

January 29, 2021

Highland CUSD No. 5 Parents and Staff,

I know many of you, especially students and staff, are disappointed in me this week. If the snow would have been timed just a little differently, we might have gotten our first snow day of the year. That's okay though, there will be other opportunities this year. Who knows, we are getting used doing things that we have never done before, perhaps a day in April could be cancelled due to an unseasonably warm day full of sunshine☺

The purpose of the weekly updates has certainly been focused on communication regarding COVID 19 and our "numbers". I also try to include information that is sensitive to issues I face on a weekly basis. This week has been busy with a number of internal issues such as budgeting/finance, personnel (vacancies and postings), and normal labor type issues (not necessarily bad, just time consuming). I do, however, want to draw your attention to one issue that has the potential to cause division and concern. First, our district believes all students can learn and that all individuals should be treated with respect and dignity. We have fantastic teachers that give their lives to educate kids taking into account the child's background, life challenges, and other obstacles that may impact our ability to reach the child. We want every student to have an opportunity to succeed in school and in life.

That being said, several parents have now reached out or commented to me about the new Illinois teaching standards. I want to provide some information to you so that there is no perception that the district failed to provide our staff and community opportunities to get involved in the process. The new standards have been approved by the Illinois State Board of Education (December 2020) and are currently being considered in JCAR (Joint Committee on Administrative Rules). My understanding is that if JCAR does not have any issues, the new teacher standards will be effective in October 2021.

Many of the requirements pertain to teacher licensure programs in the universities and/or colleges of education in Illinois. Given the current political landscape throughout the country, several of the new standards may create controversy and division. I would like to provide you links to information for you to make your own judgement and become involved in the process by contacting the folks making the decisions. I prefer to focus on our current challenges of keeping our schools open and making my concerns/thoughts known to those same folks. I do not want to create division within our own school district and community by providing a forum to debate. With that, here are some links if you are interested:

Here is a link to the proposed new Illinois Teaching Standards:

<https://www.ilga.gov/commission/jcar/SecondNotices/230024-2014574r02.pdf>

Here is a link to the JCAR website, which includes a list of committee members and more:

<https://www.ilga.gov/commission/jcar/>

Here is a link to the February 16 JCAR agenda that includes the topic: Standards for All Illinois Teachers;

[https://www.ilga.gov/commission/jcar/20210216\\_February%2016,%202021%20Meeting%20Agenda.pdf](https://www.ilga.gov/commission/jcar/20210216_February%2016,%202021%20Meeting%20Agenda.pdf)

Whew, it is a fine line to walk trying not to be political in a very political world, especially at this particular time. Let's move on to what this weekly update is supposed to be about. Remember one week from today (February 5) is a district ½ day early dismissal for teacher in-service. The schedule will be the same as the last one. Our primary and elementary buildings will dismiss at 11:00 a.m., while HMS and HHS will dismiss at the new normal time of 12:35 p.m. The next school holiday is Monday, February 15 for President's Day.

Now to COVID, our numbers this week: Highland Primary reported 1 new presumptive positive student resulting in 3 student quarantines and twenty- two quarantines related to in school and family exposures. They reported zero new staff cases or quarantines. Alhambra Primary reported 5 students waiting test results and 1 teacher quarantined due to outside exposure and zero confirmed positives. Highland Elementary reported 8 student quarantines resulting from outside exposure and 1 staff quarantine due to outside exposure. Grantfork Elementary reported 3 students awaiting test results with zero confirmed positives. Highland Middle School reported 8 students quarantined due to outside exposure, 4 students and 1 staff awaiting test results, zero confirmed positive cases. Highland High School reported 1 student positive and 1 staff positive with 5 students in quarantine.

The COVID situation changes from minute to minute so please understand that reporting is as accurate as we can provide with the correspondence available. We will continue to provide the best picture possible of how things are going within the school environment. We continue to work on the vaccination roll out to ensure our staff have the opportunity to be vaccinated at their discretion. I believe I will have wonderful news to share in our next weekly update as it pertains to vaccinations. That's all I have to share this week, have a wonderful weekend!

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent