



# TROJAN TODAY

YOUR SCHOOL TOWN OF HIGHLAND SOURCE FOR NEWS AND EVENTS | APRIL-MAY 2026

## COSTS FOR NEW BUSES SOAR

**School Town of Highland replaces single bus, puts the brakes on fleet replacement program**



**\$179,000 vs. \$99,800**

The cost for a new school bus has increased significantly over the last few years – forcing the school district to reexamine its budget and the fleet replacement program as rising utility costs and Senate Bill 1 continue to impact school funding.

The School Town of Highland will be replacing one of its fleet of buses this year, scaling back on what has been a transportation program that replaced two or three buses per year.

Superintendent Brian Smith said schools throughout the state have been impacted by a trio of factors:

- Dramatic increases in the cost of school passenger buses
- Hefty rate spikes in utility costs
- Reductions in property taxes that fund government and public school education

For STOHL, the impact of property tax funding losses because of changes in state law will mean reductions of \$709,000 this year, followed by a funding decrease of \$668,000 in 2027 and \$1.4 million in 2028.

“With costs continuing to rise for buses and other goods and the lack of funding from Senate Bill 1, we are able to purchase one bus instead of three,” Smith said. “That means we have buses well past the original 12-year cycle to trade them out for new models.”

## State law tightening restrictions on cell phones, electronics

The Indiana General Assembly has established its most restrictive policy on the use of personal electronic devices in schools.

The bell-to-bell ban goes into effect July 1 and includes personal cellphones, tablets, laptops, gaming devices and smartwatches. Bell-to-bell encompasses the entire school day, including lunch, passing periods and instruction.

Most policies include exceptions for students with documented medical conditions or individual education plans (IEPs) that require device access.

“We have a certain level of pushback with each succeeding restriction to the use of personal electronic devices at school,” Highland High School Principal John Zack said.

“It has been far too easy for kids to become addicted to these devices and far too hard for them to break the habit,” he said. “Outside of school, that’s the job of parents to keep tabs on their kids and use of electronics. Here, though, it is our responsibility to keep all students safe. It’s the law and we intend to follow it.”



## ADMINISTRATION

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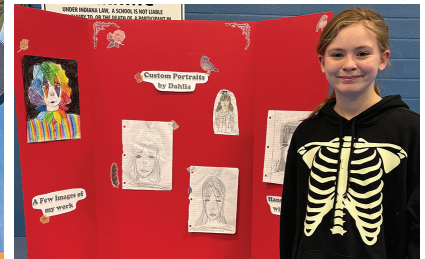
## SCHOOL BOARD

**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](http://highland.k12.in.us) for the latest information, including meeting agendas, school policies, board mission, beliefs and values.

## Johnston Elementary Maker's Fair



Johnston Elementary's third Maker's Fair in the last eight years is a one-of-a-kind showcase of students doing what they do best – innovate and create. Principal Amy Harrington said everything about the fair defies expectations. "The purpose of the Maker's Fair is to show off the innovation and creativity of our students. In all, 17 projects – all STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math) based were submitted by individuals or teams. Most students went start-to-finish using their own steam. Students came up with their ideas and executed them on their own time. Our Johnston families donated supplies and we invited our Johnston community family to see what our students had done." [ Amy Harrington photos ]

## LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

*"Class of 2026 will be leaving their mark on all of us"*

It's hard to believe the 2025-2026 school year is rapidly coming to a close. I wish you could know this group of students like we have. Students at each school building have brought honor to their classrooms and their schools.

This class of graduating seniors has been remarkable. They are a collegial, supportive, collaborative group of kids who are well-spoken, curious and ready to move on to the next chapter of their young lives.

They have a sense of fairness and have worked together to find ways to make school life better. There is no doubt they are leaving their mark on all of us here.

A decision to revive a long-held Trojan tradition of the Homecoming parade came from them. The parade was such a success, there are already plans to keep it going. The new mariachi band was the result of students who saw something that could be better and worked to make it happen.

Every year, I try to take time before the hub bub of graduation overwhelms to remember the graduating class when they arrived and milestones. This year, I'm glad I was able to share them with you.



