



# TROJAN TODAY

YOUR SCHOOL TOWN OF HIGHLAND SOURCE FOR NEWS AND EVENTS | AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2024

## NEW YEAR. NEW TROJANS.

### Highland welcomes out-of-district students

The School Town had a seamless application and vetting process this spring and is planning to welcome an estimated 120 new students this month as part of its Out-of-District program, now in its second year.

This year, the administration made a decision to limit out-of-district admissions to those children who will be entering kindergarten through Grade 7.

Superintendent Brian Smith said it is in the best interests

of students to begin their new academic careers while still in elementary and middle schools.

“We had a phenomenal year in 2023-2024. It was a learning year, too,” Smith said.

“What we found is that students in Grades 8-12 tend to have more challenges adapting to a new learning environment,” he said. “We are eager to welcome all of our students and look forward to a productive year of learning.”

### HOW IT WORKS

Earlier this year, school leaders determined how many students per grade the district could accommodate this school year. The goal: Fill classes in Grades K-7 to their optimum number.

Asst. Superintendent Ryan Erdelac said parents were asked to complete a two step process, one online and the other in person, to be considered eligible for an available spot. The district is expecting about 120 new students out of the 143 applications accepted. Here’s the breakdown by grade:

Kindergarten	41
Grade 1	16
Grade 2	19
Grade 3	16
Grade 4	9
Grade 5	19
Grade 6	10
Grade 7	13



## New fall sports program – Unified Bocce – open to students of all abilities

The Highland Athletics Department has added Unified Bocce as a new sport for this school year, thanks to a Highland High School Student Athlete Leadership Committee initiative.

Athletic Director Ryan Harrington said Highland is eager to participate with at least one team coached by Brett Jennings.

Unified Bocce joins people with and without intellectual disabilities in equal numbers on

the same team. Unified Bocce is inspired by the ideal of students training and playing together, developing friendships and understanding along the way.

“Our student athletes wanted to create a more inclusive school environment,” he said.

“There are a great many unified sports available and most schools take part in them. This is just a starting point for us. We believe everyone deserves the chance to play.”

### MORE SPORTS INSIDE

- » Meet our new coaches in football, basketball, soccer, swimming, tennis and golf.
- » Learn about our Trainer of the Year and Non-officiating Person of the Year.
- » Join us at Main Square Park for our annual tailgate.

## ADMINISTRATION

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## SCHOOL BOARD

**Victor A. Garcia**, President

**Patrick Krull**, Vice President

**Allencia Ballard**, Secretary

**Robert Kuva**, member

**Erica Smith-Gomez**, member

The school board meets the third Tuesday of the month at 6 p.m. in the Administration Building, 9145 Kennedy Avenue, Highland.

**INFO:** Visit [highland.k12.in.us](http://highland.k12.in.us) for the latest information, including meeting agendas, school policies, board mission, beliefs and values.

## Teachers participate in state literacy program, bringing key reading initiatives to classrooms

Many School Town of Highland educators including Warren teachers Gina Ensell, Annamarie Pizer, Julie Terry and Jamie Wilson spent a portion of their summer diving into the state's new Keys to Literacy program – joining other instructors around the state.

The training involved coursework conducted via Zoom on seven consecutive Mondays and assignments that were completed outside of the instructional days.

All Pre-K through Grade 6 teachers – including special education – will need to complete 80 hours of professional development on the science of reading concepts followed by a written exam.

Without the training and passing of the state exam, Indiana teachers will not be able to renew their licenses beginning in 2027.

The Highland group overwhelmingly agreed they learned new methods that will be an asset to students in Highland.

Wilson, who has a master's degree in education and has been teaching kindergarten at Highland for 26 years, described the classwork as intense and worthwhile.

“Early literacy is important to me and vital to the students I teach,” she said. “As part of this training, I learned teaching methods for reading I wished I would have been taught in college.”



### ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The three components of the Indiana Keys to Literacy curriculum are:

- » 40-hour Keys to Beginning Reading
- » 15-hour Keys to Early Writing (PreK-Grade 2) or Keys to Content Writing (Grade 3 and up)
- » 25-hour Independent Learning Tasks

As a kindergarten teacher, my job is to teach foundational reading skills. This training was beneficial.”

Pizer, a 20-year veteran educator who teaches Grade 5, saw the training as an opportunity to refresh her skills.

“They focused on reading comprehension, how to ask kids questions and graphic organizers that help students hone their writing skills,” she said.

“Writing is a struggle for many of my students. As part of this course, I learned new ways to help them write and stay on topic. We also learned about new techniques to teach children with dyslexia. I’ll be incorporating what I learned in my classes this year.”

### LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

*“The School Town of Highland is ready for the new year with an enhanced safety system – and a bevy of new faces”*

Welcome back students, staff, coaches and parents! I hope you had the best summer!

#### SCHOOL SAFETY

Over the last few months, the School Town of Highland completed a project that tracks every door leading into and out of each of our schools. The enhanced safety system provides instant notification whenever a school door is not closed properly or within the time frame established by the district. It was a door left open that allowed access to a shooter in Uvalde, Texas. We want to guarantee that won’t happen here.

#### NEW FACES

We ended the last school year on a high note and the promise of great momentum this year. I want to extend a big Trojan welcome to our new educators and staff. They impressed me with their talent and drive during the interview process. I can’t wait to see them in action in the classroom.

It’s going to be a fantastic school year!



**Brian Smith**  
Superintendent  
School Town of Highland

# Welcome to the Trojan family!

A group of talented, new teachers are preparing to welcome about 3,100 students districtwide. These educators are replacing those who retired, moved or opted out of day-to-day teaching. Asst. Superintendent Ryan Erdelac said Highland has been fortunate to maintain a full complement of courses and extracurriculars – the arts, music, theatre, K-12 Project Lead the Way, Advanced Placement, athletics and more – because of additional funding from the out-of-district program.

## HIGHLAND HIGH SCHOOL

David Boban | Science  
 Raquel DeJesus | Receptionist/Secretary  
 Nick Ecsy | English/ELL, Boys/Girls Swimming Coach  
 Sandra Greer | Special Education  
 Eric Kundich | Science | Girls Basketball Coach | Girls Golf Coach  
 Lauren Makarauskas | Science  
 Katie Matias | Life Skills  
 Brianna Miller | Technology Resource Assistant  
 Russell Rommelfanger | Social Studies

## HIGHLAND MIDDLE SCHOOL

Brittany Bonner | 7th Grade Science  
 Anne Ciastko | Math and Special Education  
 Rebecca Fritz | 7th Grade English Language Arts  
 Sandra Greer | Life Skills  
 Lukas Hackett | 7th Grade Math  
 Rubicelli Hernandez | ELL aide  
 Colin McCullough | Personal Finance and Responsibility  
 Talitha Taylor | Special Education | ½-day afternoons

## SOUTHRIDGE ELEMENTARY

Elizabeth Ancich | Autism  
 Meaghan Ehlert | 5th grade  
 Monica Greiner | Para Autism  
 Sheriann Lovelace-Chandler | Music  
 Haley Matlon | 2nd Grade  
 Natalie Otero | Kindergarten  
 Hailee Rompca | 4th Grade  
 Talitha Taylor | Special Education | ½-day mornings  
 Kari Tolliver | Title 1 Director

## MERKLEY ELEMENTARY

Erik Paulsen | Music  
 Kari Tolliver | Title 1 Director

## JOHNSTON ELEMENTARY

Mark DeLeon | 5th Grade  
 Emma Kickert | 3rd Grade  
 Erik Paulsen | Music  
 Kari Tolliver | Title 1 Director  
 Wanda Enriquez | Instructional Aide  
 Angelica Mix | Instructional Aide  
 Thea Headd | ECD and LRE

## WARREN ELEMENTARY

Sheriann Lovelace-Chandler | Music  
 Kari Tolliver | Title 1 Director





# Welcome Coaches!

When fall sports debut, there will be new faces on the coaching staff.

Ben Geffert, fresh from two seasons as offensive line coach at Calumet College was named Highland Trojan head coach in April.

“Football has been a big part of my life. It was a sport that kept me motivated in all facets of my life,” said Geffert, who has a staff of nine assistant coaches. “My motivation now is to pay it forward, developing this team for success.”

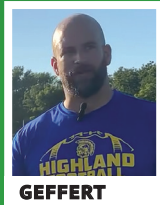
Eric Kundich, who had a lengthy tenure as coach of the East Chicago Girls Basketball team, is taking the reins coaching girls golf this fall and girls basketball this winter.

“I have met with members of both sports teams,” Kundich said. “These girls have talent. I can’t wait to see them in action.”

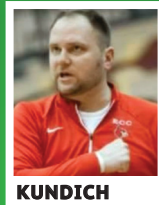
Geffert and Kundich are not alone. Highland High School sports are replete with talented newcomers.

Athletic Director Ryan Harrington said the district is fortunate.

“I am excited about this group of coaches and confident they will bring out the best in our athletes,” Harrington said.



**GEFFERT**



**KUNDICH**

## Meet the staff

There are a host of new faces coaching Highland High School prep sports. Athletic Director Ryan Harrington said the new group brings an abundance of energy to Trojan sports.

**Nick Escy**  
Boys and Girls Swimming

**Ben Geffert**  
Football

**Eric Kundich**  
Girls Golf and Girls Basketball

**Alejandro Madrigal**  
Boys Tennis

**Nikki Vandyke**  
Girls Volleyball

**Dennis Zerebiny**  
Boys Soccer

## Annual Tailgate

Join the Highland Athletic Booster Club at 6 p.m. Thursday, **August 15** for its Annual Tailgate Party at Main Square Park. We'll kick off the Trojan football season in style with a DJ, food and vendors.

## Football Schedule

The Trojans begin this year's football season away **August 18** at River Forest and will take on Whiting in the first home game **August 30**. All games are 7 p.m. Friday. Here's the lineup:

08.16	River Forest	A
08.23	Griffith	A
08.30	Whiting	H
09.06	Hanover Central	A
09.13	Calumet New Tech	A
09.20	Lowell	H
09.27	Andrean	A
10.04	Munster	H
10.11	Kankakee Valley	A
10.18	Hobart	H

Sectionals begin **October 25**.

## Non-officiating Person of the Year

The Lake County Officials Association has named HHS Athletic Department Secretary **Kathy Mahler** the Non-officiating Person of the Year. Congratulations!

## Trainer of the Year

Long-time **Highland High School Athletic Trainer Patrick Ohaver** has been named Secondary School Athletic Trainer of the Year for Indiana, Michigan and Ohio by the National Athletic Trainers' Association. Nominated by HHS Athletic Director Ryan Harrington, Ohaver was humbled by the award. “It was good to be honored among the people who provide student-athlete care.”

