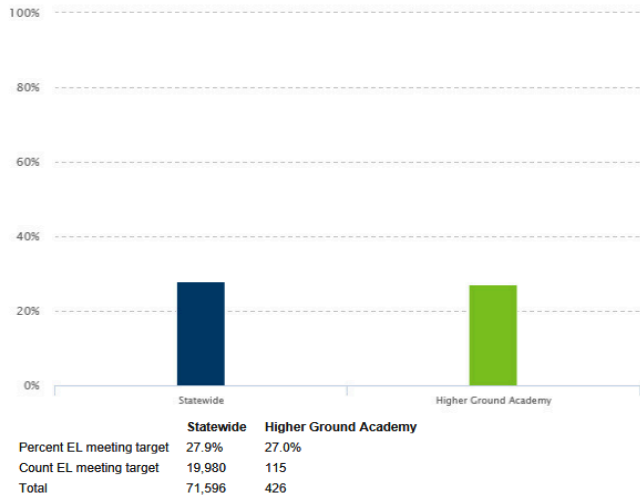
Result: In the reporting year, 27% of HGA English Language Learner (ELL) students met their target on the ACCESS test, which is only 0.7% below the state average (see table below). Based on this performance, HGA is considered to have “partially met” this target in FY25.

Minnesota Report Card
North Star Progress Toward ELP
Are English learners making progress toward becoming proficient in English?
 Higher Ground Academy
 Year: 2025 Demographics: All Students



Progress Toward English Language Proficiency (ELP)
 Percent of ELs meeting target

The “percent of ELs meeting targets” is the percentage of English learners who reached or went past their target.



2. The average progress toward target for English Learners in all grades on the ACCESS test will be equal to or greater than the state 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.

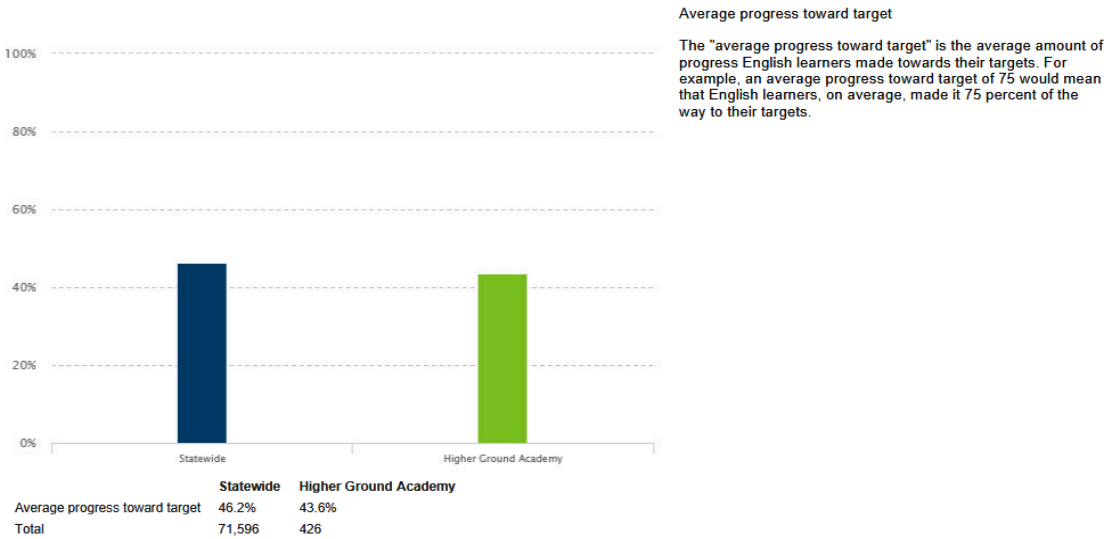
Does Not Meet: The school did not meet the criteria for any of the ratings above.

Result: As the table below indicates, the average progress toward target for HGA English Learners across all grades on the ACCESS test was slightly lower than the state average in FY25. However, the margin between HGA’s average progress and the state’s was only 2.6%. Based on this performance, HGA is considered to have partially met this target for the majority of years during the contract.

Minnesota Report Card
North Star Progress Toward ELP
Are English learners making progress toward becoming proficient in English?
 Higher Ground Academy
 Year: 2025 Demographics: All Students



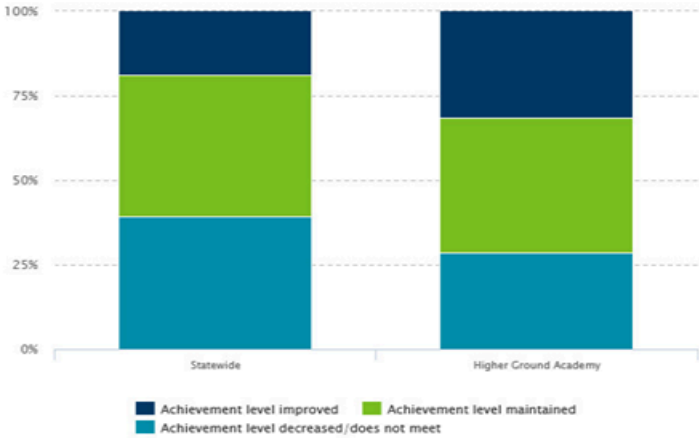
Progress Toward English Language Proficiency (ELP)



Indicator 3: Reading Growth and Progress

Under the indicator Reading Growth and Progress, HGA is required to meet two goals. The table on the next page, derived from data published on *mde.org*, serves as the source for responding to these two goals.

Academic Progress
 Reading academic progress



	Statewide	Higher Ground Academy
Achievement level improved	Count 54,498	117
	Percent 18.7%	31.4%
Achievement level maintained	Count 122,381	149
	Percent 41.9%	39.9%
Achievement level decreased or stayed "does not meet standards"	Count 115,231	107
	Percent 39.4%	28.7%
Total count of students	Count 292,110	373
Average Progress Score	Score 2.2	3.0

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

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: HGA exceeded this target in FY25. A total of 31.4% of HGA students improved their achievement level in reading, compared to only 18.7% of students statewide (see table below). This represents a 12.7% gap in favor of HGA.

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: 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 exceeded this target in FY25. The achievement level of 28.7% of HGA students decreased or remained the same on the MCA during the fiscal year, which is 11 percentage points lower than the state average. Therefore, HGA is considered to have exceeded this target.

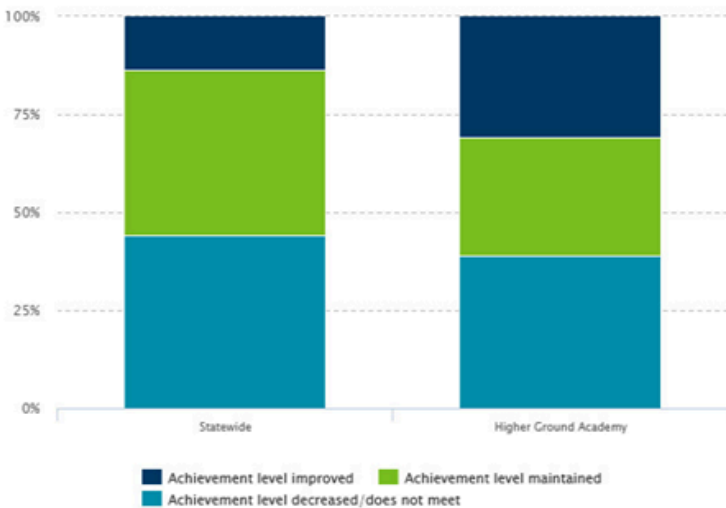
Indicator 4: Math Growth and Progress

HGA has three contractual 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 growth assessment. The table below, derived from data published on *mde.org*, provides results for the two measures based on NSAP.

Minnesota Report Card
North Star Academic Progress
Are students improving or maintaining achievement levels on academic tests?
 Higher Ground Academy
 Year: 2025 Demographics: All Students



Academic Progress
 Math academic progress



	Statewide	Higher Ground Academy
Achievement level improved	Count 39,986	115
	Percent 13.7%	31.0%
Achievement level maintained	Count 122,625	111
	Percent 42.2%	29.9%
Achievement level decreased or stayed "does not meet standards"	Count 128,231	145
	Percent 44.1%	39.1%
Total count of students	Count 290,842	371
Average Progress Score	Score 1.9	2.9

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 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 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: By achieving a result 13.7% percentage points higher than the state average—31.9% for HGA compared to 18.2% statewide—HGA exceeded this target. This margin of outperformance demonstrates the school’s effectiveness in implementing targeted instructional strategies and support systems that promote student growth at a rate significantly above state levels.

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 met this target in FY25. During the reporting year, 39.1% of HGA students demonstrated either a decrease or no change in achievement level, compared to 44.1% of students statewide. This represents a performance that is 5 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.

Indicator 5: Reading Proficiency

Goal:

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: 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 state for the same student group and same grades.

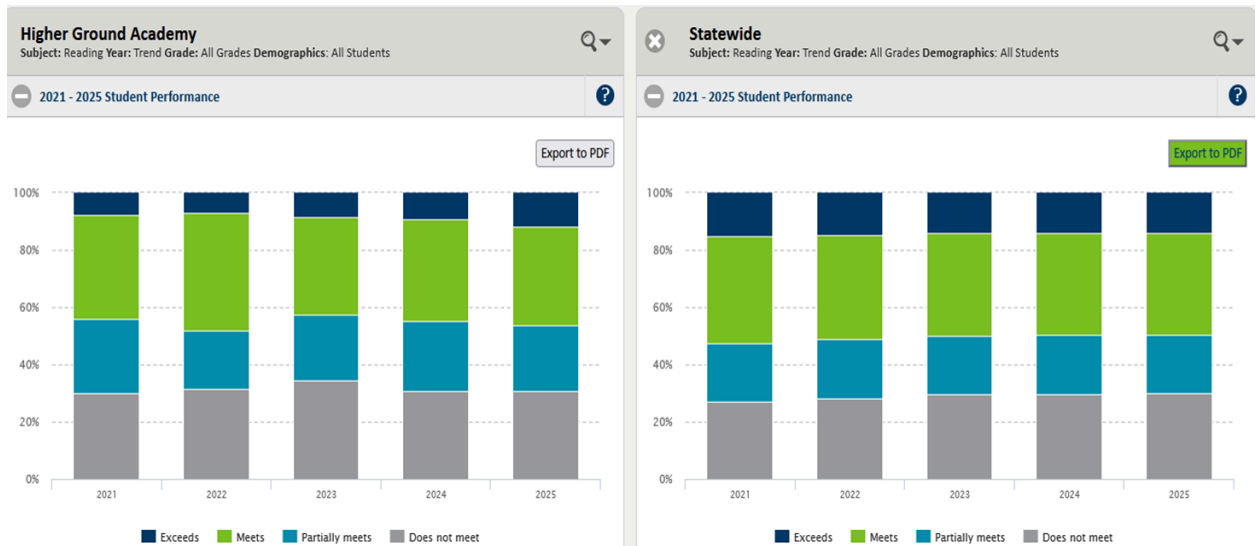
Exceeds: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is at least 10 points greater than the state's score

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 met this target. However, it is important to highlight the school's steady progress toward closing the performance gap over the course of the contract. In FY25, the gap narrowed to 2.1 index points, representing a significant improvement compared to 6.0 index points in FY23 and 2.7 index points in FY24. This consistent trend demonstrates that the strategies HGA has implemented to improve instruction and support student learning are yielding measurable results, positioning the school closer to full attainment of the target.



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 local district for the same student group and same grades

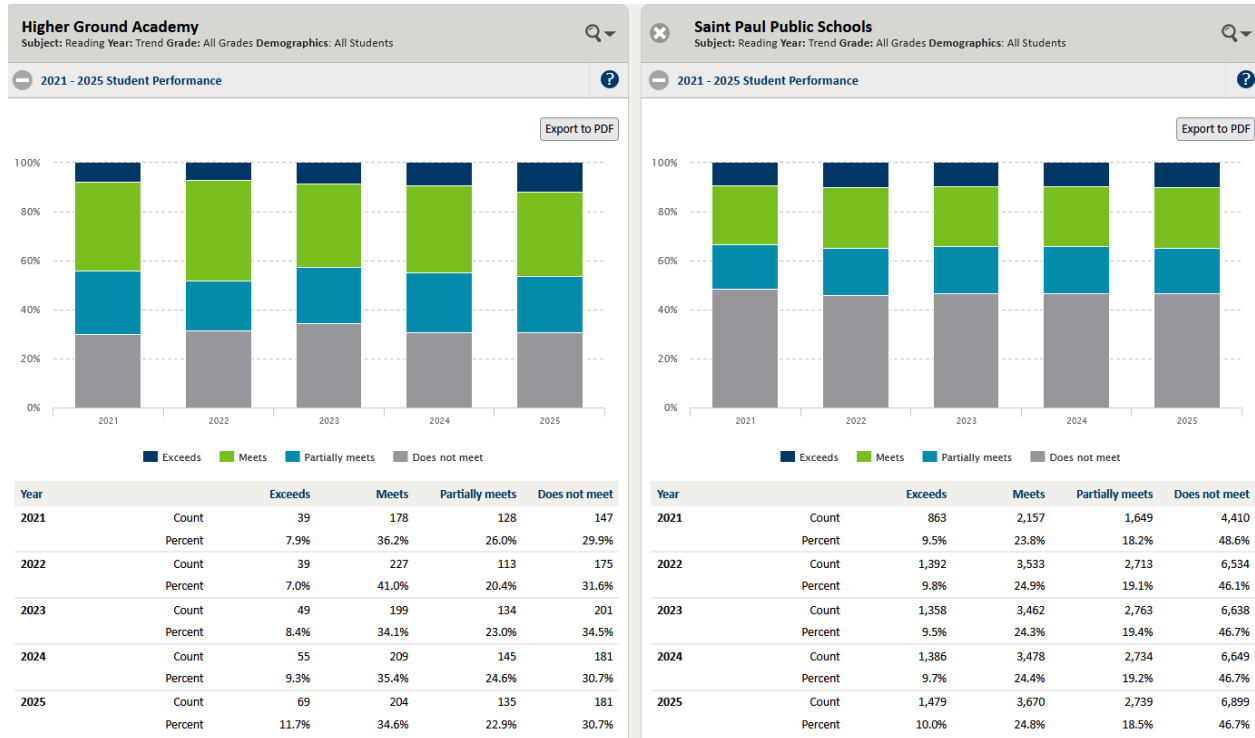
Exceeds: The school's aggregate proficiency index score is at least 10 points greater than the district's score

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: In FY25, the Reading Proficiency Index score for HGA was 57.7 index points, which is 13.7 points higher than the Saint Paul Public Schools average (see table below). This margin of outperformance demonstrates that HGA students are achieving at substantially higher levels in reading relative to their peers in the Saint Paul Public Schools. Accordingly, HGA exceeded the target on this measure.



Measure 5.3: The aggregate proficiency index score in reading for English Learners in all grades is equal to or greater than the state for the same student group and same grades.

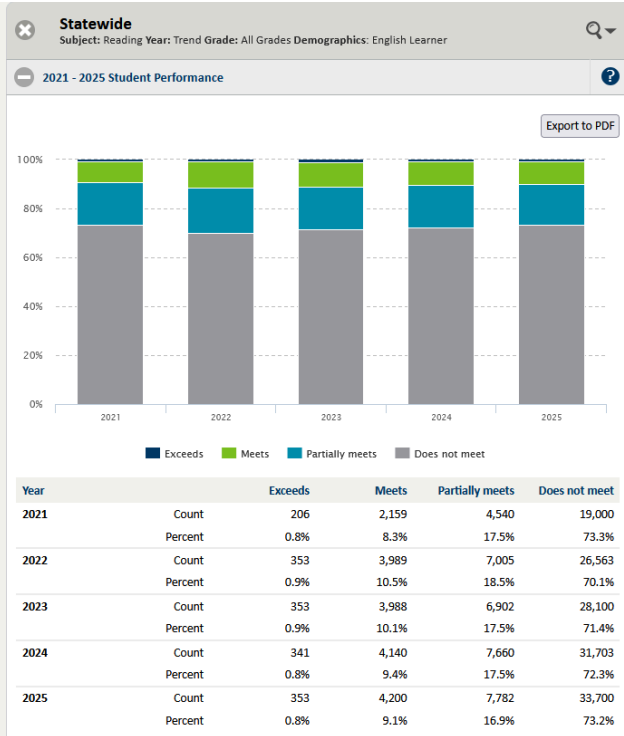
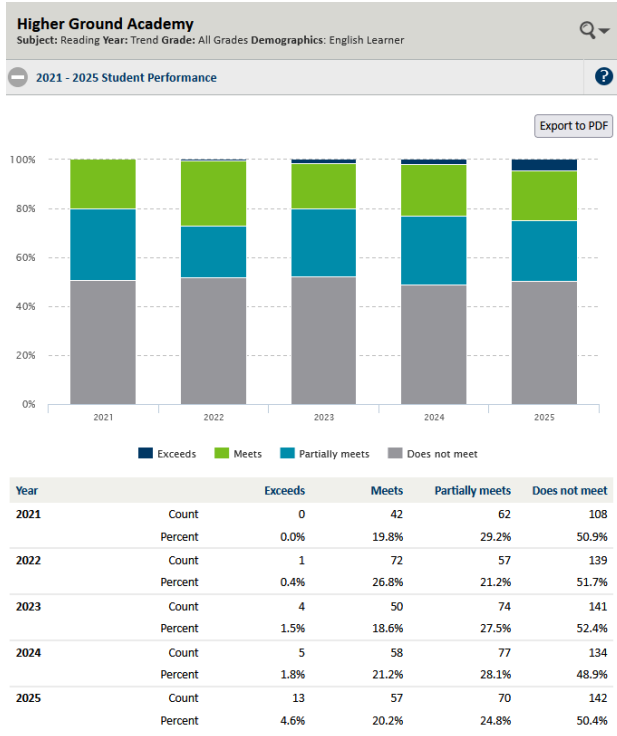
Exceeds: The school’s aggregate proficiency index score for English Learners is at least 10 points greater than the state’s score

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 36.2 and the state’s score of 18.3 for the ELL group is nearly double, in favor of HGA. This outcome indicates that HGA clearly exceeded the target on this measure. Moreover, it provides strong evidence that the school is delivering a higher level of support and service to its ELL students compared to many other schools across the state.



Measure 5.3- 5.4 Performance Data:

Reading: All State Accountability Tests – FRP Students (Meeting enrollment criteria), Grade 3-8 & 10.

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:

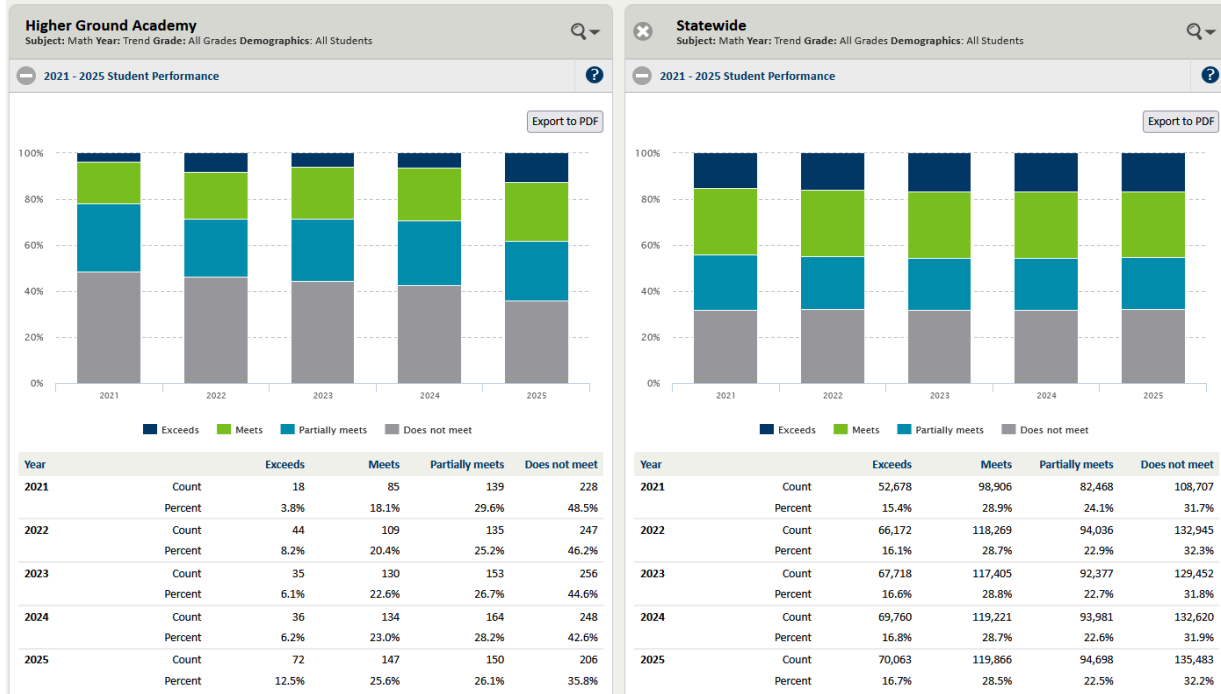
Measure 6.1: The aggregate proficiency index score in math for [all students; FRP; SPED; etc.] in [3rd grade; 4-8 grades; etc.] is equal to or greater than the state for the same student group and same grades.

Exceeds: The school’s aggregate proficiency index score is at least 10 points greater than the 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: As the table above demonstrates, HGA partially met this target in FY25. The school scored 51.1 index points on this measure, which is 5.3 points lower than the state average. Because the gap between HGA and the state is less than 10 index points, the school is considered to have partially met the target. Looking ahead, HGA will continue to strengthen targeted interventions, refine curriculum alignment, and expand teacher support strategies in order to reduce this gap.

Furthermore, HGA should be commended for its significant progress in closing the achievement gap in FY25. While the gap between the state and the school was in the double digits in FY23 (11.7 index points) and FY24 (13.5 index points), it was reduced to just 5.3 index points in FY25 (see table below). If this trend continues, HGA is well-positioned to fully close the gap within the next contract cycle.

	FY25	FY24	FY23
State Math Proficiency Index Score	56.4	56.8	53.7
HGA Math Proficiency Index Score	51.1	43.3	42.0
GAP (HGA - State) =	-5.3	-13.5	-11.7

Measure 6.2: The aggregate proficiency index score in math for [all students; FRP; SPED; etc.] in [3rd grade; 4-8 grades; etc.] is equal to or greater than the local district 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’s aggregate math proficiency index score in FY25 was 51.1, compared to 35.8 for Saint Paul Public Schools during the same period. This represents a difference of 15.3 index points in favor of HGA, demonstrating that the school not only met but exceeded its performance target.

Equally significant is the steady expansion of this achievement gap in HGA’s favor. In FY23, the difference between HGA and Saint Paul Public Schools was 7.9 index points. By FY24, the gap had widened to 10 points, and by FY25 it had reached 15.3 points. This consistent upward trajectory highlights HGA’s continued success in strengthening math achievement. It affirms the school’s unwavering commitment to academic excellence and reinforces HGA’s position as a leader in closing achievement gaps.

	FY25	FY24	FY23
SPPS Math Proficiency Index Score	35.8	35.3	35.4
HGA Math Proficiency Index Score	51.1	43.3	42.0
GAP (HGA - State) =	15.3	10	7.9

Indicator 7: Science Proficiency

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

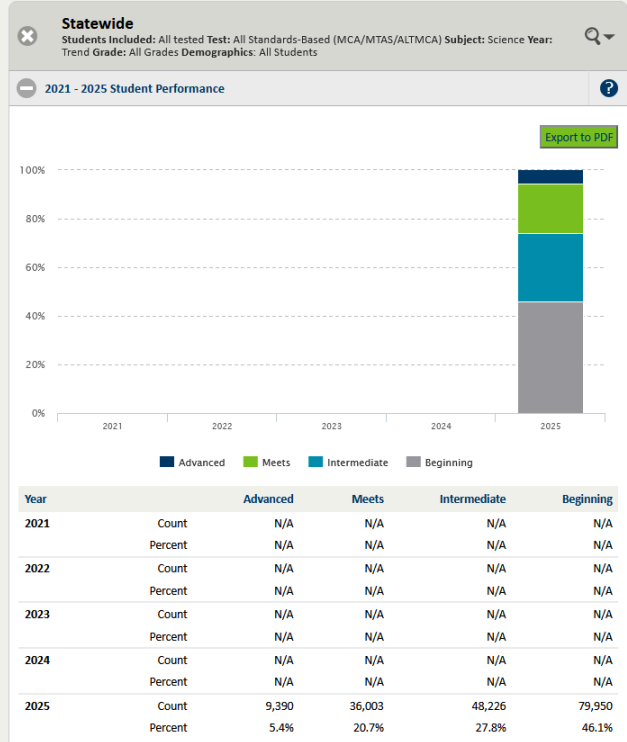
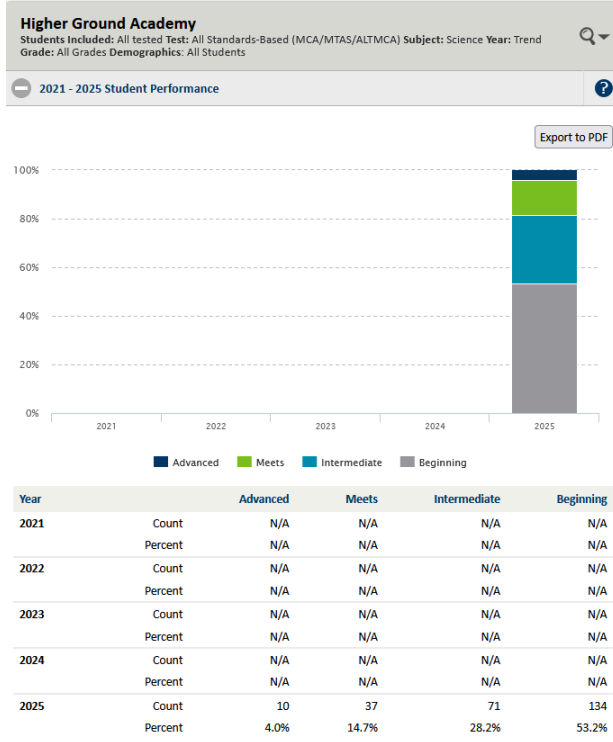
Key Measures & Results for this Goal:

1. The aggregate proficiency index score in science for [all students; FRP; SPED; etc.] in [5th grade; 5th, 8th and HS grades; etc.] 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 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:

In FY25, all schools in Minnesota were required to fully implement the newly adopted science standards for the first time. As a result, the MCA science assessments differed from those administered in previous years. As typically occurs when a new assessment is introduced, scores declined across the board. The FY25 MCA science results were no exception—the state’s average proficiency index score dropped by more than 10 points, falling to 40. Similarly, HGA’s proficiency index score decreased by 11.6 points, from 44.4 to 32.8.

Nonetheless, HGA did not meet this target. However, because the difference between the school’s and the state’s proficiency index scores is less than 10 points, HGA partially met this target.



Measures 7.1 Performance Data:

Science: All State Accountability Tests – All Students (Meeting enrollment criteria), Grades 5, 8 & High School

- The aggregate proficiency index score in science for [all students; FRP; SPED; etc.] in [5th grade; 5th, 8th and HS grades; etc.] is equal to or greater than the local district 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

No data is reported for HGA that relates to this target.

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

Goal: copy/paste Proficiency/Growth in Other Curricular Areas/Ed. Programs goal and key measures here.

CACR Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: Identify the CACR goal areas that are addressed by this contractual goal.

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 contractual goals under this indicator.

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.

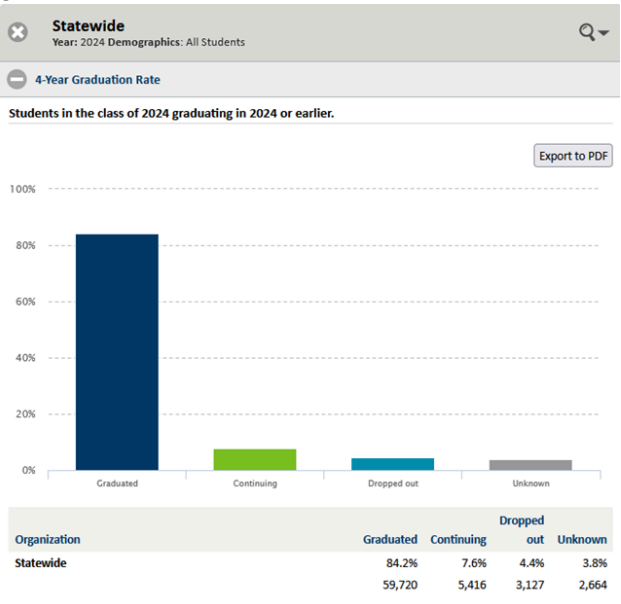
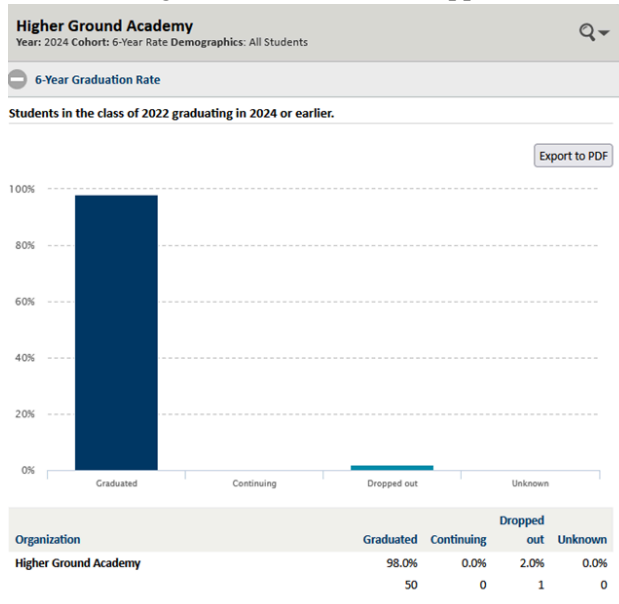
Exceeds: The school’s aggregate graduation rate is at least 10 percentage points greater than the state’s graduation rate

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: Data posted on MDE.org shows that HGA’s six-year graduation rate is 98%, compared to 84.2% for the state. HGA therefore exceeds this target, continuing a positive trend over time. This success can be attributed to the individualized attention that HGA’s staff provide to every enrolled student. Teachers, mentors, and administrators work closely with students and families to monitor progress, intervene early when challenges arise, and create a supportive learning environment.



Indicator 10: Engagement

CACR Goal Areas Addressed by this Goal: All students graduate 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

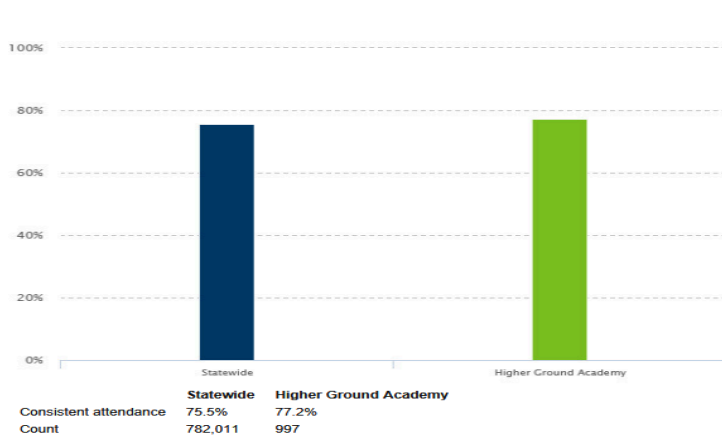
Result: In FY25, HGA's consistent attendance rate was 77.2%, compared to the state average of 75.7% (see graph below). Although the margin was slight, HGA posted a better rate of consistent attendance than the state. Therefore, HGA meets this standard.

At the same time, it is evident that consistent attendance remains an area requiring further improvement. The school acknowledges this challenge, and staff as a whole will prioritize addressing it during the FY26 school year.

Minnesota Report Card
My School
What can I learn about my school and its students?
 Higher Ground Academy
 Demographics: All Students



The number of students attending school regularly (2024)



This is a measure of students who attend school on a regular basis and are not frequently absent. A student is considered consistently attending if they attend more than 90 percent of the time the student is enrolled during the year.

1. The aggregate percentage of students engaged in the classroom, as measured by a school-developed engagement rubric utilized at least 3 times annually, will be at least 80%.

Exceeds: The aggregate percentage of engaged students is at least 90%.

Meets Target: The aggregate percentage of engaged students is at least 80%

Approaches: The aggregate percentage of engaged students is at least 70%

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

Federal and State Accountability

High Quality Charter School Status

The multitude of data presented in the previous section underscores that HGA is a strong and effective school. Its student population includes a significant number of students from low-income families (over 95%), English Language Learners (more than 45%), and children of color (approximately 82% in FY25). While students with such backgrounds often face barriers to academic success in many schools, including traditional public schools, HGA has demonstrated the ability to succeed where others struggle. This has earned the school recognition as a “*Beat the Odds*” school by the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* and as one of the strongest schools in the state by *U.S. News & World Report*.

Despite these accomplishments, HGA did not receive High Quality Charter School status in FY25, missing the consistent attendance threshold by less than 2%. Importantly, the school met every other qualifying criterion, and staff are committed to closing this small gap. With targeted strategies and a unified focus, HGA is confident it will not only meet but exceed the standard, securing High Quality Charter School status in FY26.

Looking forward, HGA’s strategic plan includes relocating its middle school to a new site during the upcoming contract cycle. This initiative is not simply about expansion but about advancing the school’s long-term vision of increasing access and strengthening educational impact. With the new site, total enrollment across HGA’s three schools is projected to rise to approximately 1,500 students. This growth, combined with a continued focus on instructional excellence, equitable outcomes, and strong accountability, positions HGA to serve as a model of innovation and effectiveness in preparing students for college, careers, and civic readiness.

ESSA Identification

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

8. Comprehensive Achievement and Civic Readiness Strategic Plan Report

HGA’S PROCESS FOR ASSESSING AND EVALUATING STUDENT LEARNING AND GROWTH TOWARD MEETING STATE AND DISTRICT STANDARDS

HGA is in the process of finalizing its CACR plan. However, many of the elements required for the CACR are already in place. Therefore, the report in this section is based on current practices.

Higher Ground Academy employs a comprehensive system to assess and evaluate student learning and growth, using multiple measures that provide both broad trends and detailed insights.

All students participate in the FastBridge Assessment at least twice annually, in the fall and spring. For students receiving additional supports—such as those enrolled in Title I, Special Education, or English Learner (EL) programs—an additional winter administration is provided to monitor progress more closely.

In HGA’s elementary program, Curriculum-Based Measures (CBM), a component of FastBridge, are administered even more frequently. By comparing results across administrations (e.g., fall to winter or fall to spring), staff are able to track student growth over time and intervene when necessary.

HGA also encourages full participation in the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA), the statewide assessments administered annually. MCA results are carefully analyzed at both the individual and group levels to determine student progress and to identify achievement trends among different student populations. These data points serve as a valuable benchmark for evaluating schoolwide instructional effectiveness and equity.

In addition to these standardized assessments, HGA relies on curriculum-based measures embedded in its adopted instructional programs to evaluate student progress toward grade-level standards. These measures provide ongoing, classroom-level evidence of student mastery, enabling teachers to adapt lesson plans and refine instruction to better meet student needs.

Furthermore, HGA integrates supplemental assessment tools such as *Read Live*, *Lexia Learning*, and *IXL*. These programs are particularly valuable for monitoring the progress of students who need additional academic support. The built-in assessments identify specific areas of struggle in reading, math, and language development, generate actionable data for teachers, and track student growth over time. This allows for targeted interventions and ensures that students receive personalized support designed to close learning gaps.

Through this multi-layered approach, HGA combines statewide assessments, benchmark testing, and curriculum-embedded measures to create a robust picture of student learning. The use of diverse data sources ensures that decisions about instruction, intervention, and resource allocation are firmly rooted in evidence.

HGA’s Process for Assessing and Evaluating Student Progress towards State and Local Academic Standards.

Higher Ground Academy (HGA) uses a multi-layered, systematic approach to assess and evaluate each student’s academic progress in alignment with Minnesota state standards and local academic expectations. This process combines standardized assessments, ongoing classroom-based measures, and targeted interventions to ensure that every student is supported in reaching proficiency and beyond.

State Assessments – Students participate in the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) and other state-mandated tests, which provide data on proficiency levels in reading, math, and science. The MCAs also generate individualized reports that show each student’s progress across specific strands within each subject—for example, Algebra, Probability, and Number Sense in mathematics. These results are carefully analyzed to identify trends, highlight strengths, and determine areas where additional support is needed.

Local Benchmarking and Screening - HGA administers benchmark assessments such as *FastBridge* two to three times annually in reading and math. These screeners provide early identification of students who may be at risk of falling behind. Data from these assessments are shared with teachers, support staff, and parents to inform instruction and intervention.

Classroom-based assessments - Teachers use a wide range of formative and summative assessments—including unit tests, quizzes, projects, and performance tasks—to monitor student progress on a daily and quarterly basis. In addition to these traditional measures, they integrate curriculum-based assessment tools such as *Read Live*, *Lexia*, and *IXL* to track growth in reading, math, and language skills. These programs generate real-time performance data, enabling teachers to adjust instruction and target interventions with greater precision. Core curricula—including *Super Kids* in the lower elementary grades, *Reading Street* in the upper elementary grades, *Benchmark* in middle school, and *Perspective* in high school—also provide built-in assessments that ensure students are mastering grade-level standards and building the foundational skills necessary for long-term success. All lesson plans are carefully aligned with Minnesota state standards so that every assessment—whether embedded in the curriculum or teacher-developed—directly reflects the competencies students are expected to achieve.

English Language Learner (ELL) Progress - For English learners, HGA administers ACCESS for ELLs assessments to measure growth in language acquisition. These results are integrated with academic data to create a comprehensive understanding of each student's development.

Parent and Student Engagement - HGA requires four parent-teacher conferences per year, during which progress data are reviewed collaboratively. Parents receive clear reports on their child's progress toward state standards, and students are encouraged to reflect on their own learning goals.

HGA's Process for Disaggregating Student Data

Higher Ground Academy (HGA) employs a systematic process to disaggregate student performance data by specific student groups in order to evaluate the school's effectiveness in meeting the needs of all learners. The school collects data from a variety of sources—that were named previously. This information is then broken down by national origin/home language of learners, English Language Learner (ELL) status, grade level, gender, and special education designation.

Disaggregated data are reviewed by administrators, team leaders, and teaching teams at multiple points during the year to identify achievement gaps and patterns in performance across student groups. For example, results are analyzed to determine how ELL students are progressing compared to their non-ELL peers, or whether particular racial or ethnic groups are meeting benchmarks at the same rate as the overall student population. These analyses inform instructional planning, shape professional development priorities, and guide the allocation of additional resources such as targeted interventions, ELL supports, or paraprofessional assistance.

For instance, results from the spring 2025 MCA administration indicated that students identified as ELL did not make as much progress as their non-ELL peers (see data and analysis in Section 7). As previously noted, HGA hired a significant number of ELL instructors in FY25 to reduce the student-to-teacher ratio within the program. This initiative has undoubtedly improved the quality and quantity of support students receive from their ELL teachers. However, since the MCA data show that ELL students are still not making as much progress as their non-ELL counterparts, additional measures are being implemented. These include providing ongoing professional development for mainstream teachers focused on strategies to better support and accommodate ELL students in their classrooms.

In addition to internal reviews, HGA shares disaggregated data with staff during professional learning communities (PLCs) and with parents during conferences, ensuring transparency and collaboration in addressing inequities. By using this ongoing process, HGA is able to monitor educational effectiveness for each student group, make data-informed adjustments, and stay true to its mission of ensuring equitable outcomes for all students.

HGA's Process for Identifying and Supporting Gifted and Talented Students

Higher Ground Academy (HGA) has established a systematic process to assess, identify, and support students with exceptional academic abilities. The goal is to ensure that advanced learners are appropriately challenged and provided with opportunities to reach their highest potential.

Identification Process -Students are identified for acceleration through multiple measures, including: Standardized Assessments:

- Students "Exceeding" standards on the MCAs and identified as "College Pathway" students on the *FastBridge*.
- Classroom Performance: Students who demonstrate advanced problem-solving, creativity, or mastery of content well above grade-level expectations.
- Parent and Teacher Recommendations: Input from families and educators is incorporated to capture a holistic picture of student potential.

Acceleration and Instructional Supports - Once identified, Gifted and Talented students are provided with differentiated and accelerated instruction. Strategies include:

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

HGA’S PROCESS FOR IDENTIFYING STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

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

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

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

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

Collaborative Professional Learning - Findings from data reviews, evaluations, and surveys are shared during professional learning communities (PLCs) and staff meetings, where teachers analyze student work, reflect on instructional practices, and collaborate on strategies to address weaknesses. Professional development is then tailored to meet the identified needs, whether through training in culturally responsive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, or content-specific strategies.

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%
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.

Central to these efforts is HGA’s motto, *“How are the children? The children are well and learning.”* This guiding principle serves as a constant reminder to teachers and staff of the school’s student-centered mission—that every decision, practice, and instructional choice must prioritize the well-being and success of students. The motto is revisited in professional development, faculty meetings, and collaborative planning, ensuring that teachers remain aligned with the mission and maintain a student-first perspective in all aspects of their work.

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

Overview

A parent survey was administered during the parent/teacher conference 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 165 out of 456 families participated, representing a 36% response rate.

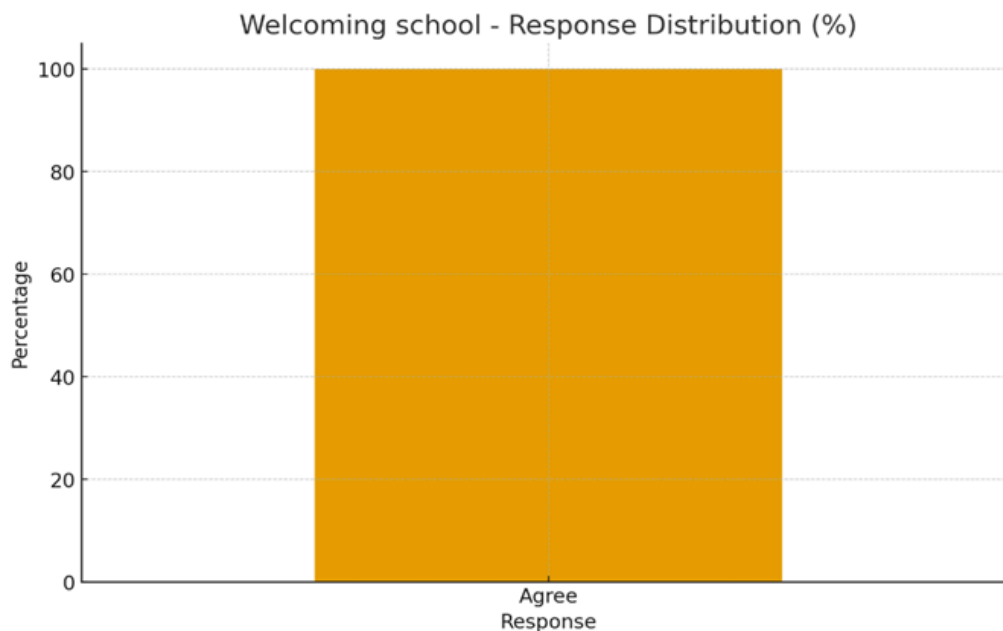
The survey gathered parent and guardian feedback on key aspects of Higher Ground Academy, including school climate, safety, communication, cultural respect, student preparation, and services such as transportation and cafeteria offerings. The following section provides a summary of the survey responses.

Note: The graphs in this section are AI generated.

Key Findings

1. Welcoming Environment & Safety

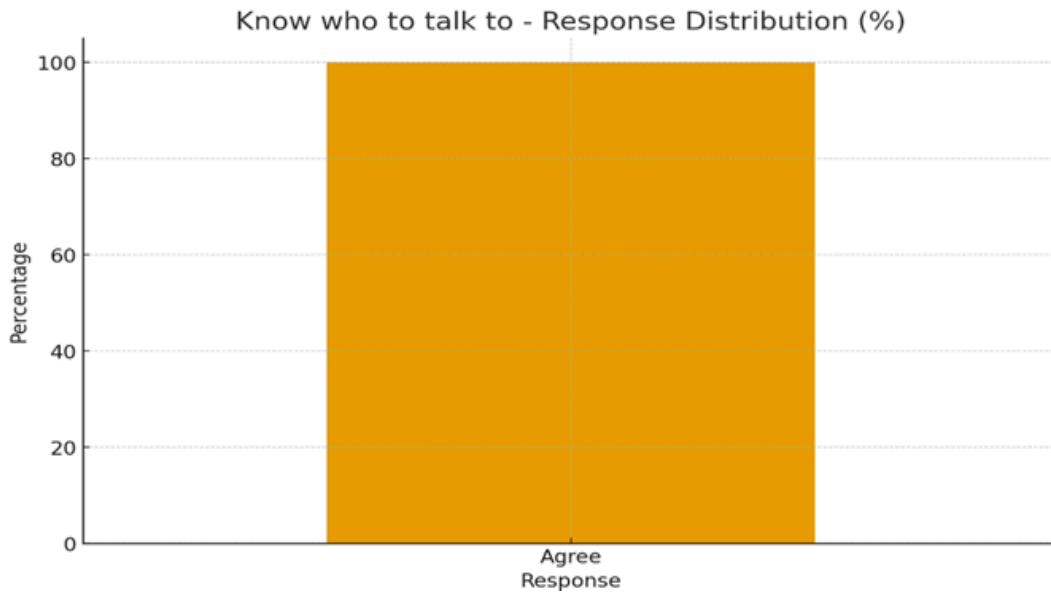
The majority of respondents, almost 100%, marked “*Strongly Agree*” or “*Agree*” that Higher Ground Academy is a welcoming school and that their children feel safe. This reflects a strong sense of community and inclusiveness. Very few responses indicated disagreement.



2. Communication & Responsiveness

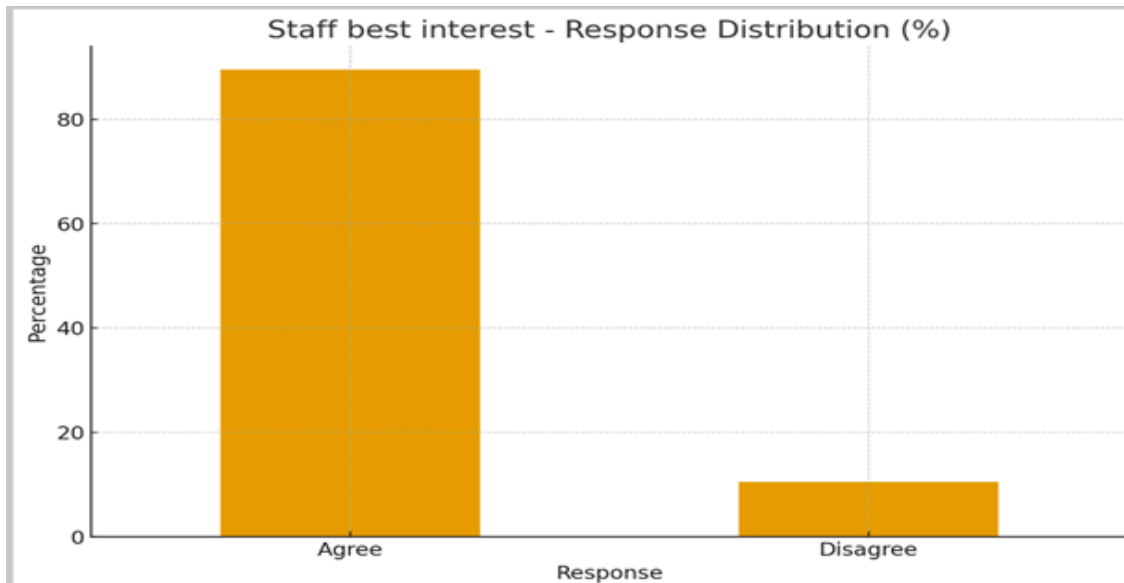
Parents overwhelmingly reported that they know who to talk to if they have a concern and trust the

school to address their issues. A small minority expressed disagreement, suggesting opportunities for improved consistency in communication.

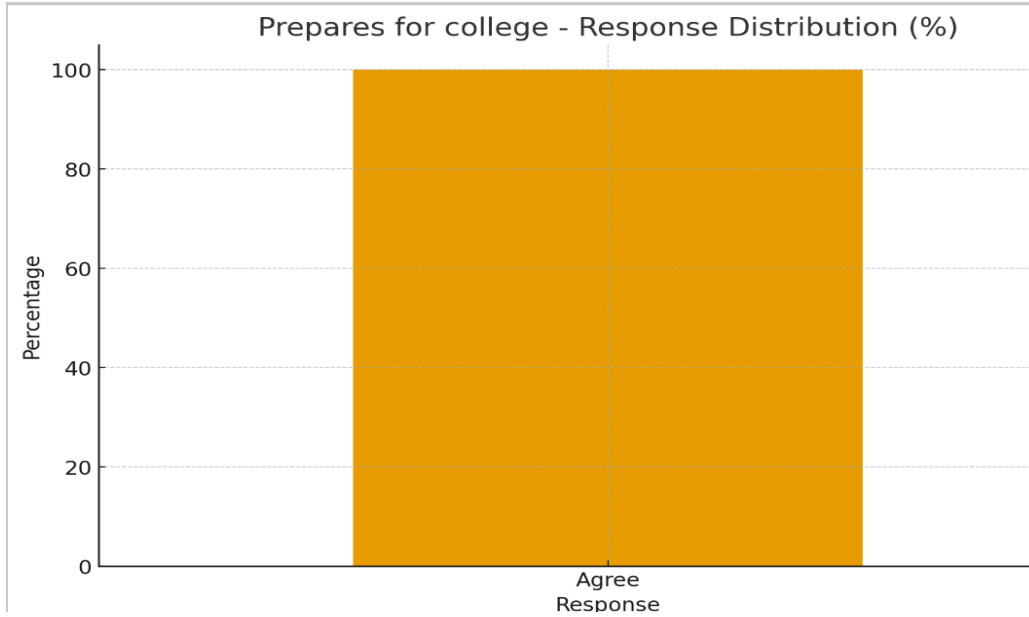


3. Staff & Student Support

About 90% of parents agreed that staff prioritize their children’s best interest. However, a minority (10%) expressed doubts, which could indicate inconsistencies in experiences across different classrooms or grade levels.

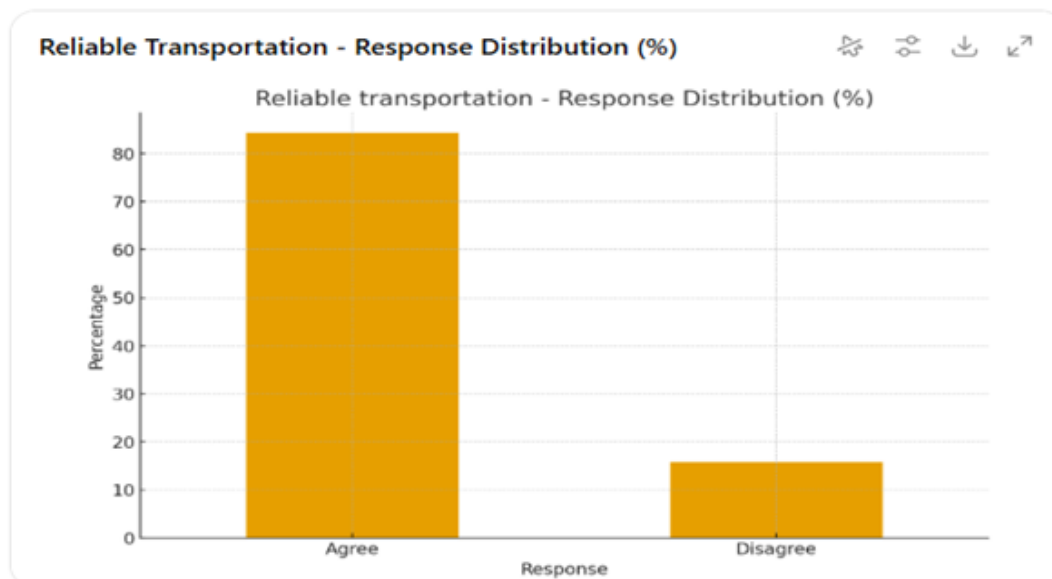


Additionally, a large portion also believes that the school prepares students for college success. There was 100% agreement that Higher Ground Academy prepares students for college. This is a major strength and an important factor in parent satisfaction and school reputation.

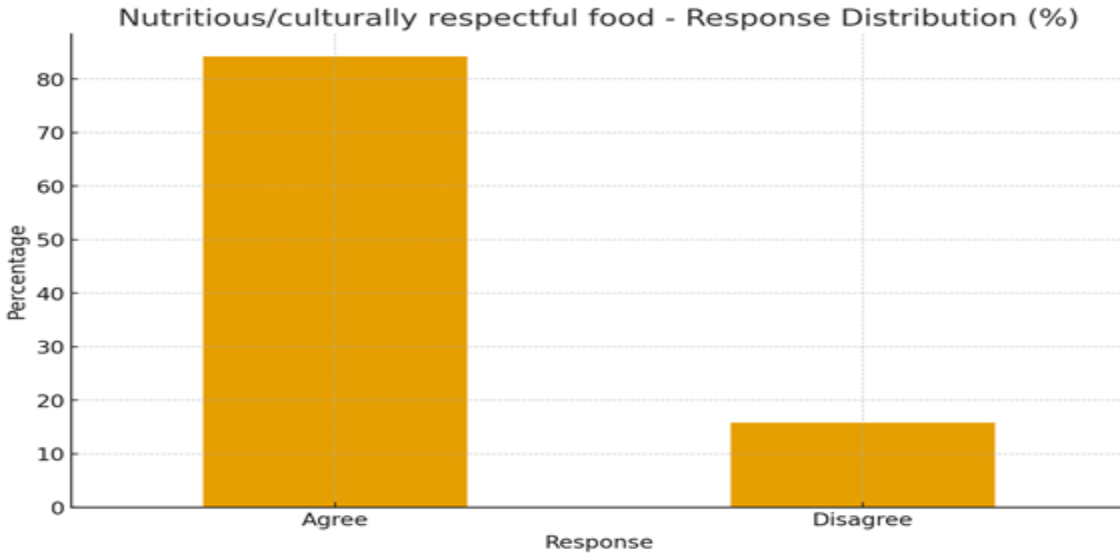


4. Transportation & Cafeteria Services

Transportation services received high marks for reliability. While 84% agreed transportation is reliable, about 16% disagreed. Transportation appears to be the area with the most notable dissatisfaction. The school has received complaints related to timeliness, consistency, and/or availability throughout the school year from certain parents.



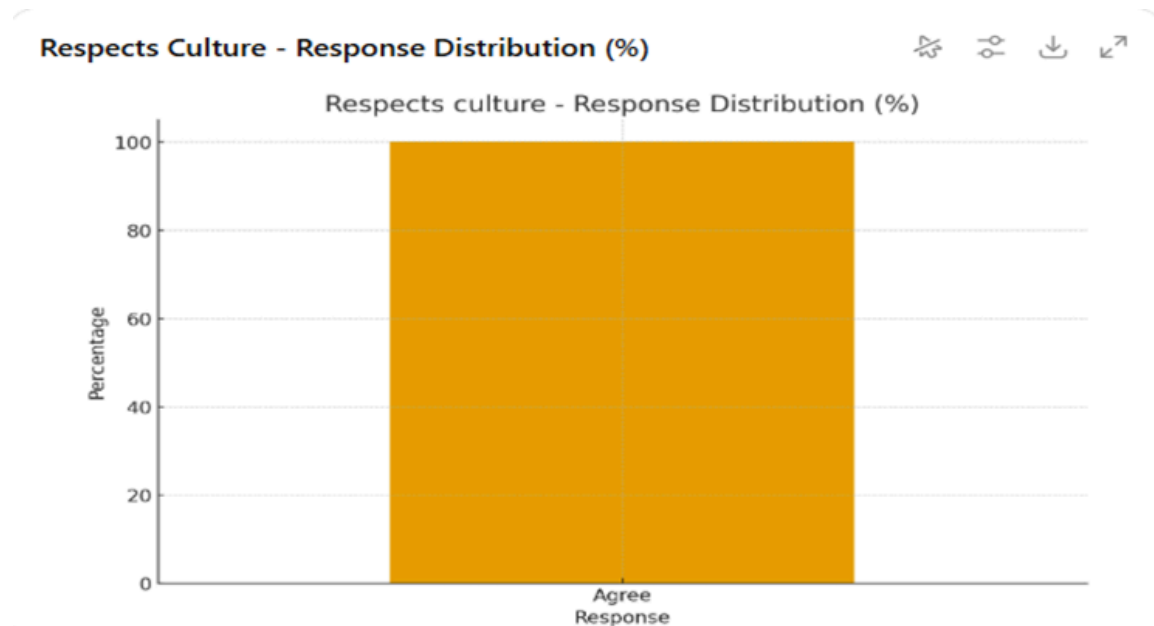
The cafeteria's nutrition and cultural sensitivity were generally well-rated, though a small number of responses showed disagreement, indicating room for improvement in food services.



5. Cultural Respect & Community Perception

Parents unanimously agreed (100%) that the school respects them and their culture. This is a significant strength and an important reflection of Higher Ground Academy’s values.

Nearly 90% of parents would recommend the school to others, but 10% would not. The administration believes addressing the concerns in food services, transportation, and responsiveness could help bring this percentage even higher.



Conclusion

Overall, parent/guardian satisfaction with Higher Ground Academy is very high, with consistent ratings of

“Agree” or “Strongly Agree.” The school is perceived as welcoming, safe, respectful, and academically supportive. While services such as the cafeteria and communication responsiveness should be enhanced, the overall results reflect a strong, positive relationship between families and the school.

Student Survey Report

Overview

An online, voluntary, and non-random student satisfaction survey was administered toward the end of the 2024–2025 school year. A total of 118 students, representing 27% of the student body, participated in the survey, which explored their overall school experience. The survey questions addressed key areas such as school climate, safety, mental health, teaching quality, academic motivation, and preparation for the future. Responses were recorded on a Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*.

The results highlight a combination of strengths and areas for growth. While many students reported feeling welcome, safe, and supported by their teachers, concerns emerged around school enjoyment, mental health support, and bullying.

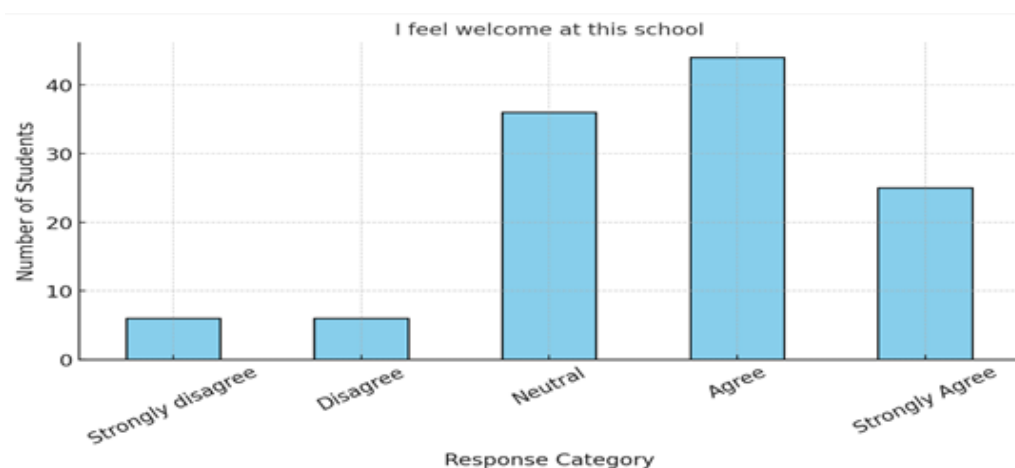
Note: The graphs in this section are AI generated.

Key Findings

1. Sense of Belonging

A strong sense of belonging is essential for student well-being, motivation, and academic success. In this survey, 70 students (59%) reported that they feel welcome at school, either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. This majority suggests that the school has built a generally positive and inclusive environment for many students.

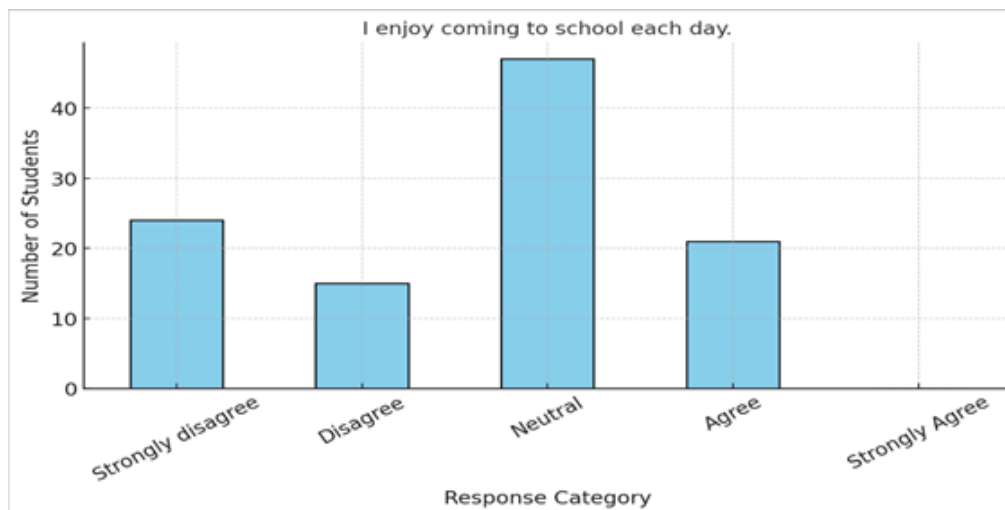
However, 12 students (10%) disagreed, indicating that a notable minority do not feel fully included in the school community. Additionally, a significant proportion of respondents selected *Neutral*, which may reflect uncertainty, inconsistency in their experiences, or a lack of strong connections.



2. Enjoyment of School

Enjoyment of school is closely tied to student engagement, attendance, and overall learning outcomes. In the survey, only 21 students (18%) agreed that they enjoy coming to school each day. This relatively low percentage suggests that for many, school is not viewed as a positive or motivating experience.

At the same time, 39 students (33%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, highlighting a significant portion of the student body that may struggle with motivation, enthusiasm, or satisfaction in their daily school experience. The remaining students selected *Neutral*, which could indicate indifference or that their feelings about school vary depending on the day or circumstances.

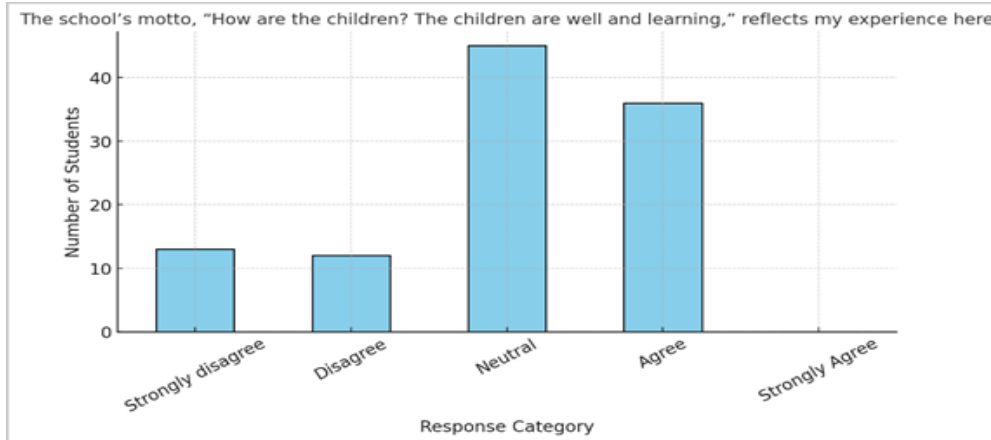


These results highlight the need for strategies that enhance student engagement and make daily school life more enjoyable. In the 2025–26 school year, HGA will explore approaches such as expanding extracurricular opportunities, incorporating more interactive and project-based learning, and elevating student voice in decision-making. These efforts aim to foster a stronger sense of purpose and greater enjoyment in attending school.

3. Alignment with School Motto

The school’s motto, “*How are the children? The children are well and learning,*” is intended to reflect a culture of care, well-being, and academic growth. When asked whether this motto reflects their lived experience at school, students offered mixed responses. A total of 36 students (31%) agreed that the motto aligns with their reality, while 12 students (10%) disagreed. The largest group, however, consisted of 45 students (38%) who responded neutrally.

This distribution suggests that while a portion of students feel the motto is meaningful and accurate, many are uncertain or do not strongly connect with it. The high number of neutral responses may reflect that students see the motto as aspirational but not consistently demonstrated in their daily experiences.

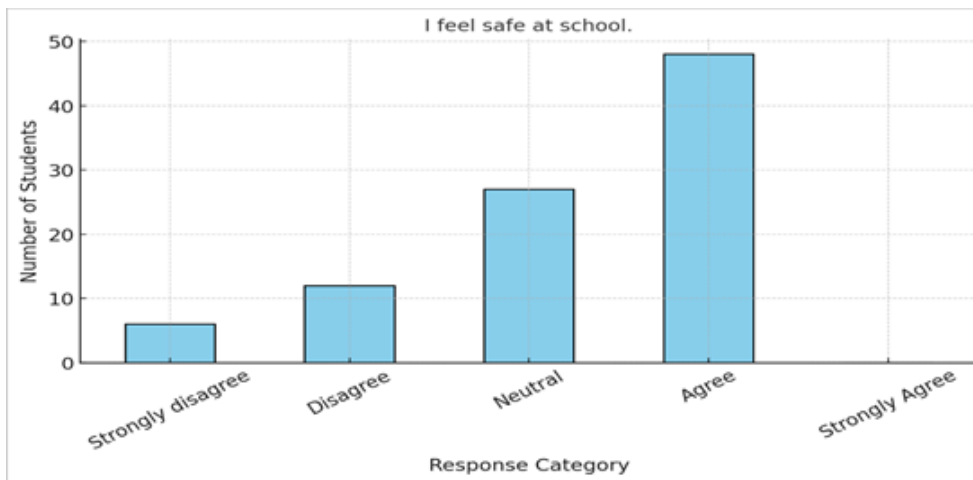


4. Safety & Bullying

A safe school environment is foundational for student learning and well-being. In this survey, 48 students (41%) reported that they feel safe at school, reflecting a positive perception among nearly half of respondents. However, 18 students (15%) expressed disagreement, signaling that for a significant minority, feelings of safety are not always present. The remaining responses fell into the *Neutral* category, suggesting that some students may feel safe in certain contexts but not in others, or may be unsure about how to evaluate their sense of security.

When asked specifically about bullying, the results revealed greater concern. Only 31 students (26%) agreed that bullying is not a problem at their school. A nearly equal number, 34 students (29%), disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating that they view bullying as a real issue. Another 34 students (29%) responded neutrally, which may suggest either limited personal experience with bullying or reluctance to take a position on a sensitive topic.

Taken together, these findings highlight that while a portion of students feel adequately safe, bullying remains a significant challenge that undermines the overall school climate. To address this concern, HGA will strengthen the implementation of its anti-bullying policies, expand peer support initiatives, and establish more accessible reporting mechanisms. These efforts aim to ensure that all students feel secure, respected, and protected in their learning environment.

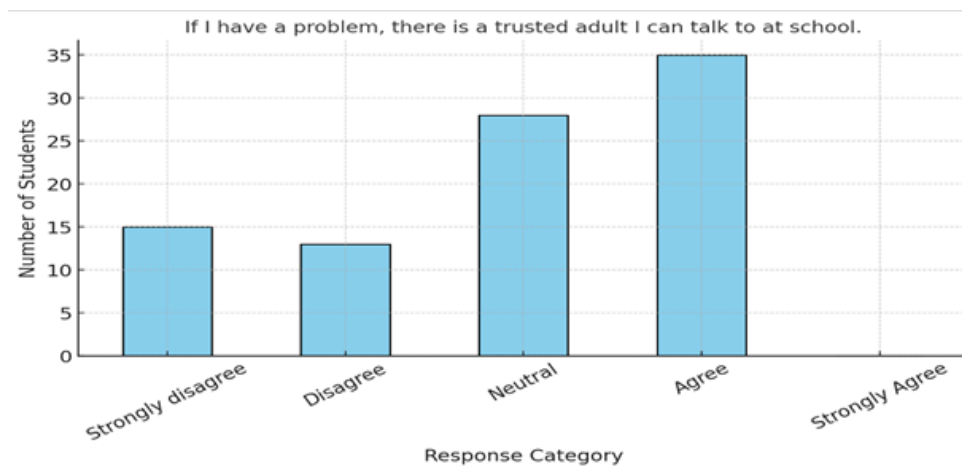


5. Trusted Adults & Support

Having trusted adults in school and access to emotional support are critical factors in student well-being. In this survey, 35 students (30%) agreed that they have a trusted adult to talk to when facing a problem. However, 28 students (24%) disagreed, and another 28 students (24%) responded neutrally, suggesting that a considerable number of students either lack such connections or are uncertain about who they can turn to for support.

When asked about mental and emotional well-being, only 26 students (22%) agreed that the school supports them effectively. By contrast, 31 students (26%) disagreed, while the largest group, 43 students (36%), selected *Neutral*. This pattern indicates that many students may not feel consistently supported in this area, or may not be fully aware of the resources available to them.

Taken together, these findings reveal gaps in student trust and support systems. Addressing these concerns will require building stronger student–adult relationships, expanding mental health services, and promoting awareness of the resources available so that all students feel cared for and supported.



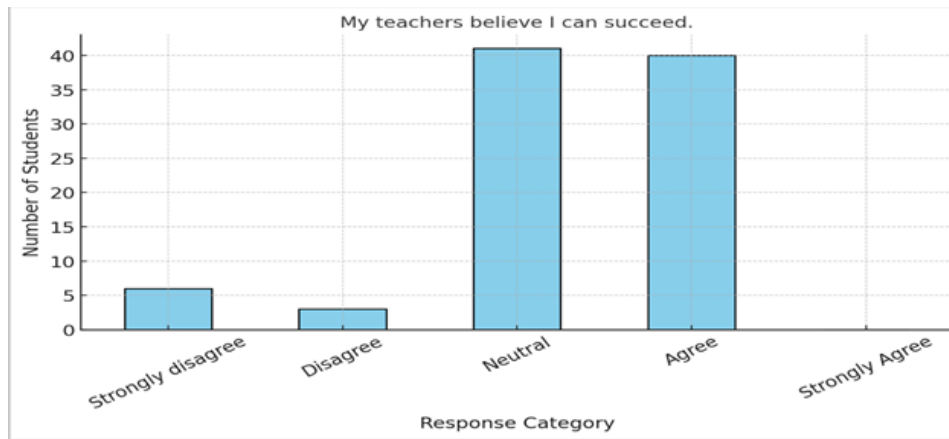
6. Teacher Beliefs and Academic Motivation

Teacher expectations and the level of academic challenge play a central role in shaping student confidence and motivation. In this survey, 40 students (34%) agreed that their teachers believe they can succeed, a sign that a decent proportion of the students feel supported and encouraged in their learning. However, an equally large portion of students, 41 (35%), responded *Neutral*, suggesting that a significant number are uncertain about whether their teachers consistently communicate high expectations or confidence in their abilities. Additionally, about 9% disagreed, indicating that some students do not feel their potential is fully recognized.

When asked whether they feel challenged and motivated by their schoolwork, the responses were notably split. 39 students (33%) agreed that their work pushes them to grow and stay engaged, while 31% remained neutral and another 31% disagreed. This balanced distribution points to a divide in how students experience their coursework — with some finding it stimulating, and others viewing it as either unchallenging or disengaging.

These results underscore the need for strategies that strengthen student engagement and make daily school life more enjoyable. In the 2025–26 school year, HGA will pursue initiatives such as expanding

extracurricular opportunities, incorporating more interactive and project-based learning, and elevating student voice in decision-making. Together, these efforts will likely foster a stronger sense of purpose and greater enjoyment in attending school.

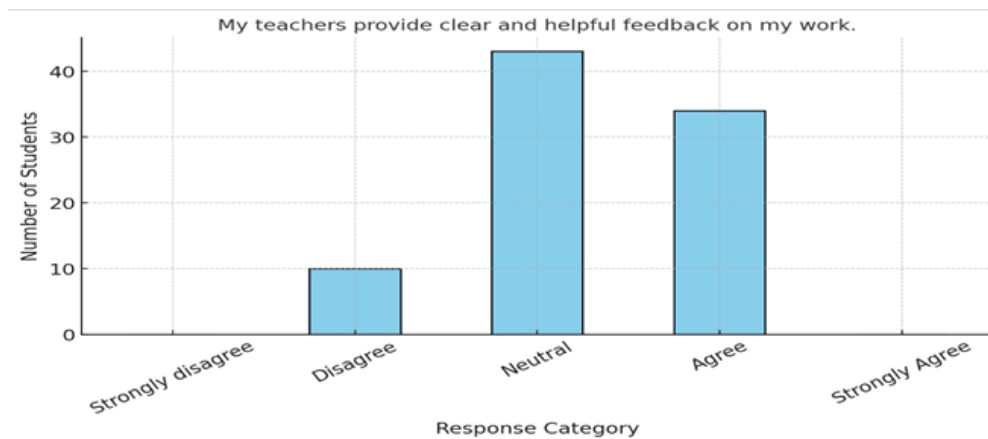


7. Instructional Feedback

Clear and constructive feedback is essential for student growth, as it helps learners understand their strengths, identify areas for improvement, and stay motivated. In this survey, 34 students (29%) agreed that their teachers provide feedback that is clear and helpful. This indicates that nearly one-third of students feel positively about the guidance they receive from their teachers.

However, the largest group, 43 students (36%), selected *Neutral*. This suggests that many students may not consistently perceive feedback as effective, specific, or actionable. It may also reflect that feedback practices vary widely across classrooms, with some teachers providing more meaningful guidance than others.

The presence of such a large neutral group highlights an opportunity for growth. Moving forward, HGA will work to make feedback more consistent, timely, and personalized so that students clearly understand how to progress in their learning. Targeted training and professional development in effective feedback strategies will further strengthen this area, helping to build a culture where feedback is consistently viewed as both supportive and valuable.

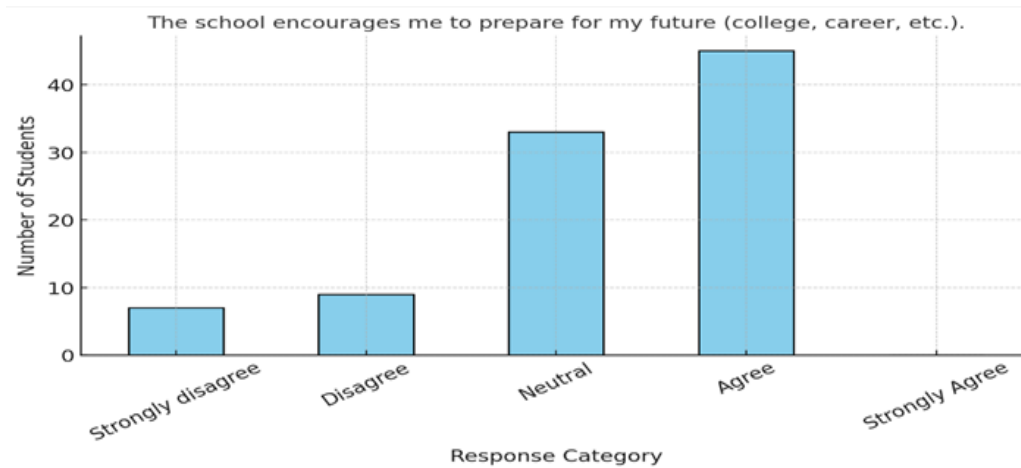


8. Preparation for the Future

Readiness for college, careers, and life beyond school is a critical outcome of secondary education. In this survey, 45 students (38%) reported that they feel their school is preparing them for future opportunities. This encouraging result suggests that many students recognize and value the efforts being made to equip them with the knowledge, skills, and experiences needed for success after graduation.

However, 16 students (14%) disagreed, indicating that some do not feel adequately supported in their preparation for what lies ahead. The remaining respondents fell into the *Neutral* category, suggesting uncertainty or mixed experiences with college and career readiness programs.

These findings point to both progress and room for growth. Moving into the 2025–26 school year, HGA will build on its existing efforts by further expanding career exploration activities, increasing exposure to college pathways, and providing more individualized guidance to help students connect their current learning to long-term goals. By strengthening these initiatives, HGA will ensure that every student sees a clear pathway from school to future opportunities, fostering greater confidence and motivation for life after graduation.

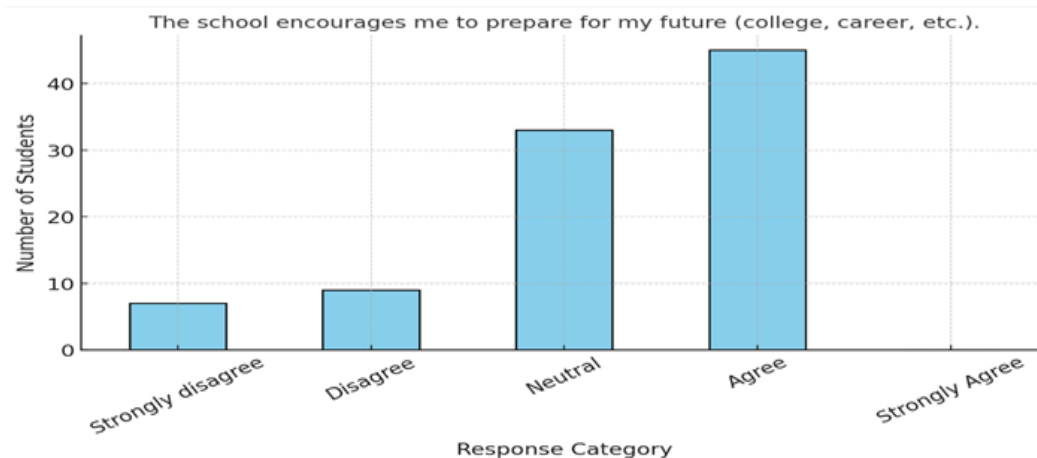


9. Resources

Access to resources such as books, technology, and other learning tools plays a vital role in ensuring that students can succeed academically. In this survey, 41 students (35%) agreed that they have the necessary resources to support their learning. This indicates that many students feel adequately equipped to meet classroom expectations and engage with their coursework.

However, 11 students (9%) disagreed, suggesting that not all students have or believe they have consistent access to the tools they need. Additionally, a considerable portion of students responded *Neutral*, which may reflect variability in resource availability across subjects, grade levels, or personal circumstances.

Addressing these disparities, whether real or imagined, is critical to ensuring that every student has an equal opportunity to succeed. Regular audits of resource distribution, investment in up-to-date technology, and targeted support for students who lack essential materials can help close these gaps and strengthen overall equity in the learning environment.



In summary, the 2024–25 student survey highlights both strengths and opportunities for growth within HGA. While many students feel welcome, supported by their teachers, and adequately resourced, notable gaps remain in areas such as emotional well-being, daily motivation, safety, and bullying. Neutral responses across several categories suggest that student experiences are inconsistent, with some thriving while others struggle to feel fully engaged or supported. Moving forward, HGA is committed to building on its existing foundation by strengthening student engagement, expanding mental health and safety supports, improving the consistency of teacher feedback, and ensuring equitable access to resources. By addressing these priorities, the school aims to foster a more positive, inclusive, and motivating environment where all students can thrive academically and personally.

11. Environmental Education

The mission of Higher Ground Academy’s authorizer, the Osprey Wilds Environmental Learning Center, is to instill a connection and commitment to the environment in people of all communities through experiential learning. Osprey Wilds defines environmental education as the implementation of values and strategies that foster learning and create environmentally literate people who engage in creating healthy outcomes for individuals, communities, and the Earth. The overarching goal of environmental education is an environmentally literate community. The test of environmental literacy is the capacity of an individual to work individually and collectively toward sustaining a healthy natural environment. This requires sufficient awareness, knowledge, skills, and attitudes in order to create a healthy planet where all people live in balance with the Earth.

HGA integrates environmental education into its academic program as part of its mission to prepare students for both civic readiness and lifelong learning. The school’s approach emphasizes environmental literacy, hands-on experiences, and culturally relevant connections to students’ lives. HGA recognizes that many of its students come from immigrant and refugee communities, where ties to land, agriculture, and resource use are integral to daily living. By incorporating environmental education into its curriculum, the school builds upon these cultural strengths while preparing students to think critically about sustainability in a global context.

The environmental education program focuses on three major areas: classroom integration, experiential learning, and community engagement. In the classroom, environmental concepts are woven into science, social studies, and even language arts lessons through project-based learning and cross-disciplinary units. For example, students explore water cycles and conservation in science, study global climate change and its impact on migration in social studies, and write reflective essays on environmental themes in language

arts. Teachers use inquiry-based strategies and technology to encourage students to analyze environmental data, debate real-world challenges, and propose solutions.

Experiential learning is a key strength of the program. Students participate in school garden projects, recycling initiatives, a food-to-farm program, and field trips to local parks, science centers, and environmental organizations. These experiences reinforce classroom concepts while helping students see how environmental issues affect their own community. HGA measures student progress toward environmental literacy through performance-based assessments, student portfolios, and project presentations that require students to apply what they have learned to real-world scenarios. In surveys and reflections, students increasingly demonstrate awareness of environmental challenges and articulate actions they can take at school and at home to reduce waste, conserve resources, and promote sustainability.

The school's successes in the past year include expanding its school garden program, which not only teaches science and sustainability but also provides opportunities for students to connect their cultural traditions around food and agriculture with local environmental practices. Parent volunteers have supported these initiatives, further strengthening the school-community connection.

A few challenges remain, particularly around resources, with urban space constraints being one of the most significant barriers to expanding outdoor projects. Despite these limitations, HGA has made environmental education both relevant and meaningful by grounding it in the school's mission and community values. By connecting environmental learning to students' lived experiences and cultural identities, HGA continues to foster environmental literacy and empower students to see themselves as stewards of their community and the wider world.

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

Name	Board Position	Affiliation**	Most current Date Elected	Most current Date Seated	Term End Date	Email Address
Dan McGrath	Chair	Community Member	5/16/2023	7/1/2023	6/30/2026	dan@hgacademy.org
Denise Tousaint	Treasurer	Community Member	5/20/2025	7/1/2025	6/30/2028	denise@hgacademy.org
Mary Tate	Member	Community Member	5/21/2024	7/1/2024	6/30/2027	maryt@hgacademy.org
Brian Swerine	Secretary	Community Member	5/20/2025	7/1/2025	6/30/2028	brians@hgacademy.org
Liban Ahmed	Member	Teacher	5/21/2024	7/1/2024	6/30/2027	libana@hgacademy.org
Shannon Tanghe	Member	Community Member	5/16/2023	7/1/2023	6/30/2026	shannont@hgacMember ademy.org
Abdiwali Guled	Member	Parent	5/20/2025	7/1/2025	7/30/2028	g_abdi@hotmail.com
Samuel Yigzaw	Ex-Officio	Ex-Officio	N/A	N/A	N/A	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				
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
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

Although the board engaged in discussions regarding its performance during several meetings, it did not complete a formal self-assessment in FY25.

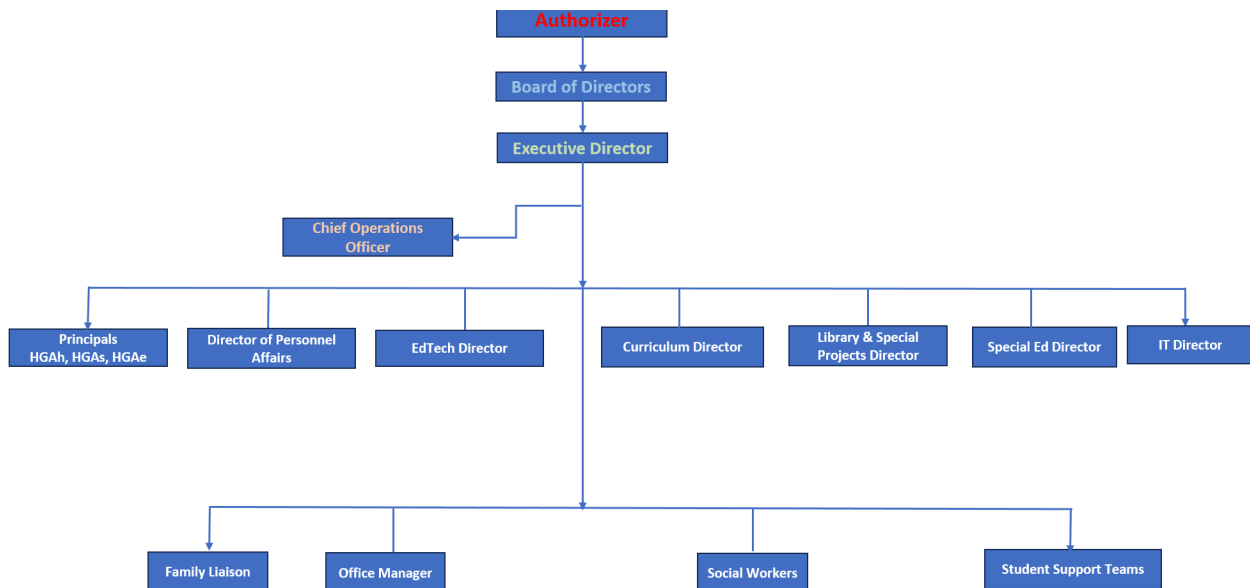
Management

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 another five-year 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 Middle School Academy (HGMSA), and HGA Secondary Academy (HGSA). HGEA and HGMSA share the Marshall Avenue campus, while HGSA operates from the Brewster Avenue campus. Enrollment has steadily grown from nearly 1,000 students in FY20 to more than 1,200 in FY25, with a substantial waitlist maintained each year. To meet this demand, HGA plans to relocate HGMSA to a new facility in fall FY26. At that time, a new middle school principal will be hired; currently, the Executive Director is also serving in that capacity.

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

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
Read Act Training	9/24 - 5/25	60
		Total Hours: 60

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 deeply committed to ensuring that every student, at every grade level, is taught by a “highly qualified” teacher. At HGA, “highly qualified” means more than holding the appropriate licensure for the grade or subject taught. It encompasses at least three years of effective classroom experience, demonstrated cultural competence, and a genuine commitment to the welfare of students. This holistic definition reflects the school’s mission and vision: to prepare students for academic success while nurturing their personal growth in a culturally responsive and inclusive environment.

Recruitment and retention efforts are centered on attracting teachers who are not only grounded in current pedagogical approaches but also adept at integrating technology into instruction to enhance learning. Equally important, HGA seeks educators who bring care, empathy, and sensitivity to children from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. With over 95% of students coming from immigrant and refugee families, the school views cultural competence as essential to fostering trust, building relationships, and tailoring instruction to students’ needs and lived experiences.

Currently, the great majority of HGA’s teachers meet or exceed the “highly qualified” standard, and those who are still working toward it receive ongoing district support and professional development. Teacher attrition remains a challenge, but progress has been made. In 2024–25, the attrition rate declined to 6.5%, a significant improvement compared to the previous year’s 11%. Departures were attributed to a mix of factors, including moves to suburban districts, career changes, personal health, and retirement. While this turnover reflects broader statewide and national trends, HGA remains proactive—continuing to invest in teacher development and implementing strategies to strengthen retention.

Despite the challenges of competing with traditional districts and other charters, HGA remains steadfast in its belief that staffing is mission-driven work. The school’s leadership holds that only when every classroom is led by a highly qualified, culturally competent, and mission-aligned teacher will HGA be true to its purpose. For this reason, recruiting and retaining quality teachers is not viewed as a strategic priority.

Last Name	First Name	File Folder	License and Assignment	SY 25-26 R/N	Comments
Abdullahi	Riad	476320	Math	R	
Adop	Michael	1038665	Grade 6	R	
Ahmed	Abdirahman	515225	World Language	R	
Ahmed	Omar	451277	World Language	R	
Ahmed	Liban	1002989	Special Education	R	
Ali	Omar	515059	ELL	NR	
Amberong	Apryl	1038662	Social Studies	R	

Andrews	Daniella	1017748	ELA	R	
Ateyah	Suad	516887	Substitute	R	
Atienza	Yves	1030378	Phy-ED	R	
Balke	Keith	509822	Grade 2	R	
Bartolome	Reyjay	1029880	Grade 4	R	
Belotindos	Edlynn	1038659	ELL	R	
Bermudez	John	1038668	Phy-ED	R	
Beyene	Endale	433578	Chemistry	R	
Bontong	Agnes	1038649	Grade 1	R	
Cabugawan	Rosalyn	1038669	Grade 4	R	
Calamcaman	Jeramie	1038653	Phy-ED	R	
Carlson	Kelsey	1000169	ELA/Grade 9	R	
Chapman	Tracy	410411	Title 1	R	
Cordero	Joselito	1038663	Kindergarten	R	
Corn	Jeanette	444063	ELA/Grade8	R	
Dahlen	Kayle	481121	Grade 3	R	
Dereje	Daba	396910	Grade 2	R	
Delmoro	Joyce	1029889	Art (3-5)	R	
Denker	Joseph	463239	Social Studies 11&12	R	
Dubad	Fathiya	1016478	Grade 2	R	
Eisele	Catherine	445546	Social Studies 9	R	
Farah	Wasima	5557775	Art	R	

Faye	Aida	490548	Special Education	R	
Galea	Neil	1038661	ELL 9&10	R	
Geedi	Mohamed	1029982	World Language 3-5	R	
Gross	Broc	506749	ELL 6&7	R	
Gruhn	Heidi	489447	Title 1	R	
Haji	Abdiwali	43434343	Substitute	R	
Ismail	Hamza	1038806	ELA/Grade 7	NR	
Hassan	Fosi	504110	School Counselor	R	
Herer	Abdihalim	1039279	Special Education	R	
Hussein	Awil	1032711	Substitute	R	
Jabagat	Marilyn	1038672	Social Studies	R	
Jama	Mohamed	1008226	Math	R	
Jansen	Bren	1030104	Life Science 9&12	NR	
Kavita	Beilah	1030129	ELA/ Grade 10	R	
Kedir	Abdurezak	443793	Chemistry 11	R	
Lamanna	Pamela	418545	Grade 5	R	
Langala	Odessa	1038650	Kindergarten	R	
Limbo	Ruby	1029864	Science 7	R	
Lumahan	Cristopher	1029885	Grade 3	R	
Mako	Laurie	410554	Elementary Principal	R	
Mangalino	Maria	1038673	Social Sciences 6	R	
Manjarrez-Ra mirea	Alexia	1012330	ELL	R	

Marqueses	Krizzia	1038664	Grade 3	R	
Martin	Mitzi	1029876	Grade 3	R	
McDermott	Jena	1018652	ELL	R	
Meeson	Thomas	497680	ELL	R	
Mohamed	Mohamed Aden	1041204	World Language 10	R	
Mohamed	Mubaarak	1001167	Special Education	R	
Mohamud	Abdulcadir	405305	High School Principal	R	
Murry	Trina	489643	Kindergarten	R	
Mushtaq	Muhammad	1032172	Math 9	NR	
Napoles	Dennis	1030376	Science 8	R	
Narvaez	Doreen	1038674	Kindergarten	R	
Nyakundi	Poline	1038652	Math 7	R	
Omar	Ahmed	451277	Math	R	
Owusu-Yeboah	Kwaku	1038660	Math 10	R	
Pranke	Esther	1004433	Social Studies 7	R	
Quidato	Stanley	1030377	Special Education	R	
Sabang	Shela	1038666	ELL	R	
Saye	Cassandra	486466	Grade 1	R	
Schreurs	Ellie	1018098	Social Sciences 7	R	
Sikuku	Agnes	1038671	Social Sciences	R	
Sontag	Eli	512808	Life Science 9	R	
Solayao	Christian	1029871	Phy-ED	R	

Smith	Victoria	1004390	Grade 1	R	
Spychalla	Aloysious	436880	Phy-ED	R	
Stamply	Destiny	1001913	Grade 5	R	
Richards	Spencer	518676	Phy-ED 7	R	
Tamonan	Marjohn	1029888	Grade 6	R	
Thomas	Johanna	244058	Title 1	NR	
Tkachenko	Neliya	381773	ELL	R	
Tollefson	Jenna	1004348	Reading specialist K-5	R	
Urvig	Andrew	1007210	Grade 5	R	
Vicente	Derose	1038651	Grade 6	R	
Wako	Faisal	414899	Math 11&12	R	
Wallace	Kris	1020477	ELA 8 & 11	NR	
Waters	Sang-Youn	518071	ELL	R	
Yigzaw	Samuel	336710	Admin	R	
Yusuf	Adan	1030139	ELL	R	

2024-25 Teacher Professional Development Activities:

Overview

In Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25), a total of 85 hours of direct, instructor-led professional development (PD) training was provided to staff. Training began prior to the first week of school and continued through the summer session.

Of these 85 hours, 78 qualified toward teacher re-licensure, including 2 hours in Mental Health – Suicide Prevention and Early Warning Signs, a key state re-licensure requirement.

Independent Study and the ReadAct Program

An estimated 2,400 cumulative hours were invested by 55 teachers participating in the ReadAct program, studying the Science of Reading online and independently.

Professional Development Topics

During FY25, teachers and staff engaged in a wide range of learning opportunities focused on:

- Reading instruction and literacy development
- Classroom management and positive behavior management strategies
- Lesson planning and instructional design
- Educational technology integration
- Emergency procedures and school safety

Additionally, 8 hours of mandated training for paraprofessionals were provided, along with annual required trainings for all staff on:

- Blood borne Pathogens
- Mandatory Reporter responsibilities

Mentor-Led Workshop Series

In October, ten experienced mentor teachers and two administrators conducted a two-hour workshop addressing technology tools and instructional techniques most requested by new instructors.

This open-format, conference-style event encouraged collaboration and peer learning. It was well attended and positively received by teachers, highlighting the value of peer-led professional learning.

Reading-Focused Professional Development

Beyond the ReadAct initiative, 19.5 hours of training were devoted to strengthening literacy instruction through the *SuperKids* reading curriculum.

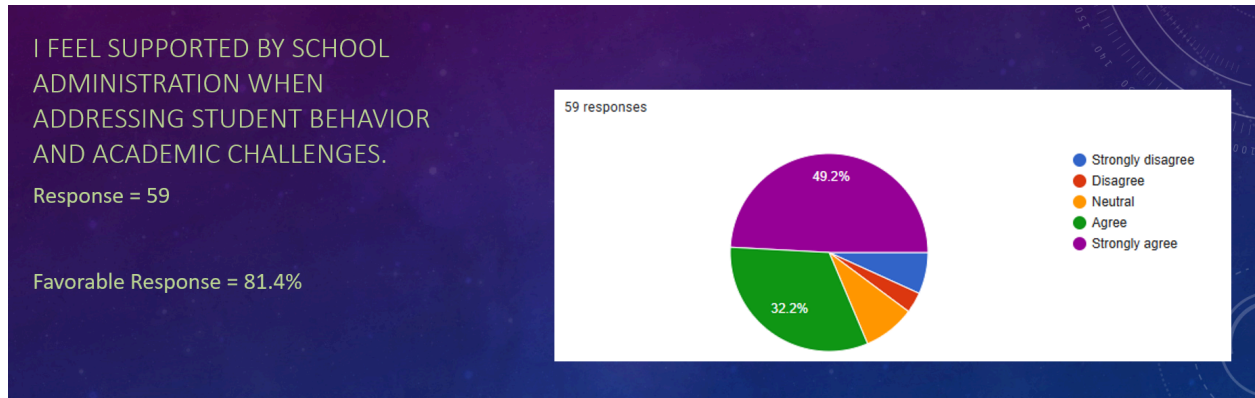
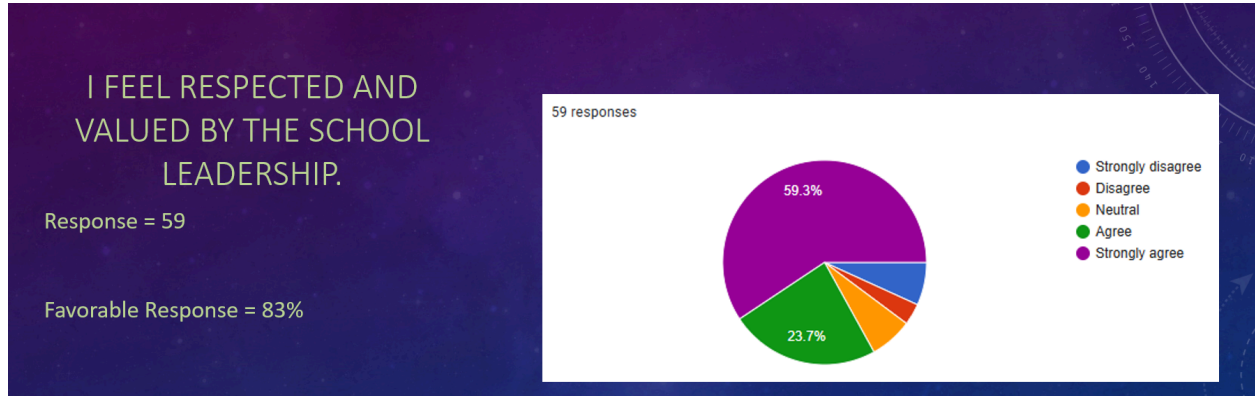
- K–2 teachers participated in 7.5 hours of direct instruction and 12 hours of live classroom observation and feedback.
- Additional sessions focused on WIDA requirements and the Ballard & Tighe curriculum for English Language Learners (ELLs).

Teacher Retention:

In FY24, 11% of HGA's teachers from the previous school year did not return. By contrast, in FY25, that proportion dropped to just 6.5%, a notable decline in attrition at a time when schools across the nation are experiencing record-high teacher turnover. This improvement highlights HGA's growing success in creating a workplace where educators feel valued, supported, and motivated to stay. It also underscores the effectiveness of the school's intentional efforts to make HGA an attractive and rewarding place to build a career in education.

Further evidence of this positive trajectory comes from the teacher satisfaction survey administered in May 2025, where faculty members expressed overall confidence in the school's leadership and appreciation for its support systems. Their responses reflected a strong sense of satisfaction with how the school addresses teacher needs, both professionally and personally. Two key items from the survey, along

with the responses, are included below to illustrate the areas where HGA is excelling in supporting its educators and ensuring that their voices are heard.



Percentage of Licensed Teachers from 2024-25 not returning in 2025-26 (non-returning teachers/total teachers from 2024-25 x 100)	<u>6.5%</u>
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2024-25 Non-Licensed Staff			
Name	Assignment	2025-26 Status*	Comments
Zahra Jama	Social Worker	R	
Fousia Abdulkadir	Nurse Aide	R	
Nasteha Ali	Discipline	R	
Mohamed Mohamed	Receptionist	R	
Hawe Tahiro	Discipline/liaison	R	
Molly McGuire	Teacher Assistant	R	
Fartun Ali	Teacher Assistant	R	
Amina Hassan	Teacher Assistant	R	
Naimo Ali	Teacher Assistant	R	
Ubah Abdi	Teacher Assistant	R	
Sakariya Mohamed	Transportation	R	
Ahmed Ahmed	Lab Technician	R	

2024-25 Non-Licensed Staff			
Omarr Williams	Janitorial	R	
Robert Anderson	Instructional Tech.	R	
Shamsadine Omar	Technology	R	
Brenda Hasan	Librarian	R	
Khadar Ali	Teacher Assistant	NR	
Saleh Saleh	Discipline	R	
Awil Hussein	Teacher Assistant	R	
Idil Abdi	Sp. Ed. Para.	R	
Marian Abdulle	Food service	R	
Suad Ateyah	Substitute teacher	R	
Raz Mohammad Ahmadi	ELL Paraprofessional	R	
Bernadine Anderson	Data manager	R	
Abdirahman Ahmed	Discipline	R	
Ifrah Dirie	Sp. Ed. Para.	R	
Zam Zam Garad	Food Service	R	
Samsam Mohamed	Teacher Assistant	R	
Asha Mohamed	Teacher Assistant	R	
Abdishakur Salad	Teacher Assistant	R	
Mohamed Jimale	Tech. Assistant	R	
Heidi Gruhn	Title I Para.	R	
Idil Hassan Abdi	Sp. Ed. Para	R	
Halimo Hassan	Sp. Ed.	R	
Maxamed Ahmed	Operations Officer	R	
Alice McCastle	Admin. Assist	R	
Aisha Aden	Sp. Ed. Para	R	
Fahima Gedi	Behavior Management	R	
Hashmatullah Dilsooz	ELL Paraprofessional & Family liaison	R	
Ernestine Kemp	Title I	R	
Fatuma Ali	Food service	R	
Nimo Garar	Food service	R	
Zakariyya Kadir	Tech. support	R	
Ifrah Mohamed	Sp. Ed. para	R	
Abubakar Mubarak	Teacher assistant	R	
Khadim Safi	ELL para.	R	
Khadija Warsame	Teacher's aide	R	
Fekadu Wordofa	Maintenance	R	
Salman Mohamed	Discipline	R	
Hawa Egal	Sp. Ed.	R	
Afifa Abdi	Teacher assistant	R	
Salman Mohamed	Teacher assistant	R	
Khalid Khalid	Sp. Ed. para	NR	
Kassim Tilmo	Dean of students	R	
Kafia Mohamed	Discipline	NR	
Faduma Mohamed	Food service	R	
Abdikafi Ahmed	Special Ed. Para	NR	
Johnnie McCalister	Nurse's aide	NR	

2024-25 Non-Licensed Staff			
Yvette Vinson	Food service	R	
Discipline	Receptionist	R	
An-Her Ankhu-Ra	Security	R	
Hinda Gure	Security	R	
Sheikh Abdirahman Ahmed	Family Liaison	R	
Ahadu Tesfaye	Social worker	R	
Fartun Mohamed	Teacher's aide	NR	
Sumeya Ali	Student support	R	
Maryan Hassan	Discipline	R	
Thomas Meeson	ELL para	R	
Rihla Rihla	Sped. Paraprofessional	R	
Huda Abdullahi	Social worker	R	
Hawa Munye	Food service	R	
Zamzam Yusuf	Janitorial	R	
Mohamed Farah	Sp. Ed. para	NR	

* R = Returning, NR = Not Returning

14. Operational Performance

In FY25, Higher Ground Academy underwent a comprehensive evaluation of its academic performance, student outcomes, organizational effectiveness, and alignment with contractual and state accountability standards. The findings reveal a school that has made measurable gains in key areas while also facing some challenges tied to mobility, attendance, and achievement gaps.

Financial Management

Higher Ground Academy concluded FY25 in strong financial health, meeting all indicators of both short- and long-term stability. The school reported total revenues of \$19.4 million and expenditures of \$18.5 million, resulting in a net income of \$710,349. The total fund balance grew to \$13.7 million, underscoring the impact of conservative budgeting and disciplined financial management. Enrollment growth continues to be a key driver of financial stability, with accurate projections supporting balanced budgets, though the middle school facility is nearing capacity and will require future planning.

Financial reporting practices also showed improvement in FY25, with board meeting minutes now documenting key financial metrics. According to the school's FY25 evaluation by its authorizer, however, minor gaps remain—notably, the Finance Committee still does not record minutes. Even so, the evaluation highlighted increasing board engagement in fiscal oversight, a positive development that strengthens accountability and reinforces long-term stability.

Food Service

In FY23, Minnesota enacted a statute ensuring that all students, regardless of family income, receive free meals on every school day. Higher Ground Academy (HGA) takes pride in having provided this benefit long before the state mandate. Since its founding, HGA has offered free meals to all enrolled students, even though each year more than 95% of its student body qualifies for free or reduced-price meals under federal guidelines.

HGA contracts with Saint Paul Restaurants and Catering (SPRC) to provide food service. The reporting year marked the third year of this partnership. For many years prior, CKC Good Foods served as the school’s food service vendor; however, in FY22, CKC lost the contract to SPRC through a publicly advertised competitive bidding process. SPRC’s contract is structured as a one-year agreement, with the option to renew annually for up to four additional years.

HGA is committed to ensuring that meals align with students’ religious and cultural needs as well as the school’s wellness policy. Balancing these requirements with the need to offer meals that students find appealing can be challenging. At times, this tension has resulted in lower student participation in the meal program on certain days, as some students opt not to eat the provided meals.

Student Transportation

In FY25, HGA entered into a new five-year contract with Pride Transportation. In keeping with its procurement policy, the Academy issued Requests for Proposals (RFPs) in May 2024, intentionally asking vendors to submit two separate bids—one for buses and another for vans. This approach recognized that while relatively few companies provide full bus service, a larger number specialize in van transport. A total of thirteen companies submitted proposals, though only three expressed interest in providing bus services.

The RFP process was conducted transparently, with bids opened in public in the presence of a school board member and HGA’s business manager. Following the review, Pride Transportation was awarded the bus contract, while Dire Dawa Transport secured the van contract. Under the new agreements, HGA paid \$275 per bus per day and \$135 per van per day during the 2024–25 school year.

Transportation is a critical service for HGA families, as nearly all students rely on it to travel to and from school each day. Recognizing this, the parent survey included questions designed to capture families’ perspectives on transportation. While many parents expressed appreciation for the availability of both bus and van options, concerns were raised regarding timeliness, route efficiency, and communication. Nearly one in three parents reported that delayed buses occasionally interfered with their ability to get to work on time. Others noted that while van service was convenient for younger students, it sometimes lacked consistency in pick-up and drop-off. At the same time, many parents emphasized that transportation remains a vital support, making HGA accessible to families across a wide geographic area.

These survey insights underscore the importance of HGA’s decision to diversify transportation providers. In FY26, HGA will actively respond to parent feedback and work to improve the quality and dependability of transportation. HGA supports its Climate & Culture priority, fostering a school environment where families feel their needs are valued and addressed. In this way, HGA demonstrates how operational decisions can directly strengthen student and family experience while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

Parent Awareness and Engagement

At Higher Ground Academy (HGA), the guiding motto—“*How are the children? The children are well and learning*”—captures the belief that student well-being and success are sustained through strong collaboration between educators and families. The school fosters this partnership by ensuring parents are both informed and engaged. Regular parent meetings, open houses, conference nights, newsletters, and frequent text and audio updates create consistent channels of communication. Parents are also encouraged to volunteer as field trip chaperones, classroom aides, or ambassadors for the school. These opportunities have translated into high participation at parent nights and conferences, as well as consistently strong levels of satisfaction with the school’s operations.

Recognizing the importance of cultural responsiveness, HGA makes a deliberate effort to reach out to families from diverse communities, particularly those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. In FY24, the school established a dedicated marketing department staffed with individuals from diverse cultural groups. This department plays a central role in broadening access to the school by translating documents into multiple languages, attending cultural and community celebrations, and meeting directly with leaders and prospective families. These intentional strategies have had a clear impact: the proportion of students identifying as Asian and Caucasian grew from less than 1% in FY23 to about 18% in FY25, demonstrating that HGA’s inclusive outreach is helping the school reach a broader cross-section of the community.

While parental engagement is strong in many areas—particularly in field trip chaperoning and conference attendance—barriers remain that limit classroom involvement. Many HGA parents face challenges such as limited formal education or demanding work schedules that leave little time for volunteering during the school day. Despite these constraints, HGA continues to emphasize parental awareness and inclusion as a cornerstone of its culture. By combining strong communication practices with intentional community outreach, the school ensures that families not only feel valued but also see themselves reflected in the life of the school. This approach strengthens trust, enriches the student experience, and affirms the school’s mission to ensure that all children are truly well and learning.

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.

FY25 Finances	Fund 1	Fund 2	Fund 4
Total Revenues	19,396,336	1,195,640	0
Total Expenditures	18,492,538	1,195,640	0
Net Income	710,349	0	0

Total Fund Balance	13,746,876	0	0
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Overview

Enrollment for Fiscal Year 2025 remained strong at 1,135 (compared to a budget of 1,143). For the past several years, the enrollment of the Academy has steadily increased proving a strong demand for the program. The Fund Balance remains at a strong level near 70% due to the strong demand for the program and increasing enrollment. There is no current plan to utilize a line of credit to sustain cash flow for the operations of the organization.

Revenues

Revenue targets maintained budgeted levels throughout Fiscal Year 2025. Final calculations for federal revenues will be made as the audit approaches; however, overall figures anticipate nearly meeting all revenue targets for Fund 01, and Fund 02. The main drivers and key sources of revenue for Higher Ground Academy include State Aids (largest area being General Education), as well as support in the Food Service Program for meals for students.

Expenses

Overall expenditures in FY25 were slightly less than targeted figures due to conservative budgeting practices of the Academy. Overall expenditures in Fund 01 were roughly 95.6% of budget, whereas Fund 02 expenditures nearly met budget estimates of 99.1%. The Academy has traditionally taken a conservative approach to the budget, which has allowed expenditure to come in slightly less than targeted figures. The largest areas for expenditures in FY25 for the Academy included Staffing (salaries/benefits), as well as transportation costs roughly 2 Million. Despite these large budget categories, the Academy continues to maintain healthy balances.

Net Surplus or Deficit and Fund Balance

It is anticipated that the Academy will maintain a health fund balance of \$13 Million after FY25 results. The academy anticipates maintaining these balances in future years as well. The FY25 anticipated surplus is near \$700,000.

Comprehensive Achievement and Civic Readiness Annual Budget

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

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

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

16. Future Plans

Based on the current demand for its programs, HGA is planning to expand in the FY26–27 school year. The Academy is actively exploring facilities that meet its needs and anticipates signing a lease agreement in the near future.

HGA is also considering the launch of a pre-kindergarten program in 2027–28, responding to strong interest from families eager to enroll their four-year-old children. While the Academy’s policy currently allows for the early admission of four-year-olds into kindergarten under certain conditions, teachers have observed that many of these students struggle to make the same progress as their five-year-old peers. For this reason, staff recommend establishing a pre-kindergarten option to better support early learners and provide an alternative pathway for families seeking early admission.

In addition, with the continued growth of new charter schools, competition for student enrollment has become increasingly intense. HGA believes that offering expanded services such as pre-kindergarten will not only meet the needs of families but also strengthen the school’s competitiveness in an evolving educational landscape.