**Brian Smith**  
Superintendent  
School Town of Highland



Merkley teacher Ali Ross (above left) has been coaching Girls on the Run for 11 years. Ross and Junior Coach Mercedes Monreal (above right) have been inspiring young girls. "This meaningful experience gives participants of all abilities a tangible sense of accomplishment," GOTR Communication Manager Cristina Kielbasa said. [ Ethan Roberts and GOTR photos ]

## Annual 5K empowers young girls, builds inner strength

Merkley 5th Grade teacher Ali Ross is celebrating her 11th year as Girls on the Run coach.

"In the GOTR program, the girls learn about what it means to be part of a team," Ross said. "This organization was created to be a positive influence on girls at this impressionable age."

The 2026 teams are called on to develop a bold heart. Ross has seen her Girls on the Run teams transformed by the empowering experience.

Mercedes Monreal, who will be graduating from Highland

High School in a couple months, said her life changed when she took the Girls on the Run challenge.

Born with cerebral palsy, Monreal spends most of her days in a wheelchair. When it came time for her 5K, she walked on her own power with her aunt as her buddy.

"Doing the 5K helped shape how I see me," she said.

"My choice is to live a full, active life." Monreal said "As a junior coach, this is my full-circle moment. I am helping kids like I was helped."

### Event Information

The Girls on the Run Lake County Spring Season 5K will be held on Saturday, **May 16** at the Highland High School Athletic Complex, 2941 41st St. The Girls on the Run Festival begins at 8 a.m., followed by the Girls on the Run 5K at 10 a.m. Each Girls on the Run season concludes with a celebratory 5K event.

**GET INVOLVED!** Community members are encouraged to get involved by registering to run or walk in the 5K, volunteering at the event or along the course, cheering participants along the route and supporting GOTR by enjoying food from vendors on site.

**REGISTRATION:** Visit [gotrincrossroads.org](http://gotrincrossroads.org) to register. Questions? Call GOTR Program Director Jodi Aurand at (219) 237-6982.



# SCHOOL EDITION

## MONBECK AUDITORIUM

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.

<b>7 p.m.</b>	<b>Friday</b>	<b>May 1</b>
<b>7 p.m.</b>	<b>Saturday</b>	<b>May 2</b>
<b>2 p.m.</b>	<b>Sunday</b>	<b>May 3</b>

**HighlandTheatreCompany.org**

**FOR TICKETS AND MORE INFORMATION**

### Upcoming Concerts

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

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

**May 5 | 5:30 p.m.**  
The Jazz and Mariachi bands will perform at Up Your Alley, 1048 Indianapolis Blvd., Schererville

**May 13 | 6:30 p.m.**  
High School Choir Concert  
Monbeck Auditorium

**May 15 | 6:30 p.m.**  
Middle School Choir Concert  
Monbeck Auditorium

**May 20 | 6:30 p.m.**  
Band & Orchestra Concert  
Monbeck Auditorium

### Out-of-District Student Registration

Out-of-district registration begins **April 13** and continues through **1 p.m. May 1**. The School Town of Highland only has openings for 50 kindergarten students and 40 first grade students. Parents must begin the registration process online at [www.highland.k12.in.us](http://www.highland.k12.in.us).

**STEP 1:** Parents/guardians must enter the registration information of their out-of-district student in the online Google Form link, which goes live **April 13**.

**STEP 2:** Parents/guardians will then click a calendar link to schedule a time to meet in person with district personnel and produce all required documentation. Parents are responsible for making sure the Highland School District receives the required documents before **1 p.m. May 1**. Parents/guardians must also complete both the online registration process and the in-person meeting by **1 p.m. May 1**.

Completing both steps reserves your student's place on the out-of-district lottery list, should there be more applicants than spots available. The lottery drawing will be held **May 8** at the School Town's Central Office. Parents will be notified of students' status no later than **May 12**.

**Questions?** Please call Ryan Erdelac at (219) 924-7400 or email [rerdelac@highland.k12.in.us](mailto:rerdelac@highland.k12.in.us).