

NEW HEIGHTS SCHOOL

Academics • Balance • Citizenship
The Power of Choice

February 2024

Based on Principal

At the Half-way Mark-Attendance Needs to Improve



Please Read

As I sit writing this month's newsletter, I am distracted by the crazy weather pattern we are experiencing-heading to 50 degrees today...in January! I realize there are some who are missing out on

their favorite winter activities, but as I have gotten older, I have to admit that I am not a winter person. I am glad we have not had more than a few days of crazy cold weather, we haven't had to endure treacherous driving conditions, we have had no school cancellations, and we have not had to inconvenience our parents with two hour late start times due to weather complications. To put it plainly, this is the best winter I could hope for living in this region.

This time of year also marks the half-way point of the school year. I have recently reviewed our students' second quarter report cards, along with our school's attendance reports. There is a lot to be proud of and celebrate, but there is also room for improvement. I'll start with **Attendance**. I'll remind parents that our school has an expectation that our students will attend school at a rate of **90% or higher**. There are many reasons for this, including complying with the law, which compels all children under the age of 18 to attend school regularly.



The main reasons for solid school attendance are simple. First, children can't learn the important lessons that school offers if they aren't at school. Students who miss school will fall behind in school work, will struggle to build the essential skills that school helps them acquire over their school years, they will find it harder to maintain their relationships with their teachers and classmates, and, perhaps one of the most important things that will happen is that they will be forming bad attendance habits that, if not corrected, could follow them into adulthood and they will have a hard time maintaining employment.

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IMPORTANT DATES

- Feb. 14th—Board of Directors Meeting 4pm
- Feb. 15th— Secondary Movie Theater Field Trip
- Feb. 16th— Staff Development day, No School
- Feb. 19th— Presidents' Day, No School



We all know what that could lead to, so let's look at the big picture and do our part to ensure that our students are coming to school at a rate of at least **90% or higher** for the second half of the school year.



I encourage you to think of this not so much about “excused” or “unexcused” absences, but more as a whole. The total number of absences “allowed” in a quarter is **4** and the total for a semester is **8**. Of course there can be some leniency in certain cases, but currently we have more than a third of our total enrolled population of students who are missing more than **10 days** of school, and there are several who are missing more than **20 days**. This must be corrected for the second half of the year.

Soon I will be sending **attendance notices** to families who have excessive absences for one or more of their children. In most cases, the parents can simply take the letter as information. We ask that you do your part to correct the issue moving forward. That is going to be the most preferred reaction. In other cases, a parent may feel that it is important to contact me to discuss the issue, which is fine. I am more than happy to have that conversation with you. Some may want or need some advice about how to get their kids to realize that this is important. I can offer some ideas. Yet another option may be to ignore the letter and just allow the poor attendance pattern to continue. That will bring the consequence phase into play, which includes the following potential school actions: First, students in elementary grades K-5 could be recommended to be held back a grade next year. Students in the critical developmental years who miss large amounts of school typically have substantial gaps in their skills. Moving from one grade to another in K-5 requires having the requisite skills to move ahead. It can be disastrous to move a student to the next grade who lacks the skills that should have been developed the year before. Those students will likely struggle with school work, fall behind, lose self-esteem, and can become kids who feel anxiety and then won't want to go to school. Then, the pattern only magnifies and the results are obvious. Strong attendance gives those students the best opportunity to be successful and move along to the next grade—thus improving their confidence and self-esteem.

Second, students in grades 6-12 could receive failing grades for missing too much school—even in cases where they attempted to make up for the missed school work. New Heights is not a “do it from home” or “I’ll do it later” school. Our teachers set deadlines for assignments, but it has become much more common recently for students to try to extend these deadlines simply because they didn't get the work done. We will only do this to a certain point. We are trying to prepare our students for the world of work, which generally expects people to show up each day and complete a certain set of tasks in a specified amount of time. The world of work operates on deadlines, which is why schools teach and enforce them. When employees don't show up and don't complete the work they are assigned, they get fired. So, to help our students understand that attendance combined with doing the work is important, we have limits as to how much time can be missed each term. The logical way to structure attendance guidelines is to apply the **90% attendance rate**, which allows for a student to miss 10% of their class time in any given term. Anything beyond that is not reasonable, barring something like a documented illness or health condition or family crisis that prevented the student from attending school.

Finally, in cases where the school has attempted to work these matters out with families but has not been successful, the school will file truancy with Washington County, and it is possible/likely that a truancy case worker will be assigned. I would ask you to trust that parents do not want to go down this road. That is why I am spending so much time and effort trying to get this issue corrected now. We realize that Covid caused people to change their behaviors. As a reaction to Covid, the government altered a lot of things that had been in place for a long time, but now we're paying the price.



Test scores are down, attendance is down, motivation is down, and too many people have changed their attitudes about the importance of school and seem to think of attending school as more of an option than a priority.

It is time to replace that attitude with one of urgency. School is considered the foundation of our communities. We can't build anything of importance on a weak foundation. Please do your part now to correct this matter. Also, watch for attendance notices to come via email within the next several days. Thank you for reading this important section and thanks in advance for an appropriate response to the matter.

Now Enrolling For Next Year

New Heights has been serving families for over 30 years, but the requests for information for next year are off the charts. That is good news because we at New Heights want to expand our school population by 25 students next year. We are well on our way, but we are encouraging you to share your positive New Heights experiences with other families who have children who might benefit from our smaller, safer, more appropriately-paced school model. We know that New Heights isn't for everyone, but if you know of a parent who has expressed frustration with their current school system, simply encourage them to contact the school for their own private information meeting. We don't want to ever become a "big" school, but we would like to see a modest increase to our current enrollment numbers so that we can expand our offerings and make the school experience even better for our students. The best way we can do that is by growing at an appropriate rate year-to-year.

Possible Changes to the School Calendar and Start and Stop Times

Many of you read my correspondence about the district's considerations of changing the school calendar and changing the start and stop times of all district schools, which would also have an impact on New Heights because we contract with the district for school bus service. In my most recent meeting with the superintendent, it seems unlikely that any substantial changes will occur in the upcoming school year, but there is still the potential that changes may be coming for the following year. It appears that the 834 board wants to pause and take some more time to gather input from the community before making any substantial changes. That said, we will keep you updated. For now, it does seem like things will remain very similar to this year's calendar and start and stop times each day. Stay tuned for future updates.

Minnesota State Testing—March & April

The MCA is a statewide assessment that is given to Minnesota students in several content areas each spring.

The *MCA Reading* is for grades:

3rd-8th and 10th.

The *MCA Math* is for grades:

3rd-8th and 11th.

The *MCA Science* is for:

5th and 8th grade, as well as all students enrolled in Biology.

*If you **DO NOT** want your student to participate in state testing, please fill out the Parent/Guardian Guide and Refusal for Student Participation in Statewide Testing form that is found on our school website before the testing begins in March.*

These tests will be administered in March and April.

Playground Update

We have made some substantial progress in fundraising for the playground project. We began this journey just before the pandemic shutdowns occurred in the winter of 2020. Since then, we have raised somewhere in the neighborhood of \$300K. We currently have two designs with two different vendors. We hope to decide on the vendor and the project soon, but we also believe that we can still collect a few more donations. If any of you work for a company, or know of a company or organization that may want to donate to the project, either let us know who the contact of the organization is, or you could tell them about this opportunity and ask them to contact the school. No donation is too small, so please help us get this project up and running soon by encouraging people you know to make a contribution. They may also want to know that New Heights is a registered 501c3 organization and their charitable giving is tax exempt.

Tom Kearney-Principal



Spirit Week—February 13-16



Monday, February 12th:
Mix and Match Day
Wear outfits that don't match

Tuesday, February 13th: Dress like a New Heights
Teacher Day
Emulate how one of your teachers dresses



Wednesday February 14th: Famous Character
Day

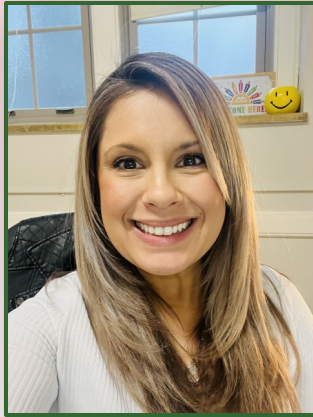
*Dress like your favorite book, movie, TV, or video
game character*



Thursday February 15th:
Sports Jersey Day
Represent your favorite team



Introducing Our New Health Attendant ~ Anna Ochs



Hi, my name is Anna Ochs I am very honored and privileged to have this opportunity to be at New Heights! I live in Stillwater with my husband William, I have two daughters Rylee (18) and Rhiannon (15). We have two dogs, Walter is a Golden Retriever and Whitney is a Pomski, and two cats Luna and Mayhem.



To get to know me a little more, here are a few questions I was asked.

What do you enjoy most about working in the health office?

I love the ability to take care of students with all types of needs and getting to know all the different personalities. I want to make a positive impact on the students and show empathy and compassion to make a difference in their life.

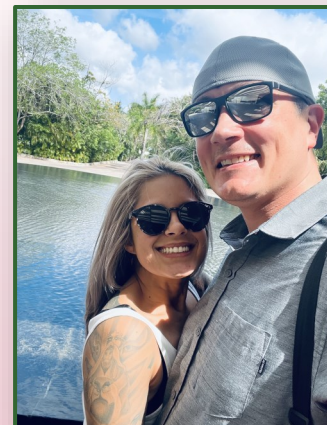
What is the most exciting thing you've ever done?

My husband and I took a trip to Cozumel Mexico. It was amazing! One of my highlighted moments was horseback riding in the jungle and on the beach.



What is something people would be surprised to know about you?

I am a former student of New Heights School and graduated in 2006. With the help and encouragement of Mr. Kearney, I received an internship and was in the banking career for 15 years. I am so happy to be back at the place that went above and beyond for me as a student going into adulthood.



What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

Taking my dogs for walks, cooking, reading, playing games, spending family time, going to AirBnB cabins on the lake.



Quarter 2 Academic Honors

Principal's Award:

Students (6-12) with an A in all 6 classes will be recognized as:

Principal's Award Students

Benicio Rivera (6)

Landon Stilwagon (7)

Kaelyn Boorman (9)

Elizabeth Granlund (10)

Isabella Charron (11)

Ally Poppert (11)

Jocelyn Schmidt (11)

Abigail Bell (12)

Claire Herder(12)

Dylan Smith (12)

Kidus Yohannes (12)

CONGRATULATIONS!

Honor Roll:

*Students (6-12) with a Grade Point average of **3.5** or above will be recognized on the **Honor Roll***

Rowan Goff (6)

Sadie Goff (8)

Bella Jawor (8)

Alastair Larson (8)

Tyler Mathias (8)

Max Mogel (8)

Daniel VanDyke (8)

Omarion Walker (9)

Gavin Braun (10)

Samuel VanDyke (10)

Samuel Larson (11)

Ally Poppert (11)

Jillian Briggs (12)

Vannessa Koeckeritz (12)

Andre Maruska (12)

Honorable Mention:

*Students (6-12) with a Grade Point average of **3.0** or above with no D's or F's will be recognized as an*

Honorable Mention

Sky Hicks (6)

Maks Kircher (6)

James Viera (6)

Katrina Collette (7)

Evelyn Schultz (8)

Jayda Sneen (8)

Alisa Collette (9)

Haedyn Engelke (9)

Cheri Johnson (9)

Jake Poppert (9)

Eloise Campbell (10)

Maria Costilla (10)

Brooke Hatch (10)

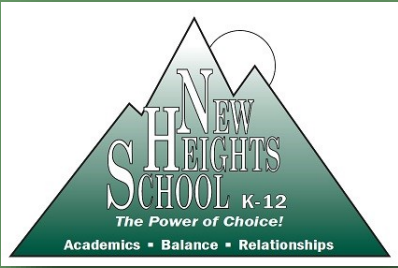
Alivia Johnson (10)

Adelaide Stanaway (10)

Emily Mai (11)

Eli Schollmeier (11)

James Schuster (11)



February Monthly Planner

Sun

Mon


Tue

Wed

Thu

Fri

Sat

28	29	30	31	1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14 <i>Board of Directors Meeting 4pm</i>	15 <i>Secondary Fieldtrip to Movie Theater</i>	16 <i>No School—Staff Day</i>	17
18	19 <i>No School—President's Day</i> 	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	1	2

Upcoming Events:

March 21st—End of Quarter 3

March 22-29— No School, Spring Break