

U.S. Department of Education
2023 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [] Title I [] Charter [X] Magnet [] Choice

Name of Principal Mr. James Montgomery
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Highland School of Technology
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 1600 N Morris Street
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Gastonia State NC Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 28052-1739

County Gaston

Telephone (704) 810-8816 Fax (704) 866-6105

Web site/URL https://www.gaston.k12.nc.us/highland E-mail jrmontgomery@gaston.k12.nc.us

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

(Principal's Signature) Date _____

Name of Superintendent* Dr. Stephen Laws E-mail sclaws@gaston.k12.nc.us
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Gaston County Schools Tel. (704) 866-6100

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

(Superintendent's Signature) Date _____

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mr. Jeff Ramsey
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature) Date _____

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

**Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, leave blank.*

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. All nominated public schools must meet the state's performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2023 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
3. The school configuration must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2018 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2022.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 or 2022.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
11. The nominated school has, or is subject to, a nondiscrimination policy (provide either a link to the policy or submit a text of the policy), is committed to equal opportunity for all students and all staff consistent with applicable law and does not have any outstanding findings of unlawful discrimination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's nomination and/or rescind a school's award if unlawful discrimination is later discovered.

12. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's nomination and/or rescind a school's award if one of these eligibility requirements is later discovered to have not been met or otherwise been violated.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the current school year (2022-2023) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools. For charter schools: If a charter school is part of the public school system, information should be provided for the public school district. If a charter school is considered its own district or part of a charter district, the information provided should reflect that.)

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 31 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
13 Middle/Junior high schools
14 High schools
1 K-12 schools
- 59 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools. **Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not for the district.**)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

☐ Urban (city or town)
☒ Suburban
☐ Rural

3. Number of students in the school as of October 1, 2022 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Students
PreK	0
K	0
1	0
2	0
3	0
4	0
5	0
6	0
7	0
8	0
9	132
10	132
11	127
12 or higher	115
Total Students	506

*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 5.9 % Asian
 - 13.9 % Black or African American
 - 14.2 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 62.5 % White
 - 3.5 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2021 - 2022 school year: 2%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain:

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	9
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	9
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2021	535
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.02
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	2

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):

Arabic, Bosnian, Chinese, Gujarati, Hindi, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Telugu, Vietnamese, and Visayan

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 1 %
3 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 26 %

Total number students who qualify: 133

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP: 0 %
Total number of students served 1

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. All students receiving special education services with an IEP should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

<u>1</u> Autism	<u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>0</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>0</u> Developmental Delay	<u>0</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>0</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>0</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>0</u> Intellectual Disability	<u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Students receiving special education services with a 504: 8 %
Total number of students served: 40

10. Number of years the principal has been in the position at this school: 4

11. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	38
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	1
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	1
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	6

12. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 13:1

13. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2021-2022	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018
Daily student attendance	94%	94%	97%	95%	96%
High school graduation rate	100%	100%	100%	99%	100%

14. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2022.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	131
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	65%
Enrolled in a community college	30%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	3%
Joined the military or other public service	2%
Other	0%

15. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes X No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award. 2017

16. In a couple of sentences, provide the school's mission or vision statement.

To prepare students for success in post-secondary education, the community, and workplace by providing students with a rigorous and relevant academic, character, and technological education.

17. Provide a URL link to the school's nondiscrimination policy.

1. <https://www.gaston.k12.nc.us/ada>

18. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

Highland School of Technology, a career and technical magnet high school, requires students to apply to attend during their eighth-grade year. Each spring the school holds an open house event where interested candidates, along with their families, visit and learn about the school and its career pathways firsthand. In addition, members of the counseling and administrative staff visit the eleven area middle schools to showcase Highland and its benefits. The middle school students view a promotional video created by our graphics students. A deeper explanation of the unique features of Highland is also presented through a digital presentation. School tours are available via appointment by the student Ram HOST's. Applications prerequisites are as follows: students and parents must be residents of Gaston County, students applying must have a C average or higher, must be in good standing in conduct, must have at least a 94% attendance rate, and must score at least a Level III or higher on the End, of Course tests for reading and math in both seventh and eighth grade.

Interested eighth-grade students meeting the above criteria must submit a completed application by the stated (February) deadline. On the application, students must rant about their top three pathway choices from the seven pathways offered at our school. Once an application has been received, our staff checks to make sure they meet the seventh-grade criteria to be included in the lottery. Students who apply, but do not meet the criteria, receive a letter explaining why they are ineligible to be in the lottery. Once all applications are checked a lottery is held to determine which students are chosen to attend. The lottery is based on the student's home high school and Highland's pathway openings. Each regular high school is allotted a number

of slots for students, based on the distribution of the student population across the district. There is also an allotted number for each pathway. Each incoming ninth-grade class will have 145 students. For the 145 open spots, upwards of 500 applications are typically received.

The Lottery is a two-step process. The names of students, who met the criteria are preloaded onto a spreadsheet by a third-party outside source. The names are randomly assigned a rank order by student name, feeder school, and pathway selections. Secondly, the names are shuffled and a school official publicly announces the student names and the pathway they were selected for. In addition, the names are recorded by feeder school and pathway area, that the student was selected for. Students who are not initially selected are placed on a waiting list for spots as they become available.

At the end of the school year, our staff checks the eighth-grade criteria to determine final acceptance into Highland. Letters are then mailed to accepted students. During the summer, school counselors and the administrative staff work to finalize the freshman class by processing commitment letters and double-checking the entrance criteria to make sure the process is fair and equitable for all. If a student decides not to attend Highland, we fill the open spot based on the high school feeder area and pathway opening available. Because Highland serves and reflects the entire district of nine high schools, varying in size, a direct proportion of each feeder school makes up the school's population.

PART III – SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Highland School of Technology (HST) is a career and technical magnet school, serving grades 9-12, reflecting the 231,000 residents of Gaston County, North Carolina. Opening as a smaller learning community in 2000, Highland is a renovated and repurposed public school with three academies and seven pathway options including Allied Health Science, Medical Science, Dental Science, Computer Science, Business and Legal Studies, Manufacturing and Engineering Technology, and Graphics.

Highland students have a supporting cast made up of teachers, administrators, secretaries, custodians, and everyone in between. Stakeholders are dedicated to serving students after school through tutoring and club meetings, but they also show up for athletic events, performances, and even to support them at their after school jobs. This tight-knit community is known for genuinely caring for each others' success and well-being.

At the school's recent performance of *Grease*, a retired principal from the district took time to boast of the personalization afforded to his granddaughter at Highland. He was in disbelief of all the amazing opportunities the school offers to help students achieve, but also a place that allows students to be themselves, feeling supported and accepted. One schoolwide need that significantly increased post-Covid was the concern for the mental health of our student population. As a result, Highland's principal began a one hour a week break for students known as RamTime. During these two thirty-minute sessions, students have opportunities to unwind and choose activities that are most inviting and encouraging to them. Offerings, developed by teachers and student suggestions, have included: a quiet time for calm, viewing episodes of *The Andy Griffith Show*, learning to crochet, tackling the college application process, portfolio work sessions, playing basketball, creative journaling, and preparing for advanced placement and other standardized tests.

As a result of Highland earning National Blue Ribbon status in 2017, there has been an increase in student applications at this prestigious school. While many in the community have completed their K-8 education at private and charter schools, Highland's reputation is highly regarded, thus making it the place to be in the Gaston County. The application and lottery process are two features that make the school unique, and holding two open house sessions for potential students and their parents have resulted in a positive energy among community members and a new eagerness to join the amazing culture that keeps Highland at the top of North Carolina's and the nation's schools.

During Covid, Highland's primary focus on student learning and achievement remained the same, and as a result of a strong foundation of teachers and support staff, data proved that the goal was reached, as there was no decline in success rates and accomplishments. While the shift to a hybrid schedule was not seamless, Highland students and staff approached the change in the same way they do everything—with resilience and fortitude. A strong administrative staff and key support personnel not only encourage teachers to try new things in their classrooms but challenge them to raise the bar for students to achieve even more, motivating all stakeholders to believe in our students and their potential!

Highland students are like-minded in their passion for academia, but most have other pursuits which highlight and showcase success in other areas, all of which are celebrated and encouraged. The past two years graphics students have created popular tifos for the Charlotte Football Team which have been on display at home games. Art students designed and painted doors on display at the well-known and heavily-visited Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden. Highland students are ambitious and focused when it comes to the community as well. One student recently set up a "giving box" where she and others supply canned goods, toiletries, and clothes for the community's homeless population. Another student, interested in preserving history, gifted an area historical association and battleground by building benches and a firewood rack, as well as a raised herb garden for historical plants and herbs to be used for cooking. Another student realized a need for students at a local elementary school to have their very own books, collecting over 500 in a matter of weeks, and yet another takes it upon herself to stock Cancer Services of Gaston County with canned food and Gatorade every month. While traditionally Highland is known for its strong academics, recently, students have also been leaving their mark throughout the community in the area of athletics, reaching

milestones in track and field, golf, volleyball, and tennis, while bringing home state titles in both swimming and cross country. The wide range of interests and involvements exhibit the well-roundedness and caliber of students Highland produces, making these renaissance scholars ready for what's next.

Highland creates a culture that inspires graduates to return and share their college and career experiences with current students. The one recurring theme is how well Highland prepared them for success for college and the workforce. While many visit as guest speakers, others take to social media to highlight how positively influenced and highly prepared they were as a result of attending this National Blue Ribbon School. Another result of students loving their time at Highland and the culture established is the number of former graduates who feel led to return to the school to teach and coach. Others return with a different passion. During Covid, two former students, now married, repurposed the school's Little Free Library into a food bank for the immediate Highland community. In short, Highland students, past and present, are invested. Invested in the school. Invested in the community. Invested in each other. Invested in the future.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

1a. Reading/English language arts curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:

At Highland School of Technology, our English curriculum pairs the four ELA standard domains — Reading, Writing, Language, and Speaking and Listening — with diverse texts and authentic experiences to cultivate global citizenship, foster critical thinking skills, and promote a life-long love of reading and literature. Our students take four required English courses alongside elective and Advanced Placement (AP) courses where HST teachers facilitate student-centered lessons designed to advance civic learning and engagement as well as build foundational skills necessary for future success.

Teachers infuse collaborative learning opportunities, project-based learning, critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, authentic audience engagement, and student choice throughout their lessons as these best practices increase student agency and achievement, and teach skills that transfer to success in college and the workplace. Because of the unique make-up of Highland’s structure, core classes, like English, are encouraged to partner with our CTE classes to reinforce content and deepen the understanding and relevancy of our curriculum to the real world. HST collaborates with business leaders and community stakeholders to offer real-world learning experiences through field trips, guest speakers, and student internships.

In all courses, students read and analyze both literary and informational texts and cite textual evidence to support their analyses through close readings, class discussions and seminars, and a mixture of whole-class, small group, and independent choice novels. By including a variety of instructional techniques, a diverse selection of authors, and a focus on student choice, students connect with and more fully understand the content and develop an appreciation for different cultures and writing styles, increasing student engagement and ownership. Students develop and analyze language, master grammar, usage, and mechanics, craft well-written essays in a variety of modes, critique and edit their own and their peers’ writing, and produce and perform speeches and presentations for a variety of audiences. Students create podcasts, public service announcements, and persuasive videos and social media campaigns on current social issues published to wider audiences via the internet and through state and national contests to promote writing and producing for an authentic audience. Courses focus on college readiness and digital literacy, reinforcing research and rhetorical skills such as avoiding plagiarism, using and citing credible sources, evaluating arguments for bias, and understanding satire in order enhance civic engagement and to prepare students for post-secondary pursuits.

We use a variety of formative and summative assessments to monitor student progress and inform instruction, including NC Check-ins, teacher, school-wide and county-level assessments, and performance-based and written assessments. Our teachers analyze this data to identify student strengths and weaknesses in order to differentiate instruction, provide targeted feedback to students, and adjust curriculum and instruction where needed. Our students also utilize this data to set goals, monitor progress, and reflect on their learning, promoting metacognition and self-directed learning.

1b. Mathematics curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:

Math instructors emphasize rigor by balancing procedural fluency with conceptual understanding as they teach the North Carolina Standard Course of Study and multiple Advanced Placement courses. Algebraic skills are spiraled throughout the curricula while technology is integrated, where appropriate, to investigate ideas and support conclusions. Concepts are introduced graphically, numerically, and analytically, and teachers often utilize guided investigations, enabling students to take ownership of their learning. For example, NC Math 3 students discover the properties of the points of concurrency by folding patty paper triangles and making observations.

Teachers strive to help students recognize that mathematics can be both practical and relevant. From NC Math 1, where students use regression to make predictions about historical data, to AP Statistics, where

learners investigate data relating to a topic of their own interest, students engage in meaningful statistical analysis in ways that cross the curriculum. Modeling is also employed to analyze real world scenarios. In NC Math 2, students use right triangle trigonometry to predict the path of Flight 1549 during its historic landing on the Hudson River.

Robust class discussion and cooperative learning opportunities are foundational to ongoing assessment. Teachers continually monitor progress and data drives remediation. In NC Math 1 and NC Math 3, teachers utilize NC Check-In testing data to prepare students for state testing. Students demonstrate mastery through discussion, presentations, projects, and traditional assessments.

1c. Science curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:

Course offerings include Earth and Environmental Science, Biology, and Chemistry (standard and honors), Physics (honors) and Physical Science (standard). AP courses offered include AP Biology, AP Chemistry, and AP Environmental Science. Science electives offered include: Forensics, Anatomy and Physiology, and a catalog of online science courses that span from standard to college level courses via NCVPS and local community colleges.

Science instruction engages in varied methods based on best practices and student learning styles. Students participate in virtual and hands-on inquiry-based simulations that provide the chance to hone and refine their science skills. Students participate in project-based learning, independent research projects, development of science literacy and an integrational project that connects science content to other disciplines. Information is disseminated through a variety of methods including teacher-led lectures, student facilitated discussions, small group and large group work, and individual practice. Teachers have access to the resources required to integrate hands-on learning, including Vernier Probeware, traditional science equipment (glassware, etc.), funds for consumable resources, and professional development needed to consistently implement highly-engaging lessons.

Teachers utilize guest speakers and field trips to highlight real world applications of the content. Students telecommute into a cardiac surgery facilitated by the MSI in Chicago and local hospital systems. During surgery, students converse with the operating room, providing context for class content and career exploration. Community partners volunteer time as guest speakers to speak with students including recent meteorology graduates that can speak on the content and college life. Students are assessed formally and informally using a variety of methods to ensure students can showcase their understanding in ways that stretch and challenge their thinking. In addition to state and AP testing, students participate in a variety of summative assessments, including presentations, research projects, and performance-based products.

1d. Social studies/history/civic learning curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:

Highland School of Technology offers a range of Social Studies courses including World History, Civics, American History, Economics and Personal Finance, and Advanced Placement classes in both European and American History. Within the framework of their respective course standards, Highland Social Studies students participate in a variety of engaging activities designed to promote critical thinking while providing significant opportunities for collaboration and active learning. Civics students, for example, participate in mock trials to experience the inner workings of the American judicial system in an authentic way, while American History students work in peer groups to write and dramatize key events from the American Civil War in an activity that requires historical knowledge, creativity, and collaboration. AP European History students participate in a “funeral” for Napoleon Bonaparte, where learners take on the role of an historical figure, writing and delivering a eulogy in an extended lesson meant to synthesize learning while highlighting the importance of empathy and understanding multiple perspectives in both historical and contemporary settings. By incorporating lessons that are designed to promote active learning, Highland students gain mastery of key Social Studies concepts in meaningful and engaging ways while learning to think critically, problem solve, and transform information into concrete outputs with real-world relevance. In addition to activity-based lessons, instructors employ a variety of formative and summative assessment opportunities, providing students with valuable data-driven feedback, focused on areas of need, ranging from gamification to traditional pencil and paper tests.

1e. For schools that serve grades 7-12:

The Career and Technical Education (CTE) is the focus of the three academies and seven pathways. Each pathway has seven or eight CTE courses required. Highland has worked to maintain a standard of excellence in their pathways and to prepare students for college or careers. The Dental pathway is unique to Highland, with digital x-rays and three dental operatories, students learn to assist dentists as they screen the county head start students. The Manufacturing curriculum was created by Highland with a manufacturing lab in which the students learn the different facets of manufacturing. Computer Science teaches the leading programming languages used in industry, program robots as well as creating networks with industry standard routers and switches. The other pathways - Allied Health, Business and Legal, Graphics Design and Medical Science - all teach the students career ready skills. Students are also provided opportunities to earn industry certifications related to their pathway curriculum. All students earn Adobe certifications their freshmen year. Some other industry certifications are Cisco Technician, Python Associate, and Certified Nursing Assistant.

All students participate in a work-based learning experience in their senior year. The Academy Coordinators work with students to find internships that relate to their pathway and are an interest for the student. Highland has developed partnerships with mentors to continue this opportunity for the students. Internships have taken place at law firms, the Public Defender's and the District Attorney's offices, architectural firms, manufacturing facilities, computer software design companies and civil engineering with the city or county. Medical Science, Allied Health and Dental seniors have clinicals where they work with the respective professionals to apply the skills they have learned.

Through the CTE programs, Guidance curricula, and dual enrollment in College and Career Promise (CCP) classes, Highland students are both college and career ready. Ninety-five percent of our graduates enter post-secondary institutions. Five percent go directly into the workforce or military. The result of concentration and hard work is a graduating class replete with college and career-ready students.

1f. For schools that offer preschool for three- and/or four-year old students:

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

2a. Arts (visual and/or performing)

At Highland, we offer a variety of visual and performing arts, including Art, Band, Chorus, and Theater Arts. The visual arts program is designed to develop visual literacy by promoting fluency in the various modes of visual communication. Students learn the visual arts by using a wide range of subject matter, media, and means to express their ideas, emotions, and knowledge. The theatre arts program integrates several aspects of the art form: script writing, acting, designing, directing, researching, comparing art forms, analyzing, critiquing, and understanding context. Using these skills, students create situations and assume roles; they interact with peers and arrange environments to bring their stories to life; and they direct and respond to one another's dramas. The music program is designed to develop musical literacy. Through music, students increase their awareness of the rich and diverse cultures, beliefs, and societies of humankind, which fosters a respect for diversity. While the primary goals of the music program are the processes of creating, performing, and understanding music, our program capitalizes on cross-curricular integration and collaboration to strengthen and deepen these goals and to highlight the connection between the arts and other subjects.

2b. Physical education/health/nutrition

Our Health/Physical Education program is built around healthful living and skills needed for an active lifestyle. Freshmen enrolled in Health/Physical education acquire a CPR/First Aid certification and

participate in activities designed to enhance fine motor skills including archery, tennis, and basketball. Students participate in Fitnessgram, a national fitness assessment to help students gain a better understanding of their own health related fitness. Students create short- and long-term goals to improve their physical fitness and implement leadership skills throughout their participation. Health class includes five major components of learning: personal and consumer health, substance abuse, mental and emotional health, nutrition, and sexual health.

Upperclassmen are encouraged to continue to participate in the other physical education courses offered including Team Sports, Body Wellness and Physical Education Pupil Instruction (PEPI). Team sports encourages students to continue to enhance motor skills, game strategy, concepts and implement leadership skills. Body Wellness focuses on nutrition, weight training, aerobics and plyometrics. PEPI is a site-based curriculum designed to introduce students to the teaching profession through lesson design, physical education and classroom management. Students implement these core topics by leading elementary physical education classes. Students gain valuable experience in leadership, communication, and community service.

2c. Foreign language(s), if offered (if not offered, leave blank)

Our World Language department complements the content and themes taught in other disciplines throughout our school. All HST students prepare themselves for higher education, the workplace, and life after high school by taking at least two levels of a world language to graduate with the UNC College Diploma Endorsement. Many students continue to advance their language skills beyond the minimum requirement. Four levels of Spanish are offered on campus, and other world language courses are offered online via the North Carolina Virtual Public School or Gaston Online. In our world language courses, students are challenged to expand their worldview and build cultural competence by exploring the diverse cultures of the countries where the language is spoken. To support their efforts, they are provided the necessary tools to develop reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in the target language. Students are also taught to collaborate with peers on class activities, projects, and presentations and to make connections to other academic disciplines as they build on prior knowledge. Building a solid linguistic foundation at our school has allowed our students to be globally competitive in the job market and has opened international doors of opportunity for graduates in their post-secondary studies.

2d. Technology/library/media

The media center serves as a catalyst for student success by providing information, literacy instruction, and resources that align with all curriculum areas. Our collection includes both print and electronic resources and contains over 6000 titles, providing an average of 12.2 resources per student, exceeding North Carolina state standards. The media specialist supports teachers and students by assisting them in utilizing the Innovation Station and library resources as they create projects and assignments for coursework and club activities.

Cutting-edge technology can be found throughout our building. Our Innovation Station includes a state-of-the-art podcast studio, broadcast studio, computer design space, makerspace, and student collaboration room. Students have ready access to VR technology and 3-D printing capabilities, allowing for creativity and innovation beyond the limits of the traditional classroom. The computer design space is an area for students to collaborate using iMac and Adobe technology. The broadcast studio includes specialized lighting, a full-sized green screen, and an anchor news desk.

Every student is issued a device with wireless connectivity and is provided access to dedicated, cutting-edge computer labs on campus.

2e. Any other interesting or innovative curriculum programs you would like to share

3. Academic Supports

3a. Students performing below grade level:

Our school is dedicated to ensuring the growth of all students, including those who are not yet performing at grade level. Our main objective is to provide the necessary encouragement and support to help these students develop academically and gain confidence. To achieve this, we have implemented a variety of interventions and support systems that utilize data from previous years, check-in scores, and relevant assessments to identify and target students in need.

We offer before and after-school tutoring sessions, as well as a unique 30-minute in-school session known as "Ram Time" that provides dedicated time to work with struggling students. This time is utilized by teachers to focus on the basic needs and requirements that will help students progress academically. Additionally, our classrooms at Highland incorporate practices such as adjusting plans when necessary, small group work, and peer learning to support students who may be struggling with the material. Many classrooms use scaffolding techniques to help pair students with peers that could help "teach" them in different ways.

By utilizing these strategies routinely in the classroom, we have seen an improvement in students' confidence levels and academic growth. Our ultimate goal is to help each student reach their maximum potential.

3b. Students performing above grade level:

At Highland School of Technology, we are committed to the growth and development of all students, regardless of their academic level. We understand that every student learns differently and at their own pace, and we have implemented practices to ensure that each student reaches their full potential in all classes. Our school offers individualized instruction, where students can choose the level of instruction that best fits their needs. This allows high-achieving students to focus on more complex questions, while other students may opt for more basic level work. We also emphasize integrations between subjects to help our higher-achieving students make curricular connections between different subjects. In one specific example from a business class, the higher-level students were paired with similar students from engineering. Together they created a 3-D model of a product and then wrote the marketing campaign for it. These kinds of integrations are what makes our school soar above others in test scores and achievement. Additionally, we offer differentiated instruction to meet the needs of students at different levels. For example, in one of our math classes, students are tasked with creating a drawing of a character or cartoon using different functions in a graphing calculator. Honors students are required to create their own functions and then implement them to create the picture, while regular students are given functions that they can use to create their pictures. This differentiation challenges our high-achieving students to think creatively and outside of the box. Differentiation also often occurs with students in honors classes by making them solve or work out problems without the aid of a calculator thus preparing them for higher level courses such as calculus. Our goal at Highland is to provide students with the best education possible—pushing each student to learn and grow while here.

3c. Students with disabilities:

Highland School of Technology aims to meet each student at their unique academic level and partner with them and other stakeholders to maximize their growth, confidence, and overall success. Where the population of students with disabilities is relatively low, it is equally important and is given the same degree of care as all other groups. Our exceptional students, many of whom have Section 504 plans, are guided by academy coordinators, counselors, and teachers to ensure their course selection, teacher selection, and school supports are tailored to their needs. Teams of trained staff meet regularly with parents and students to review learning plans and accommodations for each student. Input from all parties is combined to ensure each student has the classroom and testing modifications necessary to meet their needs. Teachers consistently monitor the learning plans for their students and adjust classroom strategies and practices to allow students to engage with the curriculum in multiple ways and in ways that best align with their learning style. Designated testing rooms are available and utilized to ensure the most appropriate setting for each student. Additional and ongoing training is provided to teachers to address all areas of classroom practice,

including curriculum, instruction, assessment, data analysis, and a myriad of learning supports available to students within the classroom environment.

3d. English Language Learners:

Highland School of Technology works to create a supportive and engaging learning environment for all students. The population of English language learners is small, but our student population is quite diverse. Many students have alternative first languages, and many speak multiple languages. Our goal is to be culturally responsive and celebrate the diversity and uniqueness of our ELL students. Bilingualism, rather than replacement, is embraced in language learning. Allowing ELL students to make personal connections to their teachers, other students, and the curriculum ensures they feel a true sense of belonging within the school community. County-level staff supports ELL students and teachers to monitor academic progress and cultural adjustment. Teachers allow ELL students to engage with the material in multiple ways, including writing, speaking, drawing, and listening. Language skills are taught across the curriculum and not in isolation in the language classes. Highland teachers look for ways to showcase the distinct knowledge of our ELL students and offer them opportunities to lead others in the classroom. This prepares all students to be globally competitive learners and collaborators.

3e. Other populations, if a special program or intervention is offered:

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Highland creates a culture that engages and enlivens students to not just participate in learning, but to take ownership of it. When students are actively engaged, they achieve their academic goals and develop a lifelong love of learning.

Each summer, upcoming freshmen are welcomed into the Highland family by upperclassmen leaders called Ram Hosts. These ambassadors guide students through an extensive tour of the school and communicate not only the logistics of classroom locations and schedules, but also the standards of academic rigor, extracurricular participation, and student conduct. This first interaction sets the tone for community, excellence, and belonging at Highland—a place where it is "cool" to be smart, involved, and dedicated. In turn, current students strive to maintain and surpass the achievements of alumni.

Highland recognizes that each student has unique talents and abilities; our staff confidently fosters these abilities to create a safe space where students thrive and excel. As part of our unique school model, each student is placed within a Career and Technical Education pathway based on their individual interests. Pathway courses, along with core and elective courses, act as the foundation for learning, empowering students to pursue their own passions and needs, while tackling rigorous coursework with the freedom and support to succeed.

Along with individualized interests and abilities, students at Highland often go outside the classroom for daily instruction and experiences. It is not uncommon for creative writing students to meet at the senior picnic tables, for biology classes to meet on the grassy hill, for English classes to meet at the recently created outdoor classroom, for medical academy students to unwind with field day, or for AP Statistics students to drop Barbie dolls off the library balcony.

In addition to academic programs, our school offers extracurricular activities to motivate, engage, and support students. Our largest clubs are three academy-aligned groups that allow students to extend their knowledge into the real world: Future Business Leaders of America, Health Occupation Students of America, and Technology Student Association. While not mandatory to join, membership reflects almost all students within the corresponding pathways; our students enjoy being part of these organizations and seek opportunities to learn, grow, and create within their fields of study, while competing at state and national levels. Also active and competing at these levels is the BETA Club, which encourages students to achieve scholastic excellence and pursue community involvement. Highland offers many opportunities to encourage well-rounded and involved students such as Student Council, Environmental Club, Gay-Straight Alliance, Bible Club, International Cultures Club, dRAMa Club, Photography Club, and Young Women's Association.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Community stakeholders support many programs at Highland, and in turn, Highland serves the community. The school has an Advisory Board in which local community leaders provide input on the pathway courses offered. The board meets quarterly to discuss, support, and improve pathways, offering suggestions to keep each pathway up-to-date on real world practices. These business partnerships have provided the school with up-to-date technology, allowing hands-on experience in high-tech career models and assessments including WorkKeys testing, Dental Radiology certification, and the CISCO Certified Entry Networking Technician exam. Recently, several donations from the community allowed updates to the Dental and Medical classrooms with various equipment and flexible seating options for students and provided upgrades to the computer engineering classrooms.

An integral component of our school is offering internships to seniors. Highland provides internship opportunities with various businesses and organizations like local doctors' offices, sheriffs' offices and manufacturing facilities. In addition to internships, business partners offer interviews for job placement and

pathway-related research and often serve as guest speakers for enrichment and extension to pathway curricula. Highland provides students an edge in careers of their choice due to specialized learning experiences resulting from strong community partnerships. The guidance department brings in numerous university representatives to speak to juniors and seniors throughout the year and meets with students in large group and individual settings to provide assistance during the college application process. Our community continues to invest in the success of our students inside and outside the classroom, during and after their time at Highland.

Highland students connect with the community through various service projects for organizations like Relay for Life, CaroMont Regional Medical Center, the Boys and Girls Club, local daycares and elementary schools, and community blood drives. Highland students strive to help those in need and actively seek opportunities to support our community's needs through the many active clubs on campus. Annually, students log over 4000 hours in community service among the various opportunities offered at Highland.

Our highly active and involved Parent Teacher Student Organization supports and maintains Highland's rich culture by purchasing and donating classroom supplies, building teacher morale, organizing, promoting, and volunteering at student activities, like Senior Sunrise, Senior Sunset, and the annual homecoming dance. Highland's Athletic Booster Club hosts special events, like tailgate parties and Senior Night, to cheer on the Rams at sporting events, while also supporting athletics financially by selling spirit wear and concessions at home events. Highland administrators keep the community and parents updated on school happenings with Parent Link messages, emails, website updates, social media and highlights on the district's television channel.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Highland offers a unique and multifaceted approach to professional development. Teachers are given the opportunity to enhance their classroom skills and continue developing their best practices through school and district professional development opportunities. Highland offers unique opportunities based on individual needs of the teachers and allows for an individualized approach to professional development.

Professional development starts over the summer when the district holds a multi-day professional development conference, the Teaching and Learning Conference. Staff are given the opportunity to present educational practices and to attend sessions based on their individual needs. The district also holds a mini conference during teacher workdays at the beginning of the school year in which teachers attend content specific professional development, which can highlight instructional changes, pacing and assessment guides. Additionally, Highland offers two additional days of professional development prior to the start of the school year. During this time staff collaborate on school wide initiatives, integrations with CTE courses and school wide procedures.

As the school year progresses, teachers are provided with monthly topic specific professional development during their planning period. This professional development is geared towards instructional design within the classroom and how to increase student engagement/learning. Teachers share examples of lesson design and offer advice on improvements with colleagues. This development extends out into monthly classroom visits where teachers observe their colleagues and reflect on instructional practices. As new educational initiatives arise, teacher leaders are selected for professional learning opportunities. Teachers receive training on instructional strategies, equipment, or resources and implement the new strategies into instruction. Highland teachers' solution-find and alter lesson plans to implement the new strategies, and as interest grows, success is seen and even expressed by students themselves, resulting in the administration planning professional development in which the trained teachers showcase student success to all. As instructional leaders, principals attend district-level training on best practices including coaching, teacher feedback, lesson-plan design, critical thinking, and classroom assessment. Administrators model learned strategies for their staff, support teachers and purchase required resources to assist with implementation.

In short, continued education and self-reflection are part of Highland's DNA. Teachers observe each other three hours per semester, making lasting connections with students, building relationships with each other, strengthening their own practices and procedures, and supporting the school's vision as a whole.

4. School Leadership:

The leadership philosophy at Highland is based on a collective belief in the importance of continuity and stability to maximize student achievement through great teaching and learning. The principal, assistant principal, academy coordinators, counselors, School Improvement Team, Parent Teacher Student Organization, and Athletic Booster Club serve as active leaders in the school community, while the value and importance of all stakeholders is maintained.

The principal clearly communicates to stakeholders the importance of how students are learning so that leadership can respond to this information to best support student success. The administration leads staff meetings and professional development with a focus on student learning and is always available and eager to support faculty. School Improvement Team, elected by the faculty and has representatives from all academic departments, support operations, and parents, discusses and decides instructional budget requests and addresses faculty concerns.

The Highland administration navigated the unprecedented challenges of COVID with a continued emphasis on great instruction and a focus on student attendance. The principal, assistant principal, and school nurse led the school through the maze of changing CDC protocols, conducting all contact tracing and communication, allowing teachers to prioritize instruction in the hybrid setting. During this time, the administration transitioned to virtual meetings with all stakeholders to maintain as much stability in the school landscape as possible.

Throughout the summer of 2021, the administration met with School Improvement Team as well as parent and student leadership teams charging each group to create a vision for Highland. Groups discussed all aspects of Highland, from the facility and equipment to technology and experiences, with a focus on student engagement and achievement. The results of each team discussion were shared with the faculty at the start of the school year and the collaborative work began to make the vision a reality.

In the summer of 2022, the administration met with Advanced Placement teachers to evaluate Highland's AP program and analyze data from the previous three years. This team discussed the results of the Teachers' Working Conditions survey to assess the professional development needs of faculty. The administration also met with a team of teachers to develop a plan to support the School Improvement Plan goal of ACT growth at 100%.

Highland students are empowered to lead, serving as ambassadors for the school by hosting prospective students and families on open house nights as well as participating in various service projects as part of the principal's student leadership team. Additionally, Highland students are active members of the Superintendent's Student Advisory Council, where they help shape school policy on the district level.

Highland leadership calls upon the collaborative voices of all stakeholders to ensure achievement for all students in all aspects of their high school experience and beyond.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Highland School of Technology establishes a culture of caring. It is a place where teachers and students promote not only academic excellence but the idea that all people are valued. From the opening freshmen orientation to daily operations, it is our people that come together to support each other in the pursuit of excellence. Our clubs are inclusive, our classroom are collaborative, our parent organizations support all students, and the achievement of our students is equally balanced by the care we have for one another.

Academic, and social supports, lift up all students. Our school counselors, social workers, and additional support staff recognize the value of all students and provide structured, sustained systems to meet that goal. We are proud of the inclusive culture at Highland and view it as a strength and core part of our schools sustained success.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR EXCELLENCE

The one element that truly sets Highland apart and allows for excellence both in and out of the classroom is the commitment to interdisciplinary instruction through extended and self-contained integrated lessons. The school was founded to encourage real-world connections among our students, technology, and coursework. Integration is a foundational tenet of our school and drives lessons in all courses and grade levels. Teachers participate in extended employment each summer where integration lesson design and themes are presented. Past themes have included “Digital Transformations of the 1980s,” “Yellow and Blue Make Green,” “Hiroshima,” and “We Are a Product of Gaston County,” which focused on integrating with local museums, businesses, and agencies, while connecting with Career and Technical Education pathways. Teachers visited several community sites, like historical museums, Dole facility, and Sundrop, to prepare for this particular integration theme. As a result of the school-wide theme integration model, semester and year long goals are set, and students realize how learning is connected—not just compartmentalized by each course.

At Highland, teachers continuously collaborate with each other on integrated lessons to emphasize the connectedness of learning and the real world. For the local theme, world history and English worked with a local historical museum on the Loray Mill strike and math classes compared population trends across the county. Isolated integrations also take place. For example, English 11 and 12 classes meet with physical education classes in the fall to weave Aristotle’s “Six Elements of Drama” with Michael Jackson’s “Thriller” and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, while also learning the popular dance and checking their resting and active heart rates. Integrated lessons allow students to make connections among multiple classes and to see that content connects beyond the walls of the classroom.

The academic programs at Highland School of Technology reflect the school philosophy. While students are required to master the core curriculum—reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies—students also gain competency in highly sophisticated technical curricula. Specialized areas of emphasis reside within three career academies: Business, Legal and Information Sciences; Health Sciences; and Manufacturing and Engineering Technology. This is achieved through the process of integrating the curriculum so that students understand the relevancy of what they are learning and how to apply to the real world. In classrooms, laboratories, and the private sector, students interact with one another, business professionals, and the world of technology through hands-on experiences. Students are then able to articulate the real-life application of the lessons and learning activities.