

# Highlands Elementary

6200 Roe Avenue  
Mission, KS 66205  
913-993-3300

Principal: Laura LaHue  
Grades Served: PreK-6  
KSDE Bldg #: 8806

Feeder Pattern: Indian Hills MS & SME



## Notable School Characteristics

- Comprehensive school serving students in grades PreK-6
- High Incidence centralized Special Education program, with a focus on social emotional regulation.
- Early Childhood Unified and Pre-K program
- Shawnee Mission East feeder schools Gifted Education Program

## KSDE Building Report Card

[Highlands Elementary Building Report Card](#)

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## Needs Analysis

What barriers must be overcome for each student to achieve grade\* level proficiency on assessments?

\*Grade level proficiency is defined by state law as scoring “above level 2” on state assessments, yet actual grade level performance is most closely related to state assessment scores above level 1.

There are always a number of challenges that should be considered when evaluating student success in a district. Some of the key barriers that impact Highlands include, but are not limited to lack of special education funding, lack or limited access to community health services and mental health services, and difficulty in retaining and attracting highly qualified teachers.

- Certified, specialized interventionist position with a 1.0 FTE. This staff member would lead the instructional support team to identify Tier 3 instructional needs through the use of district-provided diagnostic tools and document student progress. In addition to providing effective Tier 3 reading and math interventions with progress monitoring, this staff member will facilitate regularly scheduled, 6-week cycle data reviews to monitor effectiveness of interventions and adjust instruction accordingly. Highlands currently has a .5 FTE allocation and this position is split between two schools. The part-time role does not provide the resource and capacity needed to effectively implement the SMSD response to intervention system at our building. Therefore, to effectively support student needs, Tier 3 interventions and progress monitoring are placed with classroom teachers to implement during the intervention block at the expense of Tier 2 intervention/reteaching that is needed for grade level content. Because the current .5 interventionist position is only able to be in our building for 3 hours a day, this role is unable to provide data progress monitoring facilitation, data review cycle management and development of plans to target instruction using data, attend district quarterly interventionist collaboration meetings (because the staff member is at the alternate school during this time), and attend Highlands staff professional learning biweekly (is at alternate school during this time). These said duties fall on our instructional coach; at the expense of providing Tier 1 instructional support to classroom teachers through coaching cycles, co-planning lessons and formative assessments, purposeful high-leverage instructional professional learning, and preparing for and following up on PLCs.
- Teacher support from a highly-qualified instructional coach to assist in ensuring a guaranteed and viable curriculum through an equitable learning experience at the Tier 1 and Tier 2 level.
- Special Education resources to support our students with speech and language needs, as well as specialized instruction to support academic and behavior goals.

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- Family and student access to mental health services and social-emotional needs that impact daily life and learning.

## What budget actions should be taken to address and remove those barriers?

Given an appropriate level of funding for both general education and special education, there are a number of budget actions we could take to remove some barriers. Some include: increased salary to recruit and retain highly qualified certified and classified staff, increased funding and time for Professional Learning Communities (teacher teams) to meet, and additional staff members hired to meet the individual learning and social emotional needs of all students specifically, interventionists for general education students and additional specialized support for those in our high-incidence Special Education program.

- At this time, the most impactful action is to increase our current .5 FTE Interventionist allocation to a 1.0 FTE Interventionist allocation. Currently, 7 out of 34 SMSD elementary schools (Highlands being one of them) do not have a full-time 1.0 interventionist, and instead have a .5 Interventionist position that is split between two schools. These 7 schools are not able to effectively implement the SMSD response to intervention system referenced in the section above.
- Continued 1.0 FTE instructional coach at Highlands to support highly qualified teachers and new teachers to the profession. This support will help retain and sustain a high standard of excellence in our instructional practice and abilities to respond to the wide range of student needs while still ensuring high levels of learning. This full-time role dedicated to Highlands helps ensure a collective responsibility to student learning with a goal 80% of students reaching mastery of standards through effective Tier 1 core instruction. This coach then provides effective modeling and professional learning for Tier 2 interventions to secure 80% mastery for those students who did not reach the proficiency goal after Tier 1.
- Continued 1.0 FTE licensed social worker allocated to Highlands
- Increased pay - and equal pay between SAIL and resource paras here at Highlands - for our classified special education paraprofessionals to increase retention and fill rate for open positions. Our special education department is a tight-knit group and, to help with open para positions, our paras in both SAIL and resource combine their schedules to help with in-class IEP minute support.
- Continued 1.0 FTE Building Substitute to support coverage for classroom teachers so they may participate in response-to-intervention meetings. These meetings of collaboration are essential to providing a team-based approach to meeting student needs. This Building Substitute also allows for job-embedded professional learning for teachers so they may observe other classrooms, participate in learning from district consultants in the classroom, and push-in to help with co-teaching so the lead teacher can meet with small groups.

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How much time will it take for each student to achieve grade\* level proficiency on the state assessments if the budget actions would be implemented?

\*Again, state law defines grade level proficiency as scoring “above level 2” while actual grade level performance is most closely related to scores above level 1 on state assessments.

While our board of education, administration, teachers, and classified staff work tirelessly to meet the academic and social emotional needs of our students, too many factors come into play that do not allow us to accurately assess when all students will be at a certain level. Some of those include: the ever-changing population of students bringing a varying degree of cognitive abilities and disabilities which preclude us from being able to guarantee a date when all students will meet a singular level of proficiency, as well as the lack of constitutional funding of special education.

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## Board Rationale/Comments

The Shawnee Mission School District maintains focus on its commitment to meeting aspirational state and district education goals for every student. The district continues to budget conservatively, working to limit central administrative costs to less than 5% of the total budget. Over the past several years, the district has focused on responding to challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, including learning recovery, an increase in chronic absenteeism, and an enhanced need for social and emotional support for students.

The district has used information from needs assessments conducted at each building to make focused staff allocations at the building level. These include specific needs identified by large numbers of schools, including additional teacher allocations to maintain lower class sizes at the elementary level, providing a building substitute at each building, increased paraprofessional/teacher support in special education classrooms, and higher salaries for both certified and classified staff. In addition, following a comprehensive analysis of student needs, the district continues to maintain in the district budget a full-time social worker position in every school, a full-time instructional coach in every school, and Real World Learning counselors at each of the five comprehensive high schools.

The district was able to use additional state funding, (including an increase in the at-risk weighting and an increase to the base, along with a corresponding increase in the Local Option Budget) to add positions identified in individual building needs assessments across our 48 attendance centers/specialized programs. These positions include the following:

- 10 special education teachers, 5.25 para-educators, an autism coach, 2 speech language pathologists, an occupational therapist, 2 school psychologists, and 2 special education coordinators.
- 5 elementary interventionists
- An additional instructional coach for Horizons and for Early childhood
- 4 ELL teachers
- A teacher on assignment
- 3 floating nurses and
- 2 administrative interns

The district is also maintaining the following positions in the operating funds at least for one more year:

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- Elementary class size will remain at 22 for Kindergarten through 2nd grade and 25 for 3rd through 6th grades.
- Ten additional teachers at the secondary level to support learning recovery.
- At least one building sub at each building in the district.

The district will continue to analyze budget funds for the 2024-25 school year, in order to determine the ability to maintain the positions listed above that were added with ESSER funding: additional support for nursing services; additional secondary math teachers; building substitutes for every building; and class-size reduction at the elementary level.

While the percentage of at-risk Apache students performing at or above grade level on both ELA and Math state assessments (Levels 2, 3 or 4) exceeds statewide performance among at-risk peers, meaningful academic growth and moving all students out of Level 1 remains a priority.

While the percentage of Highlands students performing at or above grade level on both ELA and Math state assessments (Levels 2, 3 or 4) exceeds statewide performance, meaningful academic growth and moving all students out of Level 1 remains a priority. Like many other schools, Highlands students have experienced significant educational and developmental disruptions over the past few years, and the school is challenged to provide all students with the social-emotional support they need to facilitate learning growth. The building is focused on culture, creating meaningful relationships, and developing effective Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to increase student performance. Highlands PTA and active parent engagement provide an additional layer of support.

In addition, the district will continue to support increased professional learning opportunities for all teachers, with a focus on Professional Learning Communities and Response to Intervention. We will continue to prioritize equitable allocation of resources to create a welcoming and engaging learning experience for every student - facilitating personalized learning plans, targeting career and college readiness, with the interpersonal skills for life success.

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