



TROJAN TODAY

YOUR SCHOOL TOWN OF HIGHLAND SOURCE FOR NEWS AND EVENTS | FEBRUARY-MARCH 2026

JITTER BEANS

Highland students with cognitive disabilities gain real work experience serving up coffee, brownies

Rain or shine, high school administrators, teachers and staff can rely on a Wednesday email offering a menu of hot and cold beverages, snacks and fan-favorite brownies made in the new Family and Consumer Sciences kitchens that are promptly delivered without fail on Fridays.

It's become a proven winner, providing valuable skills – and a regular source of class income – for cognitively disabled students enrolled in the Life Skills curriculum.

HHS Principal John Zack said Jitter Beans is a favorite among staff, but also popular among the 14 students ages 14-22, who are responsible for everything that keeps their small business humming.

“Jitter Beans got its start when Highland students moved over from the New Tech location at the request of their parents,” Zack said. “The kids really enjoy what they’re doing, while learning the basics of running a small business.”



[Ethan Roberts photos]



Trojan's 4-time state champion wrestler sets her sights on competing globally

Six long months after surgery and rehab to repair a torn ACL, Aleksandra Bastaic finished her short season by wrestling her way to the Indiana State Girls Wrestling Championship title in the 155-pound weight class.

It was Bastaic's fourth state title in as many years and cemented her status as one of the best Indiana wrestlers in the history of the sport.

“These are bittersweet moments,” she said. “I worked so hard to get to this place and to surpass what I believed my limits were – both mentally and physically – and now I’ve wrestled in my last high school tournament.”

The IHSAA awarded Bastaic the coveted Mental Attitude Award for Girls Wrestling. Nominated by High School Principal John Zack and Girls Wrestling Coach Lauren Bastaic, the IHSAA

determined she best demonstrated mental attitude, scholarship and athleticism on – and off – the mat.

With a spirit that never quits, Bastaic is already looking at what's next. Summer wrestling isn't far off for the nationally recognized mat star.

By the time she graduates in June, Bastaic will make a decision on starting college this fall or taking a gap year to compete globally as part of the Serbian women's wrestling team in anticipation of securing a spot in the 2028 Olympics.

“I'll be visiting colleges this spring. My dream has always been to wrestle in the NCAA,” she said. “Whether that's this fall or a little bit down the road, I am excited to take stock of what I need to work on to continually improve. I always do best when wrestling is part of the equation.”



[Photos provided]

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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 for the latest information, including meeting agendas, school policies, board mission, beliefs and values.

Fostering community and friendship



Highland Best Buddies named New School Chapter of the Year in Indiana:

A big congratulations to Southridge Elementary and its Best Buddies students, parents and friends. The club – based at Southridge – has been named the New School Chapter of the Year in Indiana last year and also won a fundraising blitz called the Best Buddies Friendship Walk Rally Week. Together with the STOJ community, they raised more than \$4,000 in a very short period of time. “We are very proud of the hard work our small school has done in the areas of inclusion and friendship. This award means a lot to us,” Third Grade Teacher Beth Harwood said. The Southridge Best Buddies program meets once a month and does a wide variety of activities, including playing games together and making fun arts and crafts. “So many people at Southridge work together to make this program a huge success, and as soon as you step into a meeting, you can immediately see how much fun all the kids are having.” [Ethan Roberts photos]



LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

“Highland is proud of its many special needs programs – enriching us and the education tailored for our students”

I am proud of the programs that continue to evolve for our special needs students. You’ll find two examples in this issue of Trojan Today. These programs and initiatives amplify and enrich education tailored for our students who have cognitive disabilities.

What I love most is seeing these cherished programs thrive.

Life Skills: The Life Skills curriculum came back to Highland at the request of parents, who wanted their children to have the advantages of an education in the Highland schools. We wanted that, too. Today, our Life Skills students have created a cottage business in their Jitter Beans coffee cart.

Unified Bocce: Our student athletes lobbied for Unified Bocce, a relatively

new sport for us that pairs traditional and special needs in an athletic setting. Two years ago, Athletic Director Ryan Harrington was approached by students who wanted a league at Highland High School. Together, they made it happen.

Best Buddies: Southridge students have their very own Best Buddies club. Part of Best Buddies International, the goal is inclusion and meeting student needs at every age.

From the elementary schools to the high school, I want to thank everyone who works tirelessly to help these programs succeed.



