

Highland Grade School

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Stillman Valley, IL 61084
Phone 645-8188 Fax 645-8200
WEBSITE: <http://www.meridian223.org>

August 2011

Dear Parents:

Hello and welcome to the 2011/2012 School Year. I hope that you and your family had a great summer and are getting ready for school. A new year offers new beginnings, new classes, new faces, new courses, and new materials. As the opening day approaches, I want to focus on helping our students get all they can out of their education. Starting a new year gives us the opportunity to make new plans, design new strategies, and implement new ideas.

School supply lists are on the Highland Web page posted under the All About Us tab. The school events calendar is also listed there. If you have not yet registered your child, call the school and talk to Jody Bennett or Kim Rippentrop to get that done as soon as possible. The district will bill families for registration fees at a later date.

The information contained in this letter is intended to help you prepare for the beginning of the 2011/2012 School Year -- **please read it thoroughly.**

For a moment, let's focus on our partnership. I believe partnership refers to our parental commitment to live and support all that we are teaching in school -- citizenship skills and academic skills. A child receives mixed messages when we teach and practice behavior and academics in our school environment and these same behaviors and academics are not practiced as a family. Please help at home to support the behavior and academic expectations of the teachers and staff at Highland Grade School.

This year we will have four kindergarten classes at Highland Grade School and the hours are 8:50-1:20. Prekindergarten will have a morning session from 8:50-11:20 and an afternoon session from 12:50-3:20. Early childhood will only have one session and that will be in the morning from 8:50-11:20. We have 5 first grade classes and 6 second grade classes. School will run from 8:50-3:20 for all of our full time students.

Our Highland Family continues to grow. Mrs. Courtney Jones and her husband will welcome a new child into their home this summer. Congratulations to the Jones family. We will have one extended substitute teacher to be named later as Mrs. Jones starts the year on maternity and family leave.

We can be proud of all that we achieve at Highland School. Our school and programs are what they are because of supportive parents and families, a staff of dedicated, aspiring men and women who have a common goal - to do what is best for students. We are always looking for ways to achieve that goal. Thank you for your commitment to our students. This year, as in the past, we must concentrate on the processes that spur continuing advancement: evaluating what we have, determining what we can do to improve, and identifying what we need to make those improvements. Let us make the 2011/2012 School Year our best year yet.

The following is a summary of the first few days of school for Pre-k-2nd grade.

Monday, August 15 And Tuesday, August 16	Teacher Institutes - STUDENTS DO NOT ATTEND
Wednesday, August 17	First Day of School (K - 8:50-1:20) and (1 st and 2 nd 8:50-3:20) Send a lunch or money for lunch accounts for the hot lunch program.
September 2	Early Release Day 12:00 - A light lunch will be served at no charge
September 5	Labor Day - No School
September 8	Picture day / Open House – More info to come via backpacks

Other early release days will be November 4, December 2, February 3, and May 9. We will dismiss at 12:00 noon on those days. Our district will provide a light lunch like milk, chips, and a hot dog before the students are dismissed at 12:00 noon on those days. Please look at the calendar in your handbook or on the Highland website to get all of the days and breaks on your calendar.

Please note that the Highland School Open House/ Parent Orientation is on **September 8**. More information and times will come home after school begins.

Pick up and Drop-off Procedure

I consider it a problem when one child is put in a position of having to walk or run in traffic when drivers are, at times, in a hurry. One hundred percent cooperation is the minimum standard concerning our children's safety. Please do not use the area along the east side parking lot sidewalk as a waiting area with your car. Kiss your child before you arrive so that you may quickly let them exit your vehicle on the curbside as you pull alongside the sidewalk. If you need more time, please park and walk your child to the building when you are ready so that you do not keep others waiting. Do not park or wait in the traffic lane next to the sidewalk. PLEASE PASS THIS PROCEDURE ON TO GRANDPARENTS OR WHOEVER WILL BE PICKING UP OR DROPPING OFF YOUR CHILDREN.

Providing for proper student supervision and safety mandates that when students are dropped off on school grounds, they are required to stay on school grounds. Students can be dropped off between 8:30 and 8:40. Any earlier arrivals need to be approved in advance by Principal Coulahan. Student pick-up at 3:20 is by sign out in the cafeteria. Park your car first and then come in the back east side door. The doors will be unlocked at 3:20. Early arrivals to the office will be directed to wait outside at the back of the building. Please follow this procedure for the safety and security of all students.

Applications for free or reduced lunch are available at the beginning of registration and at any time that your circumstances change. Please call the school office or the district office if you need an application form.

Please help us maintain accurate school records. Notify the school office of any change of address or phone number (both home and work in case of emergency), e-mail address or enrollment status.

Joint custody parents who do not receive the school newsletter and communications may arrange to receive the information sent home by requesting to be placed on a mailing list. This process must be completed at the beginning of each school year.

Highland School and the Meridian Schools are very successful for many reasons. We have strong active support from our staff and parents in our educational partnership and our parents are accepting of their roles as primary educators of their children. Our staff deeply appreciates the support our parents give through PTO and volunteerism. PTO volunteers invest many, many hours and the evidence of those

hours can be seen in many programs and supplies throughout our school. I am so thankful for the community building activities and the volunteerism that flows from our parents and our PTO.

Kindergarten and new student parents are reminded that medical exam forms are due in the school office before the beginning of the school year.

Kindergarten and second grade parents are reminded that dental examination forms are due in the school office by May 15 for the current school year. Dental exams performed 12 months prior to May 15th are valid.

Kindergarten Meet and Greet – This will take place at 3:00 on Monday, August 15. An informational letter was sent to all kindergarten parents. This has been posted on the Highland School Website on the All About Us tab. Call the school office if you need another copy.

Medication - A stringent state and district policy exists. If your child must take medication during the school day, stop by the office and complete the necessary paperwork to allow the medication to be taken. Please do this before school starts. New forms must be completed for each school year. **MEDICATION SHOULD BE TAKEN AT HOME WHENEVER POSSIBLE. AT NO TIME SHOULD STUDENTS CARRY ANY TYPE OF MEDICATION ON THEIR PERSON with inhalers being the only exception. Please note that our nurse is NOT able to dispense over-the-counter medications with parent permission over the phone.**

Because last minute adjustments take place, class lists will be posted outside of the building on Friday, August 12 through Tuesday, August 16.

I would like to address some important areas of concern that impact the quality and safety of education in our school.

Remember that all volunteers and visitors that will be coming into contact with students in school must have completed and submitted their volunteer form. This is available on the Highland website tab under “All About Us.” Submit that in advance of any volunteering. Help your child to be on time everyday. Beginning-of-the-day tardiness continues to be a concern. Students are expected to be in their seats and ready to begin class at the 8:50 bell; parents should plan to have student in the building by 8:45. Students arriving late to class cause a distraction and delay in the beginning of the school day.

A positive parent partnership with each child’s classroom teacher contributes to a successful school year for your child. When parents contradict classroom and/or school procedures a child is placed in the awkward position of not respecting school authority -- a necessary condition of positive school interactions.

Parents are always encouraged to communicate with our staff ... especially in person in a prearranged conference. I suggest that parents not discuss openly in front of their children disagreements with a teacher or the school. This negativity has a tendency of translating into a negative student attitude in the classroom, an attitude that spreads to others, even to a whole class. Focus on communication with the classroom teacher first in order to gather all pertinent facts before making judgment. Let’s focus on being positive as we interact with each other. Being positive does not mean denying/avoiding the negative; it means there is an appropriate time and place to discuss negative issues and those times are with the school staff (teachers and administrators) or privately with someone else directly involved in a situation. Be careful about being drawn into negative discussions as negative attitudes at times are based on incomplete or inaccurate information. Remember that negativity is a drain on good, well-intentioned spirits. Be careful of negative talk around your children as students pick up parental attitudes which spill over into school.

When planning your family vacations please try to honor the school calendar. When students are absent from school there is significant impact on the classroom and teacher time, not just with your child.

The calendar is on the district website under the district tab.

Please pay close attention to your volunteer opportunities and I welcome you to be an active partner with all in our school community. There are opportunities to do things at home as well as at school, both during the day or the evening/weekends.

You are probably aware of the growing concern of allergies to nuts, such as peanuts. Parents, please make sure you notify your child's teacher each and every year if there is an allergy concern with your child. All parents should be sensitive to growing student allergy concerns as classroom treats are brought to school. Students with allergies should be trained by their parents to ask about ingredients and to ask for alternatives.

The school lunch program works like a debit account. Keep your account in the positive and milk and lunch purchases can take place starting on the first day of school, Wednesday, August 17. If you would like your child to start eating the school lunch, please send a check or cash on the first day of school with your child in an envelope with their name on it. Your check or cash will be deposited into your family lunch account. Call the office if you have any questions about the school lunch program.

The school office hours are 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. Feel free to call should you have any concerns or need any clarifications. Our monthly calendar is posted on the school web site. Consider book marking the address to your favorites/bookmark list. The calendar is updated periodically. Make sure your notification number is correct to receive recorded informational updates by phone.

I am sure you have noticed throughout this letter repeated reference to our school and district website. We continue to work toward lessening the use of paper and reduce paper handling as we post more school informational items (handbooks, etc.) on the website along with the increasing use of email communication. Over the past few years, 90-95% of our families have been internet connected at home. This coming year, parents that are not connected to the internet at home are invited to contact the school office to discuss options like being put on a mailing list to access the posted school information.

Welcome back to school and to another exciting school year. Enjoy the remaining days of your summer vacation. I know that we will have an excellent school year full of many successes for our students, families, teachers, and staff. Please call me at school (645-8188) if you have any questions. I look forward to seeing you soon.

Sincerely,

Mike Coulahan, Principal