

STUDENT & PARENT HANDBOOK



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HIGHER GROUND ACADEMY

Higher Ground Academy (HGA) opened its doors on September 7, 1999, with a mission to provide a high-quality, college-preparatory education to a diverse student body. Located in Saint Paul, Minnesota, HGA has grown into a multi-campus K-12 charter school system, serving approximately 1,200 students across its elementary, middle, and high school programs.

HGA remains committed to offering innovative, comprehensive, and culturally responsive programs that support students, families, and the broader community. Central to the Academy's mission is the preparation of students for post-secondary success — whether through four-year universities, community colleges, or technical and vocational programs. HGA's College and Career Readiness initiatives include career exploration, professional shadowing opportunities, access to Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO), and scholarship guidance, ensuring students are exposed to a broad range of academic and career pathways. Recognizing the demands of a technology-driven world, Higher Ground Academy integrates technology-rich instruction across all grade levels. Classrooms are equipped with interactive technology, and students have regular access to personal devices and digital learning platforms. In addition to strong foundational instruction in reading, mathematics, science, and social studies, the Academy emphasizes 21st-century skills — including digital literacy, research, and communication — to prepare students for success in both higher education and the workforce.

FOUNDING PRINCIPLES

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

Higher Ground Academy's mission is to create a socially committed, morally responsible, and ethnically diverse learning environment that values students individually and collectively. The goal is to encourage maximum intellectual and leadership development in students through exposure to a comprehensive academic oriented curriculum that is enhanced both by the philosophy and learning approaches of the Efficacy Development Model and by extensive experiential community service-learning opportunities. To this end, students graduating from the Higher Ground Academy will meet 21st century standards of education, be adequately prepared to pursue post-secondary and post-baccalaureate studies, and be capable of assuming leadership roles in their communities and respective fields of endeavor.

C. PURPOSE OF THE ACADEMY

The Academy's philosophy that becoming 'smart' is a lifelong process based on technique and is a learnable, teachable process of development which resides in confidence and productive effort that, in turn, results in effective development. Based on this belief, the Academy will promote positive student self-esteem and thereby develop their capacity and desire to commit to learning, through both curriculum components and parental support. The Academy will help children understand that through hard work and effective expenditure of effort they can 'get smart', thereby placing the child in control - the decision about becoming smart is now in his or her own hands. Children are empowered and motivated by the realization that they can choose to "get smart and stay smart" and many armed with this knowledge will choose to stay in school. Research has shown that when teachers set high expectations for students they get high results and when they set low expectations they get low results. Efficacy principles require that teachers set very high expectations for all students and that these expectations be communicated and shared with the students. Students are taught

that: “If you believe in yourself, if you think you can, then you will be able to work hard at what you are trying to learn. And if you really work and don’t give up - you will learn. You will get smart.”

“Smart is not just something that you are, smart is something you can get.”

And to ensure that the students of the Higher Ground Academy do indeed “get it” there is a highly motivated, skilled, and capable support system, which is poised to implement an innovative, unique, and challenging academic program.

IMPORTANT!

Nondiscrimination Statement

Higher Ground Academy complies with all applicable federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination. No person shall, on the basis of race, color, national origin, ethnic origin, sex, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, or age, be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination in any educational program, employment, or activity operated by the school. This policy applies to admissions, employment, recruitment, and selection for both part-time and full-time positions, except as permitted by law.

ACADEMIC PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Curriculum and Instruction

Higher Ground Academy’s curriculum is designed to engage students in their learning through an integrated “learning-by-doing” approach that combines direct instruction, academic coaching, and a comprehensive online curriculum aligned with the Minnesota Graduation Standards.

Academic Core Courses are taught by licensed teachers with the support of trained paraprofessionals. The curriculum is student-centered, flexible, and focused on core subjects—language arts, mathematics, social studies, natural sciences, and technology. In addition, students participate in courses such as physical education and fitness, world languages, the arts, and career exploration.

Students in upper grades may choose to enroll in Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) at local colleges and universities. Advanced Placement (AP) courses are also offered for students seeking academic rigor.

Homework and Academic Practice

Homework is regularly assigned and must be completed and submitted as part of the course grade. Students are encouraged to review and practice their coursework at least four days per week, setting aside regular study time in a quiet environment free from distractions. Research consistently shows that students who complete homework regularly are more engaged in class and perform better academically.

THE HIGHER GROUND ACADEMY’S SUCCESS

Higher Ground Academy offers a comprehensive, college-preparatory program designed to enhance student achievement and readiness for post-secondary success. The Academy delivers a rigorous academic curriculum that meets — and often exceeds — Minnesota Graduation Standards.

Our success in raising student achievement is rooted in the instructional approaches we employ. These approaches are guided by the Efficacy Principles of Teaching, developed by the Massachusetts-based nonprofit Efficacy Institute. These principles are grounded in the belief that intelligence is not fixed or predetermined but can be developed through effective effort, persistence, and the right support.

At Higher Ground Academy, we believe all students can achieve at high levels when they:

- Embrace a growth mindset regarding their capacity to learn,
- Build confidence through sustained academic success, and
- Commit to continuous effort and improvement.

This philosophy shapes both our academic programming and our school culture. With this approach, Higher Ground Academy has earned recognition as one of Minnesota’s leading comprehensive charter schools — a testament to the potential of all students when high expectations are combined with strong support and effective instruction.

SUPPORT PROGRAMS

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION OPTIONS (PSEO): Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) at Higher Ground Academy.

Higher Ground Academy encourages 11th and 12th grade students to participate in Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) courses. The PSEO program allows eligible high school juniors and seniors to earn credits that count toward both high school graduation and post-secondary academic programs.

HGA strongly recommends that first-time PSEO students in their first semester of 11th grade enroll in only one PSEO course. Beginning in their second PSEO semester, students may take additional courses each semester, provided they maintain a “B” or better in all PSEO courses and a minimum 2.75 GPA in their HGA courses.

Students must consult with the school counselor before registering for any PSEO courses.

Important: Students are required to enroll in at least one HGA course per semester to maintain active enrollment status at Higher Ground Academy.

AFTER SCHOOL TUTORIAL

Student Support and Intervention Program: Higher Ground Academy closely monitors student progress in the core areas of reading, language arts, and mathematics, recognizing that effective learning in these subjects is foundational to success in all other academic areas.

Students who earn an “F” in any quarter will be required to participate in the Academy’s after-school tutorial program. Additionally, students who are at risk of earning a failing grade may also be referred for after-school support. Attendance at these tutorials is mandatory for all identified students. Absence from a tutorial session will be treated the same as missing a regular class during the school day.

If a student consistently attends the after-school tutorials for an entire quarter and raises their grade to a “D” or higher, they will no longer be required to attend, provided they maintain passing grades in subsequent quarters.

To support this effort, Higher Ground Academy contracts with **Grade Power**, a private provider specializing in academic support services. Each year, between sixty and sixty-five students in grades 2 through 8 receive targeted tutoring from Grade Power tutors.

In addition to after-school tutorials, Higher Ground Academy offers **Extended Day** and **Extended Year** academic support programs.

- The **Extended Day Program** provides students with additional instructional time beyond the regular school day, focusing on reading, mathematics, and homework support.
- The **Extended Year Program**, offered during summer or school breaks, gives students continued access to academic interventions, enrichment activities, and skill-building opportunities designed to prevent learning loss and promote academic growth.

These programs are integral parts of Higher Ground Academy's commitment to ensuring that all students receive the time, support, and instruction they need to succeed.

SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES: Parents considering enrollment in Higher Ground Academy Charter School are asked to plan with the school in order to meet any special needs their child might have in school; health needs, learning needs, or behavior needs.

Special Education Services are provided to students who are found eligible. These services include:

- **CHILD FIND:** Identify eligible children with disabilities.
- **EVALUATION:** Conduct non-discriminatory team evaluations to determine eligibility and a need for special education and related services.
- **IEP:** Develop an individualized education plan for those children found eligible and in need.
- **LRE:** Determine an appropriate placement in the least restrictive environment.
- **DUE PROCESS:** Afford parents their due process protections in relationship to evaluation, the IEP process, placement and services including right to a due process hearing.

Parents are requested to share information regarding any special education services their child has received in the past so that a program can be developed to meet the specific needs of their child. Parents are asked to participate in all aspects of the special education planning and to work closely with the school as the program is implemented for their child.

CITIZENSHIP AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

STUDENT CODES OF CONDUCT GUIDELINES

- Use of profanity, obscene, or offensive language.
- Violation of the school district's weapons policy.
- Hazing.
- Use, possession, and/or distribution of tobacco or tobacco paraphernalia.

- Use, possession, and/or distribution of weapons or other dangerous objects.
- Use, possession, and/or distribution of illegal or harmful items, including but not limited to drug paraphernalia.
- Gambling, including but not limited to participating in games of chance for stakes.
- Violation of school bus, transportation, or safety rules.
- Possession or distribution of slanderous, libelous, or pornographic materials.
- Possession of nuisance devices or objects that cause distractions — including but not limited to pagers, radios, phones, games, and toys (such as cards) — unless specifically authorized in writing by a teacher.
- Wearing attire or maintaining personal grooming that creates a health or safety hazard or disrupts the educational process, including clothing that:
 - Contains lewd, vulgar, or obscene messages;
 - Promotes products or activities illegal for minors;
 - Displays objectionable emblems, signs, words, objects, or pictures, including those that are racist, sexist, gang-related, or derogatory toward protected groups.
- Sexual abuse, harassment, or other assaultive behavior — including fighting — that causes or could cause injury or endangers the health, safety, or welfare of students, staff, or others.
- Attendance violations, including truancy or leaving school grounds without permission.
- Violent opposition to authority.
- Use, possession, distribution, or being under the influence of narcotics or controlled substances, except when prescribed by a physician.
- Possession, use, or distribution of explosives or any compound designed to function by explosion.
- Acts disruptive to the educational process, including but not limited to:
 - Disobedience, disruptive behavior, disrespect, defiance, cheating, insolence, insubordination, failure to identify oneself, improper activation of fire alarms, or making bomb threats.
- Violation of directives or guidelines related to lockers or unauthorized access to school lockers.
- Falsification of records, documents, notes, or signatures.
- Tampering with, changing, or altering school district records or documents, including by electronic means.

- Making physical or verbal threats, including staging or reporting false dangerous situations.
- Engaging in inappropriate, abusive, threatening, or demeaning actions based on race, color, creed, religion, sex, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, disability, national origin, or sexual orientation.

PROCESSES FOR ADDRESSING A VIOLATION OF STUDENT CODES OF CONTACT

Higher Ground Academy (HGA) uses a two-pronged approach to addressing student behavior:

1. Educational Approach (Primary Focus)

Grounded in the belief in the inherent goodness of all children, HGA views most behavioral infractions as stemming from factors such as unclear understanding of expectations or cultural differences between home and school. We believe these gaps can be addressed through layered interventions tailored to student needs.

To this end, HGA has adopted **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)** — a proactive, school-wide system designed to foster a positive climate and teach appropriate behaviors.

Key Attributes of HGA’s PBIS System:

- **Purpose:** Promote a positive school environment by teaching, modeling, and reinforcing expected behaviors, while preventing misconduct through clear, consistent expectations.
- **Core Components:**
 - **Clear Expectations:** Defined behavior expectations for all settings (classrooms, hallways, buses, cafeteria).
 - **Explicit Teaching:** Staff regularly teach and review expected behaviors.
 - **Positive Reinforcement:** Students who demonstrate positive behaviors are acknowledged through praise, incentives, and recognition.
 - **Consistent Responses:** Staff apply both rewards and consequences consistently, following a school-wide discipline matrix.
 - **Data-Driven Practices:** Behavior data is collected and analyzed to guide interventions and supports.

Intervention Tiers:

- **Tier I (Universal):** Support for all students, focused on prevention and positive reinforcement.
- **Tier II (Targeted):** Small group interventions for students needing additional support.
- **Tier III (Intensive):** Individualized interventions for students with significant behavioral needs.

Staff Role:

Teachers, support staff, and administrators work collaboratively to implement PBIS, monitor student behavior, and provide timely interventions.

2. Corrective (Punitive) Approach

While HGA prioritizes education and support, we recognize the need for disciplinary measures in cases of serious misconduct. This corrective approach is used sparingly and with caution, serving primarily as a deterrent.

Sanctions are reserved for severe violations such as physical aggression, bullying, harassment, or verbal abuse of peers or staff. Disciplinary actions may include after-school detention, in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, or expulsion in cases of repeated or egregious offenses.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Higher Ground Academy serves a student body composed primarily of recent immigrants from East Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. In keeping with the Academy's commitment to fostering a culturally responsive learning environment, the curriculum is thoughtfully diversified to reflect the backgrounds and experiences of these communities.

The majority of Higher Ground Academy students are Muslim and observe the religious obligation of praying five times daily — with two of these prayer times typically falling within the school day. In the spirit of reasonable accommodation, the Academy provides appropriate space and time for both students and staff to perform their prayers. Pork products are excluded from school meals, and, as with other recognized religious holidays, the Academy closes for the Eid celebrations.

Please note that, in accordance with legal guidelines and school policy, **staff and students are not permitted to engage in prayer together during the school day or within the school building.** This is to ensure the separation of personal religious practice from professional responsibilities and to maintain an inclusive environment for all students and staff.

To support students' academic success, the Academy offers ESL instruction for those in need, supported by a strong ELL program and bilingual teachers across all three school divisions. Arabic and Somali are taught as world languages and may be used to fulfill Minnesota's graduation requirements. The Academy also respects and supports students' choice to wear traditional attire, including the hijab.

TECHNOLOGY

Technology is a key focus at Higher Ground Academy, supporting our mission to prepare students for meaningful participation in the 21st century. Technology will continue to play a vital role in teaching and learning at the Academy. All classrooms are equipped with cutting-edge tools such as SMART Boards, iPads, and instructional software.

Students are expected to use technology responsibly and ethically. Any student who intentionally or carelessly damages or loses a school-issued device (e.g., computers, iPads) will be required to replace it. School-issued devices are strictly for educational purposes. Unauthorized use — including accessing inappropriate websites or misusing either school-owned devices or personal devices during the school

day — will result in serious disciplinary action. Please see an abbreviated version of HGA’s Technology Use policy in the appendix section.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parents are a vital and integral part of Higher Ground Academy, without whom the school’s mission and vision could not be fully realized. They play an active role in the governance of the Academy, serving on the permanent board of directors and participating in key decision-making processes. Parents contribute to shaping broad policy decisions that guide the school’s daily operations, including curriculum design, budgeting, facilities planning, staffing, and outcome measurement. An abbreviated version of Higher Ground Academy's Parent Involvement Policy is included in the appendix.

PARENT VOLUNTEERS: Each parent is encouraged to provide at least 2 hours per month of volunteer service to Higher Ground Academy. The school Parent Liaison staff will schedule interested parents for their volunteer activities. Some of the volunteer activities include the following:

1. **Classroom Assistants:** The ideal site for parents to provide volunteer services is in Kindergarten through 5th grade classrooms where small groups of students’ lesson reviews are on the computer. A parent liaison staff will provide training to parents. Parents will develop skills and learn techniques for supervising, monitoring and reviewing student progress. Parents can in turn use these new skills and techniques when assisting and supporting their children in doing the required homework assignments.
2. **Field Trip Chaperones:** Higher Ground Academy recognizes that experiential learning is an important part of the overall educational process. Well thought out field trips that are linked to the curriculum and lesson plans can provide rich experiential learning opportunities. It is a goal of the Academy that the instructional activities of each classroom will provide for a field trip each month during the regular school year. Parents are encouraged to serve as volunteer chaperones for school field trips.
3. **Chaperones for Extra -Curricular Activities:** A variety of extra -curricular activities and programs are regularly scheduled at Higher Ground Academy. Some are scheduled during the school day while others are scheduled after school and on weekends. Adult supervision is necessary for some of the activities and in addition to teachers, parents make ideal supervisory chaperones.

Note: "In accordance with our background check policy, all parent volunteers are required to undergo a background check.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Earn As You Learn Scholarship Program

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Earn As You Learn Scholarship is designed to reward students for consistent academic achievement throughout their school years at Higher Ground Academy. Upon graduation and acceptance into an accredited liberal arts or technical college, eligible students may receive a scholarship valued at up to **\$2,400**, based on their cumulative academic performance.

A distinctive feature of this program is that students can begin earning scholarship credits as early as **kindergarten**, with opportunities to accrue additional credits each marking period through **12th grade**.

Scholarship credits are awarded based on academic achievement each term in the amounts of **\$200, \$175, or \$100**. Over the course of a student's academic career, the total scholarship amount can reach a maximum of **\$2,400**.

This initiative underscores Higher Ground Academy's commitment to long-term student success by recognizing and rewarding sustained academic effort.

REPORT CARDS AND PARENT CONFERENCES

Report cards are issued four times per year, at nine-week intervals. The purpose of the report card is to provide parents with a clear picture of their child's academic strengths and areas for improvement. Teachers use this information to evaluate progress and plan instruction accordingly. Parent-teacher conferences are scheduled at the end of each marking period. Additional conferences may be arranged at the request of either the parent or the teacher.

STANDARDS OF LEARNING

Higher Ground Academy is a college preparatory charter school committed to ensuring all students achieve at high levels. The Academy offers a coherent, rigorous, and comprehensive curriculum that meets and exceeds the Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and the Arts. Our program prepares students to succeed on statewide assessments administered in grades 3 through 8, as well as in high school at grades 10 and 11. Additionally, the Academy provides targeted support and guidance to prepare students for post-secondary entrance exams, ensuring they are well-positioned for college and career success.

GRADING POLICY

Higher Ground Academy operates on a quarter-based grading system. In addition to quarterly grades, students receive semester grades (for both first and second semesters) and a final year grade.

With the exception of Kindergarten, student performance is evaluated using a 13-point grading scale ranging from A+ to F. To ensure consistency across the school, all final grades are determined according to the following grading policy:

- A+ = 100
- A = 91 – 99
- A- = 90 – 90.9
- B+ = 89 – 89.9
- B = 81 – 88.9
- B- = 80 – 80.9
- C+ = 79 – 79.9
- C = 71 – 78.9
- C- = 70 – 70.9
- D+ = 69 – 69.9
- D = 61 – 68.9
- D- = 58 – 60.9
- F = 57.9 or less

Higher Ground Academy offers weighted (raised) grades according to the following scale for all Advanced Placement (AP), Higher Ground Academy (HGA), Honors, and Post-Secondary Enrollment Option (PSEO) courses. Middle school honors courses are not weighted (raised).

Letter Grade Earned	Percentage Scale:	Standard Grade Point Average (GPA) Calculation	Weighted (Raised) GPA Calculation
A+	100	4.00	4.25
A	91 - 99	4.00	4.10
A-	90 – 90.9	3.67	3.92
B+	89 - 89.9	3.33	3.58
B	81 - 88.9	3.00	3.25
B-	80 – 80.9	2.67	2.92
C+	79 – 79.9	2.33	2.58
C	71 – 78.9	2.00	2.25
C-	70 – 70.9	1.67	1.92
D+	69 - 69.9	1.33	1.58
D	61 – 68.9	1.00	1.25
D-	58 – 60.9	0.67	0.92
F	57.9 or less	0.00	0.00

It is further the policy of Higher Ground Academy that grades must reflect student learning. While homework, participation, and behavior are important aspects of the learning process, they do not always serve as accurate measures of a student’s mastery of the subject matter. Therefore, these factors shall account for no more than fifteen percent (15%) of a student’s final grade.

GENERAL INFORMATION

ATTENDANCE

Higher Ground Academy’s school day begins promptly at **7:00 a.m.** and ends at **2:30 p.m.** Students arriving after **7:10 a.m.** are considered tardy. Attendance is taken in homeroom and must be entered into the school’s database by 9:00 a.m.

Students who arrive at 10:00 a.m. or later will be allowed to attend class; however, they will be recorded as absent for the day.

Parents/guardians will be notified whenever a student does not report to school or class.

As a closed campus, Higher Ground Academy does not permit students to leave school grounds during the school day without written permission from a parent or guardian.

Chronic absenteeism will be reported to the appropriate county authorities in accordance with state regulations.

STUDENT ABSENCES

Students are expected to attend class **every day**, as absences disrupt the learning process. Parents/guardians are urged to ensure their children maintain regular attendance in accordance with the law.

Students who do not report to school or are consistently tardy will have their absences marked as **unexcused**.

Parents/guardians are expected to notify the school office between **9:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m.** if their child will be absent.

Early pick-up of a student requires prior communication — either by telephone, note, or letter — from the parent/guardian. The student must be signed out **at** the front desk by the parent/guardian.

When a student returns to school after an absence, they must bring a signed note or letter from home explaining the reason and dates of the absence. If no documentation is provided, the absence will be recorded as unexcused.

Students are responsible for completing all lessons and assignments missed during their absence.

EXCUSED SCHOOL ABSENCES

- Sickness
- Health or Mental Health appointments (return to school slip)
- Extreme family emergencies
- Religious holidays
- Child is not immunized
- Travel

UNEXCUSED ABSENCES

- Baby sitting
- Too tired/Over slept
- Needed at home
- The weather
- Missed the bus or kicked off the bus

Excessive tardiness and absenteeism negatively impact student learning. Therefore, students are expected to arrive on time for class and attend school regularly, except in cases of unavoidable absence. When a

student is absent for an excused reason, it is the student's responsibility to contact their teacher(s) to arrange for make-up work. In accordance with school policy, students are required to attend at least 90% of scheduled classes.

TRUANCY POLICY

Higher Ground Academy reserves the right to make the final determination regarding whether a student's absence is excused or unexcused. The school may utilize the **Truancy Intervention Project (TIP)** as a referral resource for students with attendance concerns.

According to Minnesota law:

- A child between the ages of **5 and 16** is considered **truant** if they are absent without a legal excuse for **three (3) or more days or class periods**.
- Students aged **16 and 17** are considered **truant** if they are absent without a legal excuse and have **not lawfully withdrawn from school with parental or guardian consent**.

Higher Ground Academy reports cases of truancy to the **Office of the Ramsey County Attorney**. Truancy information is managed by the **Social Work Office**, where inquiries may also be directed.

PARENTS CONTACTING TEACHERS BY TELEPHONE

Parents and guardians should contact teachers by calling their voicemail. To protect instructional time, we ask that teachers not be interrupted during the school day. If you need to drop off items or deliver a message to your child, please leave them at the front office; staff will ensure they are delivered appropriately.

Students may use the school phone only with the teacher's permission and a phone pass. Calls are limited to school business or emergencies — we discourage students from making social calls, such as arranging visits with friends.

POLICY ABOUT THE USE OF CELL PHONES BY STUDENTS

Higher Ground Academy's cell phone and personal electronic device policy sets clear expectations for responsible use. Students may possess devices such as mobile phones, smartwatches, and earbuds, but they must not use them during instructional time unless in designated areas. The policy strictly prohibits any use that disrupts learning, invades privacy, promotes cheating, or violates school rules. Students are forbidden from recording or sharing images of others without consent, especially in sensitive areas like restrooms or locker rooms. Violations may result in disciplinary action, including detention, suspension, or expulsion.

The policy also emphasizes that students bring personal devices at their own risk, as HGA is not responsible for loss, damage, or misuse. Devices are not subject to the school's internet filters, and students and families are responsible for appropriate use. If a device is suspected to be used in violation of school rules, it may be searched and confiscated according to school procedures. The policy is communicated through the student handbook, the school website, and is available upon request.

FAMILY EMERGENCY

Check with the office. Directions will be given. Changes in home or work telephone numbers should be reported immediately.

FAMILY MOVES

If you plan on moving and intend on the student remaining in the Academy, please notify the school immediately of the new address. With advance notice, we will be able to accommodate any changes in transportation.

STUDENT WITHDRAWS FROM ACADEMY:

Parents/guardians must notify the school in writing or by phone if their child is transferring to another school. A written or verbal notice is required to ensure timely processing and transfer of student records to the new school.

BUS RULES

Bus Conduct Expectations

1. **Follow the Driver's Instructions**

Always listen to and follow the driver's directions promptly and respectfully.

2. **Store Belongings Safely**

Keep personal items on your lap—not on the floor, under the seat, or in the aisle. If you have a bulky item, ask the driver where to place it.

3. **No Sharp Objects**

For everyone's safety, do not bring sharp objects onto the bus.

4. **Windows**

Do not open, close, or adjust windows without the driver's permission. Never extend any part of your body or throw objects out of the windows.

5. **Emergency Equipment**

First aid kits, emergency exits, flares, and radios are for emergencies only. Do not tamper with or misuse emergency equipment.

6. **Prohibited Behaviors**

Fighting, spitting, teasing, wrestling, throwing objects, or littering is strictly prohibited.

7. **Respect Others' Property**

Treat fellow students and their belongings with respect.

8. **No Animals**

Animals and pets are not allowed on the bus.

9. **Courtesy and Language**

Be courteous at all times. Profane or abusive language is not permitted.

10. **Noise Control**

Keep voices and other noises at a reasonable level.

11. **Bus Damage**

Students will be held responsible for any damage they cause to the bus.

12. **Cell Phone Use**

Follow the school's Cell Phone Use policy while on the bus.

Failure of a student to observe these rules could result in the loss of privilege of riding the school bus. A copy of bus rules will be sent home with all students for parents to go over with students. Students in grades K-12 will be tested over the rules and regulations of bus safety.

BUS ISSUES (Important Bus Information!)

How to Know Which Bus My Child Should Ride

A few days before school starts, you will receive a card in the mail and a phone call from the school with details about your child's pick-up and drop-off location and times.

Be at the stop at least five (5) minutes early.

If the Bus Does Not Arrive

Call the numbers below if the bus does not come.

Consider having a backup plan for the first few days of school as routes may be delayed.

When Will My Child Return Home?

School ends at 2:30 p.m.

Most students should arrive home within one hour, but expect some delays the first couple of weeks.

If your child is not home by 4:30 p.m., call:

- **Pride Bus Company:** 612-448-6947
- **Transportation Coordinator:** 651-324-6954
- **The school (as a last resort):** 651-645-1000

If the Bus Does Not Arrive

Call the numbers below if the bus does not come.

Consider having a backup plan for the first few days of school, as routes may be delayed.

If your child is not home by **4:30 p.m.**, please call:

- **Pride Bus Company:** 612-448-6947
- **Transportation Coordinator:** 651-324-6954
- The school (as a last resort): 651-645-1000

Bus Behavior Expectations

- Students must follow the same behavior rules on the bus as in school.

Bus Discipline Procedures

- First offense: Reminder from driver, parent notified.
- Second Offense: At least 2-day suspension, plus Saturday Bus Safety School.
- Third Offense: At least 1-week suspension, plus Saturday Bus Safety School.
- Continued misconduct may result in permanent loss of bus privileges.
- Class I Offenses (e.g., weapons, dangerous actions) lead to immediate permanent loss of bus privileges.

If Your Child Will Not Ride the Bus on a Certain Day

- Send a written note to the teacher that morning.
- Students will only be held back from the bus with a parent note.

DRESS CODE

Higher Ground Academy believes that a student's dress reflects their attitude toward learning, their self-respect, and their consideration for others. We encourage students to dress modestly. The Academy fully supports students who choose to wear a hijab or other coverings as part of their cultural or religious tradition.

FOOD SERVICE

Higher Ground Academy provides nutritious breakfast and lunch meals daily for all students. All meals are prepared and served by a qualified and certified external vendor, ensuring they meet high standards of quality, safety, and nutrition.

Parents are encouraged to notify the Academy administration of any dietary restrictions or special needs. Please note that all menu items are pork-free.

STUDENT LOCKERS:

Lockers are the property of Higher Ground Academy and are assigned to students for their use during the school year. The administration reserves the right to inspect lockers at any time. Students are responsible for providing their own locks and must ensure that school administration has access to their lockers upon request.

SCHOOL SUPPLIES:

The following items have been identified by Higher Ground Academy as basic school supplies. Items on the list do not represent all supplies needed by students, but will serve the students for the start of school. Please check with the homeroom teacher for more details. Supplies are broken down by grade level.

<u>Kindergarten</u>	<u>Grade 1</u>	<u>Grade 2</u>	<u>Grade 3, 4 & 5</u>
Pencil Sharpener Pencil Box Pocket Folders Sharpened No. 2 Pencils Erasers Crayons Elmer's Glue Washable Markers Wide-Lined Notebooks Glue Stick Scissors Box Of Kleenex Roll Of Paper Towels	Pencil Box Elmer's Glue Pocket Folders Sharpened No. 2 Pencils Colored Pencils Crayons Watercolor Paints Washable Markers Wide-Lined Notebook Scissors	Pencil Sharpener Pencil Box Pocket Folders Colored Pencils Sharpened No. 2 Pencils Erasers Crayons Elmer's Glue Washable Markers Wide-Lined Notebooks Glue Stick Scissors Box Of Kleenex 12-Inch Ruler Roll Of Paper Towels	<u>Spiral Notebooks</u> 2 Red For Math 2 Blue For Writing 2 Black For Arabic 2 Green For Science 1 Yellow For Social Studies 1 <i>Blue Compositions Notebook (4th Grade Only)</i> <u>Pocket Folders</u> 2 Red For Math 2 Blue For Writing 2 Black For Arabic 1 Green For Science 1 Yellow For Social Studies 1 Green For Science 1 For Homework 1 pair of Scissors 1 Backpack 1 Pair Of Athletic Shoes (For Gym Class) 4 Pink Erasers 60 Pencils 1 Bottle Of Hand Sanitizer 1 Package of Crayola Colored Pencils or Crayons or Washable Markers 1 Container Clorox Wipes 1 Box Of Band-Aids 2 Boxes Of Tissues 1 Package Of Construction Paper 1 Ruler 1 <i>Calculator (4th And 5th Grade Only)</i> <i>Glue or Glue Sticks</i> 1 <i>Yellow Highlighter (4th And 5th Grade Only)</i> 1 Blue Pen 1 Box Gallon Sized Ziploc Bags
<u>Grade 6</u>	<u>Grade 7 & 8</u>	<u>High School</u>	
4 – 3 Ring Binders At Least 2 Inch 4 Notebooks 4 Folders 3 Boxes Of Pencils Erasers 1 Basic Function Calculator 2 Dry Erase Markers 1 White Board Eraser - (<i>A Piece Of Cloth Or Old Sock Works Well</i>) 1 Box Washable Markers 1 Pair Small Scissors 1 Glue Stick 1 Small Hand Held Pencil Sharpener 1 Sturdy Plastic Pencil Box Or Zip Pencil Case 1 Box Kleenex	4 – 3 Ring Binders At Least 2 Inch 4 Notebooks Dividers Pencils Calculator	Pocket Folders No. 2 Pencils Colored Pencils Erasers Crayons 1 Box Washable Markers 1 Small Hand Held Pencil Sharpener Wireless Notebook Ballpoint Pens 12-Inch Ruler 3x5 Index Cards Scientific Calculator	

GENERAL HEALTH INFORMATION

IMMUNIZATIONS

Before a child may enroll in a Minnesota school for the first time, state law requires that they be immunized against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio, measles, mumps, and rubella. This requirement may be waived only if a signed medical exemption or a notarized conscientious objection form is submitted to the school.

HEALTH INFORMATION

School personnel are prohibited by law from dispensing aspirin or any other medication without a doctor's order. If a student requires medication prescribed by a doctor during the school day, it must be provided in the original container with written instructions specifying the dosage and time it should be administered.

For questions regarding this policy, please contact the school nurse or principal.

If a student requires long-term medication, parents must notify the school nurse and complete the necessary forms, available through the school office.

Parents should also promptly inform the principal or school nurse of any allergies or health conditions affecting their child.

If a physician recommends that a student limit participation in physical education, a signed note from the physician must be submitted to the school office.

STUDENT ILLNESS/INJURY

When Should My Child Stay Home from School?

Parents often wonder when a child is too ill to attend school. The following general guidelines apply:

- If your child has a fever over 100°F, they should remain home until 24 hours after the fever has subsided **without** the use of fever-reducing medication.
- If your child has a rash caused by illness—or if the cause of the rash is unknown—please consult your clinic before sending your child to school, as many rashes are contagious.
- If your child has vomited, they should remain home until 24 hours after vomiting has stopped.
- If your child is too ill to participate in recess, they are too ill to attend school.

If a child becomes ill or injured at school, we will attempt to contact you at home or at work. Please arrange to pick up your child within one hour. If we cannot reach you, we will contact the emergency numbers you provided. We require at least two emergency contacts on file. Please notify the school promptly if your emergency contact information changes.

MEDICATIONS/MEDICATION ADMINISTRATION POLICY

Medication Administration Guidelines

- Long-Term Prescription Medication (over 2 weeks):
Requires a written order from a licensed prescriber, written permission from a parent or guardian, and the medication in its original prescription bottle with the pharmacy label.
- Short-Term Prescription Medication (2 weeks or less):
Requires written permission from a parent or guardian and the medication in its original prescription bottle with the pharmacy label.
- Over-the-Counter Medication:
Requires a written order from a licensed prescriber, written permission from a parent or guardian, and the medication in its original container.

Important

- Medications sent to school in any packaging other than the original container will be destroyed.
- Parent permission forms for medication administration are available from the school office.

CHILD ABUSE/NEGLECT

Higher Ground Academy recognizes that every child deserves care and support from both family and community. As a professional organization serving children and families, we accept the responsibility to protect children from harm. In accordance with Minnesota state law, professionals—and those acting under their direction—who work with children are legally mandated to report suspected child abuse or neglect, including instances that occurred within the past three years, when they know or have reason to believe a child is being or has been abused or neglected. The professional staff of Higher Ground Academy will strictly adhere to this mandate and comply fully with all applicable Minnesota laws.

INCLEMENT WEATHER

The decision to send children to school during severe weather rests with parents. Higher Ground Academy will notify families if school is closed due to weather conditions. Announcements will also be made on local television and radio stations.

It is the policy of the Higher Ground Academy to comply with federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination and all requirements imposed by or pursuant to regulations issued thereto, to the end that no person shall on the grounds of race, color, national and ethnic origin, sex, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, age, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any educational program or in employment, or recruitment, consideration, or selection, whether part-time or full-time, under any educational program, employment, or activity operated by the school except as provided by law.

Saint Paul Public Library – Library Go Program

As part of your child’s enrollment at Higher Ground Academy, they are automatically enrolled in the Saint Paul Public Library’s *Library Go* program. This program provides your child with a library card that grants access to:

- All Saint Paul Public Library (SPPL) locations
- SPPL’s extensive online book collection
- Daily homework help (available from 1:00 PM to 11:00 PM)

- eBooks and audiobooks
- Research tools
 - Test preparation resources (including sample test questions)
- And much more

We believe that the *Library Go* program will significantly enhance student reading and literacy.

If you have any questions or wish to opt out of the program, please contact Bob Andersen, Director of Instructional Technology, at **Bob@HGAcademy.org**.

Online Privacy at Higher Ground Academy

At Higher Ground Academy, we use online tools and apps to help students learn. We also take your child's safety and privacy very seriously.

Sometimes, in order to use certain educational websites or programs, we need to share a small amount of student information—like their first name, last name, and school email address—with trusted companies that provide these services. This helps us set up accounts for students so they can learn and explore safely online.

For students under the age of 13, a federal law called COPPA (Children's Online Privacy Protection Act) usually requires companies to get a parent's permission before collecting any information. However, schools like Higher Ground Academy are allowed to give that permission on behalf of parents when the tools are used for school purposes.

Google Workspace for Education

All students at Higher Ground Academy will receive a Google Workspace for Education account. This allows them to use tools like Gmail, Google Docs, and Google Classroom in a safe and secure learning environment.

If you'd like to learn more about how Google protects your child's information, you can read their Privacy Notice.

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's online privacy, feel free to contact us. We're here to help.

**Higher Ground Academy
Parent/Teacher/Student Compact
2025–2026 School Year**

"How are the children? The children are well and learning."

Higher Ground Academy (HGA) is committed to providing a high-quality education that empowers all students to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. This compact outlines the shared responsibilities of the school, parents/guardians, and students in supporting student learning and school success. It is developed in accordance with Minnesota Statutes § 124D.895 and the requirements of Title I, Part A of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

School Responsibilities

Higher Ground Academy will:

- Provide high-quality curriculum and instruction in a supportive and effective learning environment that enables all students to meet the Minnesota academic standards.
- Maintain high expectations for all students, staff, and parents.
- Provide meaningful parent-teacher conferences at least annually to discuss student progress and the compact.
- Communicate frequently with families about school programs, student progress, and academic expectations through newsletters, phone calls, email, and conferences.
- Offer parents opportunities to volunteer, participate in school activities, and observe classroom instruction.
- Ensure a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment that embraces diversity and supports student success.
- Support and train teachers to effectively engage families in the education process.

Parent/Guardian Responsibilities

We, as parents/guardians, will support our child's learning in the following ways:

- Ensure our child attends school regularly, arrives on time, and is ready to learn.
- Monitor our child's homework, academic progress, and behavior.
- Participate in decisions relating to our child's education and communicate with the school regularly.
- Promote positive use of extracurricular time (e.g., reading, recreation, limited screen time).

- Volunteer in school activities and attend parent-teacher conferences and school events when possible.
- Stay informed by reviewing school communications and responding promptly when needed.

Student Responsibilities

I, as a student, will take responsibility for my learning by:

- Coming to school on time, prepared, and ready to learn.
- Completing all assignments to the best of my ability and asking for help when needed.
- Following the school’s behavioral expectations and showing respect for myself, others, and school property.
- Communicating regularly with my parents and teachers about my schoolwork and challenges.
- Participating in school activities and taking ownership of my education.

Communication and Collaboration

This compact will be:

- Reviewed annually with input from families, students, and staff.
- Discussed during parent-teacher conferences and revisited as needed to support student achievement.
- Supported by regular communication and opportunities for shared decision-making.

Signatures

By signing this compact, we agree to uphold the responsibilities outlined above to support student learning and success.

Student Name: _____

Student Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Teacher Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Summary of Recently Approved or Revised Policies

The most recent policy updates and approvals are available in full on the school’s website under the “Governance” tab.

1. Background Check Policy

Higher Ground Academy requires background checks for all employees, coaches, vendors, volunteers — including parents — and any individuals who may have contact with students. This policy is publicly posted on the school’s website under the “**Governance**” section. The procedure for implementing this policy is outlined in the **Appendix** of this handbook.

2. Higher Ground Academy Lead Testing and Remediation Policy:

Keeping Your Drinking Water Safe

1. Higher Ground Academy tests the school’s water every year (in June) to make sure it’s safe to drink.
2. If the water has unsafe lead levels, the school will:
Turn off the water right away.
Fix the problem before turning the water back on.
 - a. Test the water again to make sure it’s safe.

How Will You Know?

1. The school will send parents a yearly update about water testing and results.
2. You can also find this information on the school website and in the student handbook.
3. If a test ever shows unsafe lead levels, the school will fix the issue within 30 days or notify parents directly.

The School Also Reports to the State

Higher Ground Academy reports water testing results every year to the Minnesota Department of Health.

3. Cell Phone Use Policy

Higher Ground Academy prohibits student use of mobile phones, smartwatches, headphones, and similar personal devices during instructional time, except in designated areas. Devices must be silent and out of sight. Students may not use devices to cheat, bully, harass, record others without consent, or access inappropriate content. Taking videos or photos of students, staff, or others—whether inside the school building, on the school bus, or during school-related activities—without their consent is strictly prohibited. Sharing images or videos taken by others without consent is also forbidden.

Students assume all risks for bringing personal devices to school. HGA is not responsible for lost, damaged, or stolen items. Violations of this policy may lead to disciplinary action, including confiscation of the device, detention, suspension, or legal action.

4. Admission Policy

Higher Ground Academy ensures open enrollment in compliance with MN Statute 124E.11, without admission criteria based on ability or achievement.

- **Currently Enrolled Students:** Minnesota residents remain enrolled until withdrawal or expulsion; out-of-state students must reapply annually through the lottery.
- **Kindergarten Enrollment:** Begins in February. Priority is given to siblings of current students, foster children of HGA families, and children of staff. A lottery fills remaining spots. Four-year-olds may be admitted based on readiness per a separate policy.
- **New Student Enrollment (Grades 1–12):** Applications must be submitted by May for lottery consideration. Enrollment opens in June, with Minnesota residents receiving priority.
- **Lottery Process:** Conducted publicly in June to fill open spots and establish a waitlist.
- **Placement:** Final placement is based on submitted enrollment information after acceptance.

5. Telehealth Services Plan

Higher Ground Academy (HGA) provides space and support for enrolled secondary students to access mental health telehealth services during school hours. Services include mental health counseling, case management, screenings, and health education, provided by licensed professionals or approved partner agencies.

Key elements of the plan:

- Parental consent is required before services begin.
- HIPAA- and FERPA-compliant technology must be used.
- Sessions occur in **private, supervised spaces.**
- HGA coordinates scheduling, supports equitable access, and upholds student confidentiality.
- Emergency protocols are in place for crises.
- Providers document sessions per state regulations, and HGA reviews partnerships and usage annually.

6. Harassment, Violence, and Other Sexually Inappropriate Behavior, Respect and Safety for Everyone

The policy strictly prohibits harassment, abuse, or violence by or toward students, staff, or community members.

- **Reporting Responsibilities**
 - **Staff:** Must act when aware of harassment or violence.
 - **Supervisors:** Must act when harassment involves staff or community members.
 - **Others:** Should report concerns to designated individuals.

- **Investigations and Actions**

The district will promptly investigate all complaints and take appropriate action, ensuring compliance with laws and policies. Allegations are reported to the school board, which may order an independent investigation. Receipt of reports is acknowledged within 24 hours (excluding weekends).

- **Retaliation Prohibited**

The policy forbids retaliation against individuals who report or participate in investigations.

- **Reporting System**

The Executive Director ensures procedures are in place for timely handling of complaints, with designated personnel for investigation.

- **Training and Dissemination**

- The policy is posted in schools, distributed at hire, and included in student handbooks.
- Regular training is provided to staff and students.

- **Definitions Include**

- **Harassment:** Conduct based on protected characteristics that creates a hostile environment or affects opportunities.
- **Racial/Religious Harassment or Violence:** Actions or threats tied to race or religion.
- **Sexual Harassment or Violence:** Unwanted sexual conduct or force, including criminal acts.
- **Violence:** Includes all forms of racial, religious, or sexual violence.

7. Title IX Policy on Sex Discrimination and Sexual Harassment: Everyone Deserves Respect and Safety

Higher Ground Academy follows federal law (Title IX), which says no one should be treated unfairly because of their sex or gender. This means students and staff are protected from discrimination and sexual harassment at school.

What Does This Policy Cover?

- **Sexual harassment and discrimination are not allowed.**
- If something happens at school (or during a school activity) that feels like harassment, students have the right to speak up.
- The school will take reports seriously and investigate them.

What is Sexual Harassment?

- Being pressured into sexual acts or behavior.
- Unwanted sexual comments, jokes, or touching.
- Behavior that makes school feel unsafe or uncomfortable.
- Acts like sexual assault, dating violence, or stalking.

What Happens If You Make a Report?

- You can report a problem to the school's Title IX Coordinator (Sumeya Ali).
- The school will listen, offer help, and explain what happens next.
- You do not have to face the situation alone—you can have someone with you when talking about it.
- The school will work to protect you and support you while handling the situation.

What If You Are Accused?

- You have the right to know the details of the report.
- You will be treated fairly and given a chance to share your side of the story.
- No punishment will happen until a full investigation is done.

What If You're Afraid of Retaliation?

- It's against the rules for anyone to get back at you for making a report or helping with one.
- The school will act if someone tries to threaten, scare, or harm you for speaking up.

What Should You Do?

- If you see or experience sexual harassment or discrimination, report it right away to:
Sumeya Ali
Tel: 651 645 1000 ext. 156
Email: sumaeya@hgacademy.org
Office: Main Office Suite, 1381 Marshall Ave, Saint Paul, MN 55104
- Talk to a trusted adult, teacher, counselor, or the Title IX Coordinator.

8. Student Journalist Policy

Your Rights and Responsibilities as a Student Journalist

You have the right to express your ideas in official school publications (like newspapers, yearbooks, or theater productions), but this comes with some rules.

Your work will be guided by a teacher (called a faculty advisor) and the school principal, who will make sure it follows school guidelines.

If you ever feel like your right to free speech was unfairly limited, you can ask the principal to review the decision within three school days.

What's Not Allowed in Student Publications

- Anything obscene, offensive, or inappropriate for younger student
- False information that harms someone's reputation (libel)
- Promoting illegal activities or breaking school rules
- Encouraging hate or harassment
- Breaking school rules about when and where you can distribute materials

Editorial Control:

The school can edit or limit content for good reasons—like making sure it's age-appropriate, fair, well-written, and doesn't look like the school is taking a political side.

When and Where Can You Share Your Work?

Before school, during lunch, or after school (unless you have special permission)

In places where you don't block hallways, doors, or interfere with school activities

You cannot force anyone to take your publication

If You Break the Rules

The school may give consequences based on the student discipline policy.

9. Appropriate Use of Technology at School – What You Should Know

Technology is for learning. You are expected to use school devices, the internet, and your personal devices (if allowed) for schoolwork and positive purposes only.

Be responsible online. Use good judgment, be safe, be kind, and don't try to get around school filters or rules.

Your Responsibilities

1. Keep your account safe. Don't share your passwords and always log out when done.
2. Use respectful language. No swearing, insults, or hurtful comments online.
3. Treat others kindly online. No bullying, harassment, or hate messages—whether in school or out of school.
4. Use devices for good. Don't search for or share offensive, violent, or inappropriate content.
5. Be a good digital citizen. What you do on social media should not harm your school or classmates.
6. Be honest online. Don't pretend to be someone else.
7. Respect school security. Don't hack, bypass filters, or install unauthorized software.
8. Take care of school property. Don't damage devices, files, or programs—you may be responsible for repairs.

9. Respect copyrights. Don't copy others' work or download illegal music, movies, or software.
10. Follow school rules when posting online. Ask before publishing anything connected to school.
11. Protect your privacy. Never share personal information or photos online without permission.

If You Break the Rules

You may lose tech privileges, face suspension, expulsion, or even legal action.

10. Pledge of Allegiance at School – What You Should Know

- Students at Higher Ground Academy will say the Pledge of Allegiance at least once a week.
- This can happen in your classroom or over the school intercom on Mondays.
- You will also learn about the flag, how to show respect for it, and the meaning of patriotic activities.

Your Choice Matters

- If you don't want to say the Pledge of Allegiance for personal reasons, you do not have to.
- Everyone must respect each person's right to choose whether to participate or not.

11. Possession of Controlled Substances at School

Higher Ground Academy does not allow tobacco, alcohol, drugs, or unauthorized prescription medicines on school property, buses, or at school events.

- This includes illegal drugs, vaping products, THC, CBD, and medicines that aren't prescribed to you or used without permission.

Why This Matters

- These substances are harmful to your health and your learning.
- Using, bringing, or selling them at school is a serious offense.

What Happens If You Break This Rule?

- You may face **suspension or expulsion** according to the Student Handbook.
- The school will inform your parents and may involve law enforcement.
- If you cooperate, the school may offer counseling or mediation.

Drug Searches

- The school may use police dogs to check lockers, backpacks, and cars (but **not students** directly).

- Teachers who report suspicions about drugs are protected by law.

Be Smart and Stay Safe

- The school teaches about the dangers of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco as part of your classes.
- The goal is to help you make healthy, smart choices.

12. HGA Student Fee Policy

What You Should Know About School Fees

- **Your Education is Free.** Higher Ground Academy will never charge you for required classes, textbooks, supplies, or anything you need to graduate.
- **When Fees Might Be Charged**
 - If you choose to join extracurricular activities like sports or clubs.
 - If you buy personal items like yearbooks, class rings, or graduation announcements.
 - If you want to keep a project or product you make in class.
 - If you rent a school instrument or take Driver's Ed.
 - If you need transportation for extracurricular activities or to PSEOS classes.
 - If you lose or damage school property, like iPads or textbooks.
- **Things You'll Never Be Charged For**
 - Textbooks, workbooks, and materials for required classes.
 - Required field trips.
 - Graduation cap, gown, tassel, or diploma (unless you want to buy them to keep).
 - Library books needed for schoolwork.
 - Lockers or transportation if you live two miles or more from school.
- **Your Grades and Diplomas Will Never Be Withheld** because of unpaid fees.
- **Fee Waivers:** If your family has financial hardship or a parent in the military, some fees may be waived.

13. Higher Ground Academy Prohibition of Malicious and Sadistic Conduct Policy Respect and Safety for Everyone at School

- **No one at Higher Ground Academy is allowed to hurt others on purpose or act in a cruel way.**
- This rule applies to students, staff, and anyone working with the school.

What is Malicious and Sadistic Conduct?

- It means doing something to intentionally harm someone or being extremely cruel on purpose.
- It also includes enjoying hurting or bullying others.

Protected Groups

- This policy protects everyone, no matter their race, religion, gender, disability, sexual orientation, or background.

What Happens If Someone Breaks This Rule?

- The school will follow its discipline and student code of conduct policies.
- Serious actions could include suspension or expulsion.

Bottom Line

Everyone deserves to feel safe and respected at school — hurting others on purpose will not be tolerated.

14. HGA Religious Accommodation Policy

- **Higher Ground Academy respects everyone’s religious beliefs.**
The school does not promote or discourage any religion. You are free to practice your religion as long as it doesn’t disrupt others.
- **You may pray, talk about religion, or express your beliefs at school,**
but only when it doesn’t interfere with classes or school activities.
- **Teachers and staff won’t lead or stop religious activities.**
They must stay neutral but can make sure everyone follows school rules.
- **You may request to wear religious clothing,**
even if it’s different from the school dress code.
- **You can ask to be excused from class for religious instruction,**
but this must be arranged by your parents or guardian.
- **Religious classes can’t happen at school during the school day,**
and teachers won’t teach religion — only about religion as part of learning.
- **No one at school should make you feel bad about your religion.**
Everyone has the right to feel safe and respected.

Higher Ground Academy

Language Access Plan

Effective: 2025–26 School Year

1. Purpose

Higher Ground Academy (HGA) recognizes that clear communication with families and students is critical for student success. This **Language Access Plan** ensures that students and families with limited English proficiency (LEP) have meaningful access to school programs, services, and information in accordance with **Minnesota Statute 123B.32**.

2. Commitment to Language Access

HGA is committed to:

- Providing timely and meaningful access to school-related information for all families.
- Using trained or certified interpreters when discussing academic progress, educational placement, disciplinary actions, or specialized services.
- Ensuring that translated documents are accurate and accessible.

3. Identification of Language Needs

HGA will:

- Identify language preferences of students and parents/guardians at enrollment through a Home Language Survey.
- Maintain updated records of language needs in the student information system.

4. Provision of Interpreter and Translation Services

HGA will:

- Provide qualified interpreters (in-person, virtual, or telephonic) for critical conversations, including:
 - Academic progress reports
 - Special education meetings
 - Disciplinary actions
 - Health-related matters
 - Enrollment and orientation sessions
- Provide translated documents for key communications, including:
 - Report cards and progress reports
 - Disciplinary notices
 - Special education documents
 - School policies and handbooks
 - Emergency information

5. Notification to Families

HGA will notify families annually and upon enrollment about:

- Their right to interpretation and translation services at no cost
- How to request language services
- Whom to contact for concerns regarding language access

This information will be included in:

- The annual student/parent handbook
- The HGA website
- Enrollment and orientation materials

6. Staff Training

HGA will:

- Train all staff annually on language access policies, procedures for requesting interpretation/translation services, and working effectively with interpreters.

7. Biennial Review and Plan Updates

HGA will:

- Review and update this Language Access Plan every **two years**
- Solicit feedback from families, community members, and staff during the review process

8. Contact for Language Access Concerns

Families may contact the following person for language access questions or concerns:

Sheikh Abdirahman Ahmed
Family and Community Liaison
Phone: (651) 369 7555
Email:

Mr. Mohamud Mohamud

Marketing Director & Homeless Liaison

Phone: 612 645 1000

email

Forms

Parent/Guardian Permission for Medication Administration

Student Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Grade: _____

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

Phone Number(s): _____

Emergency Contact (if different): _____

Phone Number(s): _____

Medication Information

(One form per medication)

Medication Name: _____

Dosage: _____

Time(s) to be Given at School: _____

Route (e.g., oral, inhaled): _____

Reason for Medication: _____

Start Date: _____ End Date: _____

- This is a long-term medication (over 2 weeks) — Requires healthcare provider's written order
- This is a short-term medication (under 2 weeks) — Requires parent/guardian permission
- Over-the-counter medication — Requires healthcare provider's written order

Is this medication prescribed by a licensed healthcare provider?

Yes No

Will this medication be self-administered by the student?

Yes No

Parent/Guardian Authorization

I hereby request and authorize Higher Ground Academy personnel to administer the medication as indicated above. I understand that:

- The medication must be provided in the original labeled container.
- School personnel are not legally obligated to administer medication and will do so as a courtesy to support my child's health needs.

- Any change in medication or dosage requires a new authorization form.
- Medications sent in other containers will be destroyed.

I release and agree to hold harmless Higher Ground Academy and its employees from any liability in connection with this medication administration.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

For Office Use Only

Date Received: _____

Received by: _____

Healthcare Provider Order on File: Yes No

Medication Logged by: _____

**Higher Ground Academy
Field Trip Permission Form**

Student Name: _____

Grade: _____

Teacher: _____

Date of Field Trip: _____

Destination: _____

Purpose of Trip: _____

Departure Time: _____ AM/PM

Return Time: _____ AM/PM

Mode of Transportation: _____

Special Instructions (if any): _____

Emergency Contact Information

Name: _____

Relationship: _____

Phone Number(s): _____

Medical Information

Does your child have any medical conditions or allergies we should know about?

Yes No

If yes, please explain: _____

Parent/Guardian Consent

I give permission for my child, _____, to participate in the above-listed field trip. I understand that school personnel will take all reasonable precautions for the safety and supervision of students. In case of emergency, I authorize school staff to seek medical care for my child.

Parent/Guardian Name (Print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Procedures

I. Concussion Management Implementation Procedure

1. Distribution of Concussion Information

- At the beginning of each school year, the Athletic Director will ensure that all student-athletes and their parents/guardians receive concussion information.
- The information must include:
 - Nature, risks, signs, and symptoms of concussions
 - Importance of prompt medical evaluation and treatment
 - Protocols for return to play after a concussion
- Distribution methods may include:
 - Parent/student handbooks
 - School website
 - Athletic registration packets

2. Parent/Guardian Consent

- Before participating in any athletic activity, each student-athlete must submit a signed consent form acknowledging receipt of concussion information.
- The Athletic Director will maintain records of all signed forms.
- Students will not be allowed to participate in practice, training, or competition without a signed consent on file.

3. Staff Training Requirements

- All coaches, trainers, and school officials supervising athletic activities must complete the CDC “Concussion in Youth Sports” online training prior to the first practice session.
- Training must be renewed **every** three school years.
- The Athletic Director will maintain documentation of completed training for all required staff.
-

4. Removal from Play and Return-to-Play Protocol

- If a student-athlete exhibits signs, symptoms, or behaviors of a concussion:
- The coach, trainer, or school official must immediately remove the student from participation.
- The incident must be reported to the health office using the Student Injury Form on the same day.

- The student may not return to activity until:
- They are symptom-free, AND
- Evaluated by a licensed healthcare provider trained in concussion management, AND
- Provide **written clearance** from the healthcare provider.

5. Ongoing Monitoring and Oversight

- The **Athletic Director** is responsible for:
 - Ensuring compliance with information distribution, training, and consent collection
 - Monitoring incidents of suspected concussions and proper documentation
 - Conducting an annual review of the concussion management process and addressing areas of concern
- The Health Office will maintain records of injury reports and medical clearance documentation.

6. Annual Review and Communication

- The concussion management procedures will be reviewed annually by the Athletic Director and Health Office Staff in coordination with the Executive Director.
- Updates or changes will be communicated to staff, students, and families before the start of the athletic season.

Procedures

II. Procedure for Implementing the Title IX Grievance Policy

1. Receipt and Reporting

- Any student, parent/guardian, or staff who believes sexual harassment or discrimination has occurred should report it immediately to the Title IX Coordinator in person, by phone, email, or mail.
- All employees are mandatory reporters and must promptly report any known or suspected incidents to the Title IX Coordinator without conducting their own investigation.

2. Initial Response

- The Title IX Coordinator will:
 - Notify the Executive Director who in turn will notify the school board, MDE, and the police as appropriate.
 - Contact the complainant confidentially.
 - Discuss supportive measures available with or without filing a formal complaint.
 - Explain the formal complaint process.
 - Offer supportive measures (counseling, schedule changes, etc.) while maintaining confidentiality to the extent possible.

3. Filing a Formal Complaint

- The complainant or Title IX Coordinator may file a formal written complaint requesting an investigation.
- The district will provide written notice to both parties outlining:
 - Allegations and known details.
 - Statement of presumption of non-responsibility.
 - Rights to an advisor.
 - Information on reviewing evidence.
 - Notice regarding false statements.

4. Investigation

- The district will assign an Investigator (not the Coordinator or Decision-maker) to:
 - Interview parties and witnesses.
 - Collect and review relevant evidence.
 - Allow parties 10 days to review evidence before the report is finalized.
 - Prepare a written investigative report summarizing relevant evidence.

5. Determination of Responsibility

- A Decision-maker (separate from the Investigator and Coordinator) will:
 - Allow parties to submit written, relevant questions and receive responses.
 - Issue a written determination, including findings, conclusions, sanctions (if applicable), and appeal options.
 - Share the written determination simultaneously with both parties.

6. Appeals

- Either party may appeal based on:
 - Procedural irregularity.
 - New evidence not reasonably available previously.
 - Conflict of interest or bias.
- Appeals must be submitted within 5 days of the determination.
- The Executive Director will review and issue a final written decision within 30 days.
- The Executive Director's decision can be appealed to the school board.

7. Informal Resolution (Optional)

- May be offered after a formal complaint is filed, if both parties voluntarily agree in writing.
- Cannot be used when an employee is alleged to have sexually harassed a student.
- Either party can withdraw from informal resolution and resume the formal grievance process.

8. Recordkeeping

- The district will maintain records of:
 - Reports and complaints, including supportive measures provided.
 - Investigations, evidence, findings, sanctions, and remedies.
 - Appeals and outcomes.
 - Informal resolutions.
 - Title IX training materials.
- Records will be kept for seven years.

9. Training and Dissemination

- Title IX Personnel will receive regular training on investigations, adjudications, bias, and Title IX definitions.
- Training materials will be posted on the district's website.
- The grievance procedure will be made available to all students, staff, and parents/guardians.

10. Retaliation Prohibited

- Retaliation against any individual for reporting, participating, or refusing to participate in the grievance process is strictly prohibited.
- Allegations of retaliation will be addressed using the same grievance procedures.

11. Contact Information

Title IX Coordinator: Sumeya Ali
Office: Main Office Suite at the Marshall Avenue building
Tel: 651 645 1000/156
Email: sumeya@hgacademy.org

III. HGA Grievance Procedure for Non-Title IX Related Issues

Purpose

To provide a fair, orderly, and timely process for addressing complaints or concerns raised by employees, students, or families.

1. Definition of Grievance

A grievance

Is a formal complaint regarding an action, decision, or condition perceived to be unfair, inequitable, or a violation of policy, procedure, or law.

2. Informal Resolution (Step 1)

The complainant should first attempt to resolve the grievance informally by discussing the concern directly with the person(s) involved within 10 working days of the incident.

- If resolved, no further action is needed.

3. Formal Grievance (Step 2)

If the matter is not resolved informally:

- The complainant submits a written grievance to the appropriate supervisor or principal within 7 working days of the incident. The written grievance should include:
 - o Name and contact information of the complainant
 - o Description of the grievance
 - o Date of the incident
 - o The remedy sought

4. Investigation and Response (Step 3)

The supervisor/principal will:

- o Acknowledge receipt within 5 working days
- o Conduct a prompt, impartial investigation, which may include interviews and a review of relevant documents
- o Provide a written response with findings and any proposed resolution within 10 working days of receiving the grievance

5. Appeal (Step 4)

If the complainant is not satisfied with the Step 3 outcome:

- An appeal may be submitted in writing to the Executive Director within 10 working days of receiving the Step 3 decision.
- The Executive Director will review the grievance, investigation, and decision, and may meet with involved parties if needed.
- A final written decision will be provided within 10 working days of receiving the appeal.

6. Board Review (Optional, Step 5)

If the grievance concerns the Executive Director, the complainant may submit the appeal to the School Board Chair within 10 working days. The Board may:

- Review documents and findings
- Decide to hold a closed session meeting to hear the grievance
- Issue a final decision within 30 days of receipt.

The decision of the Board is final.

7. Recordkeeping

All grievance records will be maintained confidentially in accordance with applicable laws and policies.

8. Non-Retaliation

No individual shall face retaliation for filing a grievance or participating in an investigation.

Higher Ground Academy

Parent & Family Engagement Plan

I. Purpose

Higher Ground Academy (HGA) is committed to building strong partnerships between families, schools, and the community to support high levels of student academic achievement. This plan outlines how HGA Elementary, Middle, and Secondary will implement meaningful, two-way family engagement consistent with Title I requirements.

II. Annual Title I Parent Engagement Actions

1. Annual Title I Meeting

Timeline: Fall (The 2nd or 3rd Tuesday of September)

Purpose:

- Inform families about Title I programming
- Explain parent rights and responsibilities
- Review school-parent compact
- Explain curriculum, assessments, and proficiency levels

Format:

- In-person + virtual option
- Translation services provided
- Materials in accessible formats and language

2. School-Parent Compact Implementation

Timeline: Developed annually; reviewed during conferences

The compact will:

- Describe curriculum and instruction
- Outline how parents support learning at home
- Define shared academic responsibilities
- Establish communication expectations
- Reviewed at fall parent-teacher conferences
- Sent home with explanation
- Available on website

III. Two-Way Communication System

HGA will ensure regular, meaningful communication through:

Strategy	Frequency	Responsible Party
School Newsletter	Quarterly	Admin
Parent-Teacher Conferences	Quarterly	Teachers
Progress Reports	Quarterly	
Family Academic Updates	Bi-Quarterly	School Leadership
Parent Advisory Meetings	1/semester	Title I Coordinator
Surveys (Climate Engagement)	& Annually	Administration

Communication will:

- Be in languages families understand
- Be accessible to families with disabilities
- Provide timely academic information and other important updates

IV. Building Staff Capacity

To strengthen family engagement:

- Professional development for staff on effective family communication
- Training on culturally responsive engagement
- Guidance on supporting families of English Learners
- Coordination with community organizations and local partners.

V. Inclusive Engagement Strategies

HGA will provide full participation opportunities for families who are:

- Limited English proficient
- Economically disadvantaged
- Parents of students with disabilities
- Migratory families
- Racial or ethnic minority families

Accessibility Supports:

- Translation & interpretation services

- Alternative format documents
- Flexible meeting times (morning, evening, weekend)
- Virtual participation options

VI. Parent Advisory & Decision-Making

HGA will:

- Establish or maintain a Title I Parent Advisory Board
- Involve parents in reviewing:
 - Title I District Plan (SERVS application)
 - Schoolwide/Targeted Assistance Plans
 - School Improvement Plans
- Include parent input on use of 1% Title I family engagement funds (if allocation exceeds \$500,000)

VII. Annual Evaluation of Effectiveness

Each spring, HGA will:

1. Conduct parent surveys
2. Identify participation barriers
3. Evaluate engagement strategies
4. Review academic outcomes of Title I students
5. Revise engagement strategies as needed

Evaluation Focus Areas:

- Barriers to engagement
- Effectiveness of communication
- Impact on student achievement
- Equity of participation

VIII. Parent Support for Student Learning

HGA will provide families with:

- Clear explanations of curriculum and standards
- Assessment information (state and local)
- Achievement level explanations
- Home learning strategies
- Opportunities for regular meetings upon request

IX. Coordination with Other Programs

HGA will coordinate family engagement efforts with:

- Public preschool programs
- Federal, state, and local education programs
- Community organizations
- Business and philanthropic partners

X. Communication & Public Access

This Parent & Family Engagement Plan will be included in the Student Parent Handbook which will be:

- posted on the school website
- distributed to families annually
- reviewed and updated yearly

XI. Implementation Calendar

Month	Key Action
August	Staff training on family engagement, compact review at open house
September	Annual Title I Meeting
January	Midyear parent survey
March	Parent meeting
May	Annual evaluation & policy revision

XII. Monitoring & Accountability

The Title I Coordinator and school administrators will:

- Track participation data
- Monitor communication frequency
- Review compact implementation
- Report engagement outcomes to the Executive Director who will in turn report to the Board annually