



# TROJAN TODAY

YOUR SCHOOL TOWN OF HIGHLAND SOURCE FOR NEWS AND EVENTS | AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2025

## BRIDGING THE GAP

When school begins this year, parents of students in grades 6-12 who face obstacles to in-person, full-day learning will have options – Highland Online Public Education.

The HOPE school, an entity that is part of the district, has been designed for students who, because of illness, injury or other issues, are not able to attend classes will have the option of getting the same great education in a format created specifically for them.

Educator Brittney Delariva, who serves as HOPE Principal, said the goal is to create a learning environment and curriculum for students facing difficulties in the traditional classroom or school setting .

“The exciting part for me is supporting students and their families. The HOPE curriculum will follow that of in-school. If circumstances change for our online students, they will be able to transition seamlessly back to the classroom,” Delariva said. “Families who live in Highland who are home schooling their children are welcome to reach out to see if HOPE would be a good fit for them.”

### HOW IT WORKS

Highland Online Public Education, which is for Highland residents only, is launching this fall for students in Grades 6-12. Students will earn the same credits and take the same courses offered in a traditional school setting, but in an online format.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Parents who would like to learn more about the their high school or middle school child participating as an online student this fall should contact the Principal Brittney Delariva at [bdelariv@highland.k12.in.us](mailto:bdelariv@highland.k12.in.us).



HIGHLAND ONLINE PUBLIC EDUCATION

# HOPE

### Construction Update

Construction crews have been busy all summer gearing up for the new school year with renovated food labs, new HVAC units and repaved parking lots.

Full story Inside, Page 2

### New Teachers & Staff

A group of talented, new teachers and staff members will welcome students back to the School Town of Highland for the 2025-2026 academic year.

Full story Inside, Page 3

### Social Worker & Dog

The Highland Police Department's new social worker and her furry friend will be helping students and their families cope with issues affecting them.

Full story Inside, Page 4

## ADMINISTRATION

**Brian Smith**  
Superintendent  
bsmith@highland.k12.in.us

**Ryan Erdelac**  
Assistant Superintendent  
rerdelac@highland.k12.in.us

**Cindy Adams**  
Chief Financial Officer  
cadams@highland.k12.in.us

**Britni Luster**  
Food Service Administrator  
bluster@highland.k12.in.us

**Andrea Warner**  
District Nurse Coordinator  
awarner@highland.k12.in.us

**Kris Besch**  
Special Education Director  
kbesch@highland.k12.in.us

**Mike Sukta**  
Facilities Manager  
msukta@highland.k12.in.us

**Dominic Nieblas**  
Transportation Director  
dnieblas@highland.k12.in.us

**John Zack**  
Highland High School Principal  
jzack@highland.k12.in.us

**Scheryl Corman**  
Highland Middle School Principal  
scorman@highland.k12.in.us

**Amy Harrington**  
Johnston Elementary Principal  
aharrington@highland.k12.in.us

**Eric McMahon**  
Merkley Elementary Principal  
emcmahon@highland.k12.in.us

**Kevin Beveridge**  
Southridge Elementary Principal  
kbeverid@highland.k12.in.us

**Christina Davis**  
Warren Elementary Principal  
cdavis@highland.k12.in.us

## SCHOOL BOARD

**Patrick Krull**, President  
**Robert Kuva**, Vice President  
**Erica Smith-Gomez**, Secretary  
**Victor A. Garcia**, member  
**Richard Alyea**, 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.



After more than 40 years, the kitchens in the Family and Consumer Sciences Department are getting a huge makeover (left), while the parking lots are resurfaced (right). [ Ethan Roberts photos ]

## New food lab, HVAC units, resurfacing top back-to-school construction list

From installing new HVAC systems, to parking lot improvements and a top-to-bottom renovation of the food lab at the high school, construction crews have been finalizing details of a host of summer construction projects to guarantee they are school-ready.

### High School and Middle School

Heating and ventilation systems have been upgraded with two new chillers to keep students and staff at both schools cool and comfortable throughout the year. A comprehensive rehabilitation of the food lab at the high school has been a long time coming. Students are being greeted with new appliances, food prep stations, flooring, ceiling, cabinets and work surfaces. Rounding out the

upgrades are new sidewalks around the circle drive at the main entrance and new blacktop on the front lot.

### Johnston Elementary

New blacktop in the playground area has replaced the crumbling surface. The school also has a new rooftop air unit.

### Merkley and Warren Elementary

New rooftop air handling units have been put in place at both schools to replace aging infrastructure.

“Most projects should be winding down just in time for the upcoming school year,” District Electrician Russ McWilliams said. “We should be ready for students to return on the first day of school.”

## LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

*“We’re ready for another spectacular Trojan school year”*

Welcome back to a new school year full of opportunities for our students to shine. Summer has been full of preparations – for our buildings and curriculum – but there is something so very special about the first day of school when our students return **August 13**.

### Banning Electronics

New this year, all of our schools are electronics-free. Also known as the cell-phone ban, this prohibition, which stems from a new state law, is in place and in force from the first day of school. In addition to cell phones, devices covered include smart watches, tablets, earbuds, headphones and gaming devices. The policy was put in place after too many of our students treated earlier versions

as a suggestion – and not a rule. There is no question the policy will minimize distractions during the school day by creating a focused, respectful learning environment. Details are available online at [www.highland.k12.in.us](http://www.highland.k12.in.us).

### Launching HOPE

New this year is the launch of Highland Online Public Education. The HOPE school was created to provide a bridge for students who may have mental/health issues or credit deficiencies that prevent classroom attendance.



**Brian Smith**  
Superintendent  
School Town of Highland

# Welcome to the Trojan family!

Welcome to the teachers and staff members new to the School Town of Highland for the 2025-2026 school year. Asst. Superintendent Ryan Erdelac said this new group of educators brings a wealth of experience and talent that will serve students well. "Highland has the advantage of being a mid-sized district with a reputation for great education," he said. "We are sought out by teachers who welcome the quality education and classroom sizes offered at Highland."

## HIGHLAND HIGH SCHOOL

Lauren Bastaic | Guidance Registrar  
(moved from Johnston Librarian)  
Briget Brew | Bookkeeper  
Renee Castro | Spanish Teacher  
Jamie Houchin | Athletic Secretary  
(moved from HHS Treasurer/Bookkeeper)  
Lucas Maciejewski | District Computer Technician  
Steven Moss | Math Teacher

## HIGHLAND MIDDLE SCHOOL

Claire Hays | 7th Grade Math Teacher  
Mark Boer | 7th Grade Math Teacher  
Dawn Reule | Instructional Aide  
Hailey Tremain | Bookkeeper  
Emmanuel Alcala | ESL Aide  
Jane Beasley | Life Skills Teacher

## SOUTHRIDGE ELEMENTARY

Kaitlyn Lopez | Second Grade Teacher  
Hailey Rudloff | First Grade Teacher

## JOHNSTON ELEMENTARY

Mishelle Alvarez | Title 1 Paraprofessional  
(transfer from HHS Supervisory Aide)  
Jessica Kutscher | Instructional Aide  
Irma Long | K-2 Life Skills  
Michelle Schroeder | Special Education Teacher  
Jayne Sindewald | Special Education Teacher  
Stacy Steele | Librarian  
(transfer from Johnston 5th Grade Aide)

## WARREN ELEMENTARY

Rachel Roberts | 5th Grade Teacher  
Marcia McAleer | Title 1 Aide

## MERKLEY ELEMENTARY

Sarah Nagel | First Grade Teacher

Every  
DAY  
IS A CHANCE  
TO  
Learn





Social Worker Halie Gonlag (center) introduces her furry friend – Miss Murphee – to Highland School Superintendent Brian Smith (left), Director of Guidance Kelly Gossman and Asst. Superintendent Ryan Erdelac. [ Ethan Roberts photo ]

## Highland schools welcome new HPD social worker, furry friend

In the weeks leading up to the start of the new school year, Highland's first-ever Social Worker Halie Gonlag began planning with the School Town of Highland how students and families in need can tap into services to help navigate difficult circumstances.

Gonlag and her furry friend Miss Murphee were hired by the Highland Police Department with the idea that – just like they do with School Resource Officer Cpl. Rick Hoffman – the department would share the resource with the schools.

“My passion to use the power of social work to help others comes from personal experience and more than 10 years in the profession,” Gonlag said. “Everyone needs help sometimes. Our shared goal – the school’s and the police department’s – is to be that resource when students and families need it.”

### Power Paws

The Highland Public Library will welcome Power Paws for Kids the third Wednesday a month to give reluctant readers the opportunity to read to the group’s therapy dogs and their volunteer handlers.

The goal is to help build confidence in the students as they read to their new canine friends. The Highland library is one of six participating in the program during the upcoming school year.

**When:** 6-7 p.m. the third Wednesday of the month

**Where:** Highland Public Library, 2841 Jewett Ave.

**Info:** [powerpawsforkids.org](http://powerpawsforkids.org)

## Fall Trojan Sports

Athletic Director Ryan Harrington is eager to begin a packed roster for all Trojan sports, beginning with those that start in August.

“We’re looking good, up from last year in all sports,” Harrington said. “We have some bigger classes of freshmen and sophomores coming through. Our coaches are gauging enthusiasm as high beginning with boys football and girls volleyball and continuing through all of the team sports. Our coaches inspire their players while teaching the fundamentals for the benefit of the team – and for individual players.”

## New Head Coach

Jen Urbanczyk, who worked as assistant coach to bring the best to Highland Girls Volleyball last season, has been named Head Coach of the team for the 2025-2026 season. The Lady Trojans will play their first match under Head Coach Urbanczyk at 6:30 p.m. **August 18** at Kouts.

## Annual Tailgate

Join the Highland Athletic Booster Club at 6 p.m. Thursday, **August 14** 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 Highland Trojans will host a scrimmage against River Forest **August 15** and begin this year’s football season at home **August 22** against Griffith. All varsity football games are 7 p.m. Friday.

08.15	River Forest	Home
08.22	Griffith	Home
08.29	Whiting	Away
09.05	Hanover Central	Home
09.12	Calumet New Tech	Home
09.19	Lowell	Away
09.26	Andrean	Home
10.03	Munster	Away
10.10	Kankakee Valley	Home
10.17	Hobart	Away

Sectionals begin **October 24**.