

December 18, 2020

Highland CUSD No. 5 Parents and Staff,

Let's start this week's update by saying that I love snow and I love lots of it. I do love it much more when it starts about 3 or 4 p.m. on Friday and is mostly gone by Monday morning. This week's dusting probably doesn't mean much to many of you, but it created some anxiety for me and has initiated several conversations. We have been in a flurry (ha ha) to get our call lists and procedures updated for the possibility of school cancellation for inclement weather. It seems to sneak up on us from time to time. I would like to remind you that messages will go out on inclement weather days much the same as the weekly updates. I will announce on FB, twitter, live stream, email, and text as well as notify the major television stations. I have been asked whether remote learning would be used during inclement weather days. Currently, we do not plan to implement remote learning on these days and just want to encourage kids and staff to take advantage of these days whether by playing in the snow or simply getting a mental break from the grind that this year has provided. I do have some philosophical thoughts as well, but for the time being, we will leave it at that.

We are almost there! Two days next week and we can finally take a breather and enjoy some time away. Highland High School will be taking final exams next week and many students will opt out of taking them this year due to lenient protocols put into place due to COVID. Congratulations to those students benefiting from that☺ There have not been many positives taken from this year, but that is one the kids can appreciate. I mention this situation at HHS because it should be obvious by the weekly updates that a large majority of our positive cases have been concentrated at the high school. This is not because of irresponsible behavior or anything like that, they simply are more active and socialize outside of school much more than younger peers. It also means that we will likely have less quarantines due to close contact for the remaining few days. None of us want to see quarantines running through Christmas day and throughout the break.

I like to share stories every now and then so I feel compelled to share one with you right now. I was getting lunch yesterday and on my way to my car when a parent stopped me and asked if I was Mr. Sutton. I am sure this person is reading this update so we will keep names out of it. I actually know this parent, but I struggle with recognizing folks with the masks out in public. The encounter immediately became emotional and I wasn't sure what I was in for. She proceeded to tell me how much the opportunity to keep her children in person has meant to her family with tears running down her face.

I tried to convey to her that many, many people deserve her heart-felt thank you more so than I. I couldn't help but think about the team effort over the last several months to keep our students and staff safe while doing what so many school districts have been unable to do or perhaps unwilling to do. Teachers, administrators, support staff, and the Board of Education could have given up so easily, but we all came together for a common purpose and not only survived, but excelled. Then finally, as I have said in previous messages I too am a sappy emotional kind of person, so I drove away with tears in my eyes as well. Those types of encounters serve as an excellent reminder why this semester has been so important to so many. We pulled up our bootstraps and we pushed the ball over the goal line. The only problem is that it is only half-time.

Keeping with that train of thought, we have a two week break before classes start back on January 6th for students. Many have asked whether we have considered going remote for a period of time following the break due to family gatherings and the such. The answer is “Yes” we have considered it and talked about it. We have decided that it is best to continue with the in-person learning as long as our staffing situation remains doable. We have had an influx of new substitutes over the last couple of months that position us well for the 2nd half of the school year. We will be asking our staff to keep us informed about situations that may require them to quarantine when school resumes in January. We anticipate being able to fully staff classrooms upon our return. We trust our staff and we trust our students and parents. However, I want to stress the importance of extra caution in monitoring possible symptoms COVID and encourage everyone to error on the side of caution when a student or staff’s is unsure.

We have to continue to be proactive and assertive that conditions will be ripe for increased numbers of COVID after the break. As a reminder, if anyone in your immediate family is being tested for COVID, please keep kids home until the results are known. I can’t tell you how many quarantines have resulted from contact tracing for students who develop symptoms after an immediate household member tested positive, but the kids continued to attend school until the results were provided. We are not going to place blame because this COVID situation has been confusing to everyone. Please help us start another good drive from our own goal line for 2nd semester (hey, it’s football season so I am going with that analogy).

I have already gotten pretty long winded so let’s get to the update on numbers. Highland Primary reported 19 quarantines (3 staff members and 16 students) all resulting from outside exposures and 1 positive staff member resulting in no quarantines. Alhambra Primary reported 1 student positive from an outside exposure and zero quarantines. They also had one staff member positive not reported from last week with zero quarantines as a result. Highland Elementary reported 8 students in quarantine and 1 new staff member in quarantine all due to outside exposures. Grantfork Elementary reported 1 positive student resulting in 2 quarantines and 2 additional students quarantined due to outside exposures. Highland Middle School reported 2 positive student cases resulting in 10 quarantines this week. Highland High School reported 11 positive students and 1 presumptive positive and currently have a total of 145 students in quarantine. I am reporting that 1 staff from the main office remains in isolation from a positive result last week and 1 food service employee is currently positive with zero quarantines.

That sums up the report for this week. If there is any significant news to report from Highland CUSD No. 5 on Tuesday, I will send another update prior to Christmas, otherwise, consider it an early gift to not hear from me. Thanks to all of you for being part of this tremendous community team. Be safe, be healthy and Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays to all of you!

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent