

December 4, 2020

Highland CUSD No. 5 Parents and Staff,

I am so very thankful that the date above now says December and our students are still learning in person. We anticipated a very difficult couple of weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas breaks due to the hype of irresponsible behaviors occurring during the holidays. Well, I have been very diligent about not making any type of political statements during the last several months so I am going to attempt to keep it that way and simply say "thank you for being responsible during the break and not sending kids back to school when sick". I think we have many responsibilities as leaders and we tend to focus on the ones in our wheelhouse. I will continue to focus on educating kids. I am also thankful for the amount of research now available that shows schools are not super spreaders and the kids need to be in school.

Prior to much of the research coming out, we were living on the edge so to speak because of the importance we put on educating kids in person. We were able to do it with support of our teachers and staff as well as our community. I think we can now put to bed any ideas that we should not be in person and focus on what it takes to keep it going. It appears that politics will not be the source of closing schools at this time, but we still need to be REAL about the need to protect kids and staff from COVID so that they can continue to come to school and work. I have several updates to include today.

First, many of you may have heard about the new guidance from the CDC regarding lengths of quarantines. It is true that CDC has updated their guidance. Here is a copy of their guidance:

Local public health authorities determine and establish the quarantine options for their jurisdictions. CDC currently recommends a quarantine period of 14 days. However, based on local circumstances and resources, the following options to shorten quarantine are acceptable alternatives.

Quarantine can end after Day 10 without testing and if no symptoms have been reported during daily monitoring.

With this strategy, residual post-quarantine transmission risk is estimated to be about 1% with an upper limit of about 10%.

When diagnostic testing resources are sufficient and available (see bullet 3, below), then quarantine can end after Day 7 if a diagnostic specimen tests negative and if no symptoms were reported during daily monitoring. The specimen may be collected and tested within 48 hours before the time of planned quarantine discontinuation (e.g., in anticipation of testing delays), but quarantine cannot be discontinued earlier than after Day 7.

With this strategy, the residual post-quarantine transmission risk is estimated to be about 5% with an upper limit of about 12%.

In both cases, additional criteria (e.g., continued symptom monitoring and masking through Day 14) must be met and are outlined in the full text.

I am hopeful that our Illinois health leaders follow suit quickly to adopt the updates in the new guidance. The Madison County Health Department recommends that we continue to use the current guidelines

until IDPH makes changes in their guidance. I will be on a call this afternoon with MDHD and urging them to follow suit as soon as possible. We have many students and staff currently quarantined who could be impacted by the timeliness of these actions. I am hopeful something is done by the day's end.

I also want to call attention to the window of opportunity to select your child's learning environment for quarter 3. Please be aware that we plan to honor changes during this window, but changes during the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter will have more scrutiny due to the staffing decisions necessary to accommodate changes, especially at grades Kindergarten through grade 5. Today is the deadline for changing status of a student's environment from in person to remote and from remote to in person. As of the now, we have had 47 requests for changes, 13 request to move from in person to remote and 34 requests to move from remote to in person. Please make sure to visit the following link to make a request for changes: <https://forms.gle/YQMEKFrPepsWbee57> You do not need to do anything if no changes are being requested.

Let's now focus on the meat of my weekly update: Highland Primary reported 1 positive student case resulting in 7 quarantines. Alhambra Primary reported 1 student positive and zero quarantines. They also have 2 students and 1 staff quarantined due to outside exposure. They also have 22 children and 2 staff quarantined from outside exposures. Highland Elementary reported 2 positive student cases and 22 students quarantined from outside exposures. Grantfork Elementary reported zero cases this week. Highland Middle School reported 6 positive student cases this week resulting in 47 quarantines. They also reported 2 staff positive cases resulting in zero quarantines and 9 student quarantines resulting from outside exposures. Highland High School reported 9 cases dating back to last week including 2 staff and 7 students. Highland High School currently has 45 students on quarantine. While these numbers continue to have significance, the spike in the region and country suggests that schools are relatively safe places and kids should be in school.

I believe one reason the research shows schools can safely open to in person is the use of the mitigation strategies. I want to emphasize the importance of keeping your kids home when they have symptoms. We have seen an uptick in the number of students being sent home during the day with symptoms. This generally means larger numbers of quarantines and no parent likes to receive that call. Please be proactive in supporting this strategy as well as wearing face coverings, washing hands often, and social distancing to the extent possible. The next big milestone for in person is Christmas break on December 22. Let's do this thing!

I wish a wonderful weekend to everyone, stay safe and stay healthy!

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent