

December 11, 2020

Highland CUSD No. 5 Parents and Staff,

Good afternoon to all of you. The weeks are flying by this year. It is strange that time seems to be flying by, but at the same time, 2020 seems like the year that will never end. I believe everyone is ready for the new year and hopeful it looks nothing like this year. There is so much we have accomplished this year, but we have paid the price mentally and sometimes physically. I have some really good information to share with you this week.

First, I mentioned in last week's update about the new guidance from the CDC regarding lengths of quarantines. Unfortunately, I cannot commit to implementation of the new guidance until the end of a meeting I have this afternoon. I am hopeful to report definitive information following that meeting. However, I can provide some insight. In the new guidance there are shortened quarantine periods of 10 days and 7 days with certain criteria. It is very likely that the 7-day shortened quarantine will not be used for students due to the timeliness of documented testing and the shortage of personnel to track the various requirements and to ensure the testing window is appropriate.

The 10-day quarantine is still a possibility. The issue is the criteria required once a person returns on a shortened quarantine. One of the requirements is that the person socially distances for the remainder of the 14-day period. As we have communicated since day 1 of the school year, we cannot ensure that students are socially distanced 6ft at all times during the school day because we have all students reporting daily. I have a meeting this afternoon to get clarification on the definition of "social distance". If it is defined as it was in the Return to School guidance as "to the extent possible", we will consider implementing the new shortened quarantine. If it is defined as "no less than 6ft", then we will likely have to continue with the 14-day quarantine procedures.

We have been able to provide the in-person option since day 1 because of our commitment to educate kids in the most effective environment and the fact that we have been very open and honest about our procedures and the results from week to week. This has provided families the opportunity to select remote or in-person based on real data and based on the needs of individual families. We have been transparent since day 1 because there is nothing to hide, following the guidelines along the way. We have to continue to do this as guidance changes. We like the idea of shortened quarantines to get kids back in school as soon as possible, but we are not willing to circumvent any rules or guidelines to do so. I will provide some feedback on quarantine periods following the meeting this afternoon. It will likely conclude shortly after this message goes out.

You might have seen an announcement go out earlier this week regarding a new app available to track your student's school bus in real-time starting December 11, 2020. If you are interested in this, please see the information on our district website. A copy of that announcement is located on the live feed link from Dr. Arteberry. The message provides information regarding directions for downloading and setting up the app.

This week's numbers include:

Highland Primary reported zero positive cases, however, they do have one staff member quarantined due to a family member positive and 30 quarantine students due to outside exposures.

Alhambra Primary reported zero positive cases, but 3 student quarantines due to outside exposures.

Highland Elementary reported 2 positive student cases and 13 students quarantined. They also reported one positive staff and currently have 2 staff members in quarantine.

Grantfork Elementary reported zero cases this week, but 1 student in quarantine due to outside exposure. 1 student and 1 staff remain quarantined from exposure last week.

Highland Middle School reported 3 positive student cases this week resulting in 29 additional quarantines. They also reported 6 additional quarantines from outside exposure and 2 staff members quarantined from outside exposure.

Highland High School reported 11 positive cases including 1 staff and 10 students. Highland High School currently has 81 students on quarantine and 4 staff members in quarantine (2 from school setting and 2 from outside exposure).

The numbers reported this week are similar to the last couple of weeks. We were told to expect elevated numbers due to the Thanksgiving weekend, but so far we have not seen a significant increase. I am hopeful that remains true through Christmas break.

We have a couple more weeks before taking a long deserved break. When we return in January, some students will have changed learning environments. The window is now closed to make changes. We had 71 requests for changes in learning environments, 18 students going from in-person to remote and 53 going from remote to in-person. This trend is starting to result in some uncomfortably large class sizes and we will be considering possible solutions over the next several weeks as the trend continues to show more students returning to in-person. The end of quarter 3 will likely necessitate some difficult decisions to address this issue. I will talk more about it in coming updates.

As always, a big thank you for the support and cooperation of our families and community. Also, I am speechless when trying to find words to describe the pride I have in our staff, all staff, for their daily commitment to our students. Thank you all!

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

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent