

Dear Highline Academy Families,

It is with great sadness that I must inform you that Susan Tobias, our outstanding music teacher, has passed away after fiercely and fearlessly battling cancer.

As I write this message, I can't help but express how blessed and inspired I feel to have known and worked with Ms. Tobias. Every single day, she embodied the spirit of Highline's core values. She gave support and had patience for EVERY student. She tirelessly embraced the sacred role of a teacher, pouring endless energy into profoundly shaping the future of students whom she encountered, with the love of music.

If you knew Susan Tobias well, you know that she was one of the bravest, toughest fighters you've ever met. She never lowered her expectations of herself, even in the face of illness. Throughout her illness, she worked tirelessly to coordinate and produce a magical Winter Concert for our school community. She did this because of her devotion and her boundless passion for service to the Highline community. Susan set an amazing example for us and for all of her students; an example of tenacity, strength, and empathy. She loved Highline Academy with all her heart, and we will always feel her loving presence in return.

This Friday, the school is hosting Literacy Day. At the end of this day of Reading, we would like to assemble at 2:45pm to have each staff, student and community member gather together in her honor. The assembly will begin celebrating literacy and then we will transition into our ceremony of honoring Susan by having each homeroom teacher release three balloons outside. Please feel free to come and celebrate Susan's life with our staff and students this Friday.

Most urgently, it is important for you to know that tomorrow, our school counselor and psychologist, Ms. McMinamen and Ms. Irk will join a trained DPS Crisis team to serve our students, staff and family in any capacity. They will be setting up a special space in the library for students and staff to visit should they need support in coping with the loss of Susan. Ms. McMinamen and Ms. Irk will continue to support the students and staff after Spring Break in case additional support is needed. We would suggest talking with your kids tonight about Ms. Tobias and how she died peacefully with her family and friends. We want to make sure that all students get an opportunity to process this information with their loved ones before they return to school tomorrow.

We will share information on her memorial service with the Highline community as soon as it is available.

Once again, please know that our staff is ready to serve in any capacity your child may need. If your student needs support, please do not hesitate to contact us, by calling the front office and we will set up a support system. No one should face the pain of loss alone, and we will band together to get through this extremely grief-stricken time.

On Sunday, with a friend serving as her typist, Susan wrote the following note, which she wanted the Highline community to receive. (see below)

Best Regards,

Kali Garofoli

Principal

Highline Academy Southeast



**My Dear Highline Friends,**

**I want to thank you for being the most loving, supportive group of people I have ever met. Your kindness throughout my journey has been amazing. I especially appreciate one of the students finding the color ribbon that represents my cancer and being instrumental in having the cross-country team wear the turquoise ribbons at their competition. The blood drive that the Art Teacher organized on my behalf meant so much to me.**

**The fact that people would go out of their way to provide transportation for me to go to medical appointments was remarkable. I have been grateful for the families who have visited me. I love seeing your smiling faces and my dogs love their walks. The cards the students made me were encouraging, comforting and thoughtful. The beautiful Ode to Joy card signed by all the teachers and staff, was amazing; all my cards are on display at my home and are a constant reminder of how much my Highline family means to me.**

**I could go on and on, but I just want you all to know I couldn't have done it without you.**

**I have had a wonderful life.**

**Susan**