Brian Smith
Superintendent
School Town of Highland



Jordan Steele (holding winning ball) is one of the state's top scorers and defenders. In January, she became Highland's all-time leading scorer, surpassing her sister, Taylor, and breaking the record held by Jenny DeMuth. [Ethan Roberts photos]



STEELE RESOLVE

STANDOUT SENIOR SHOOTING GUARD BREAKS TROJAN SCORING RECORD

Girls Basketball phenom Jordan Steele went into the Jan. 20 varsity game at Griffith surrounded by family, friends and teammates rooting for her to break Highland High School's scoring record that had stood for 24 years.

With two minutes left, Steele broke Jenny Demuth-Hensley's record with back-to-back three-pointers that made her prep scoring total 1,833 points – one more than she needed and with three more games remaining before sectionals.

Girls Basketball Coach Eric Kundich said Steele is a dream player – the perfect blend of talent and drive.

"Jordan perseveres no matter how the game is going," Kundich said. "She knows when to put the team on her back. She is a uniquely great player who helped lead the team to semi-state last year."

"In my freshman year, I never thought I could break Jenny's record," said the senior who is hoping to play college ball.

"Last year, I pushed myself to see just what I could do. I came into this season determined to do it," Steele said. "It's taught me that when you put time and dedication into something you really want, you get the outcome you're seeking."

Kindergarten Registration

Highland public elementary schools will hold kindergarten registration for the upcoming year in two phases:

PHASE 1: Visit the RDS parent access page at highland.k12.in.us to enroll new students. No code required.

PHASE 2: Parents are urged to bring their children and the items listed below to the school that serves their immediate district. All registrations will be held from 3 to 5:30 p.m. on the dates below:

TUESDAY, MARCH 3

Johnston Elementary School
8220 Fifth St. • (219) 923-2428

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4

Southridge Elementary School
9221 Johnston St. • (219) 922-5650

THURSDAY, MARCH 5

Merkley Elementary School
9340 Fifth St. • (219) 922-5640

TUESDAY, MARCH 10

Warren Elementary School
2901 100th St. • (219) 922-5660

AGE REQUIREMENT

Students must be 5 years of age on or before Aug. 1, 2026.



[Ethan Roberts photo]

ITEMS FOR REGISTRATION:

- Five proofs of residency**
Two of the following: NIPSCO, water, phone, cable (utility bills/deposit receipts)
Two of the following: Driver's license/state ID showing current address, vehicle registration, recent paycheck/unemployment check.
One of the following: Lease and rent receipt, mortgage and homeowners insurance documents, notarized letter with three proofs of residency from the homeowner (parent/guardian must provide ID listed above)
- Proofs of custody**, if applicable
- Birth certificate**
- Social Security Number**
- Current Immunization records**

MATTRESS ^{HIGHLAND} *Music* FUNDRAISER

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Upcoming Concerts

Join us for these free, family-friendly performances by our very talented performing arts students.

March 3 | 6:30 p.m.
6-12 Orchestra Concert

March 10 | 6:30 p.m.
Middle School Choral Concert

March 11 | 6:30 p.m.
Warren Elementary Program

March 12 | 6:30 p.m.
Johnston Elementary Program

March 17 | 6:30 p.m.
High School Choir Concert

April 9 | 6:30 p.m.
6-12 Band Concert

Where: Monbeck Auditorium,
Highland High School, 9135 Erie St.

Craft & Vendor Fair

Get a jump on your Easter, Mother's Day or graduation gift shopping at the Highland Band Boosters' Spring Craft & Vendor Fair. Help support these talented students! The event features an amazing collection of talented artists, crafters and vendors. Join in on the raffle fun and stop by the bake sale table for a sweet treat.

WHEN: 9 a.m.-3 p.m. **March 7**

WHERE: Highland Middle School,
2941 41st Street

ADMISSION: Free

INFO: Please email us at
highlandbandindianacraftfair@
gmail.com

Spring Musical

Highland Theatre Company is proud to present its spring musical, **Big Fish School Edition**, a sweeping and heartfelt story about family and memory. Overflowing with humor, warmth, and wonder, the musical celebrates the power of storytelling and the legacy we leave behind.

WHEN:

7 p.m. Friday, **May 1**
7 p.m. Saturday, **May 2**
2 p.m. Sunday, **May 3**

WHERE: Monbeck Auditorium,
Highland High School, 9135 Erie St.

TICKETS: For tickets and more info,
visit HighlandTheatreCompany.org.