

February 12, 2021

Highland CUSD No. 5 Parents and Staff,

Last week was so positive and the weekly update was fun to write, but it fizzled on Sunday with that terrible display they called the Super Bowl. I can't believe...NEVERMIND! Let's get back to the positive stuff. So, it turns out that my concerns of the vaccination clinic being held during the week and the potential for many staff to feel symptoms the next day was accurate. I just want to share that I did receive the 1st dose of the vaccine on Friday and about 5 hours later started to become very sore and lethargic. Saturday morning was even worse as I didn't want to roll out of bed because every joint in my body ached (my wife thinks I played it up☺). I did wake up Sunday morning free from any of those symptoms and have felt great since then. I only share that experience because many of you may have experienced the same or maybe different symptoms or maybe nothing at all.

I know many folks in our community are trying to get appointments for vaccinations and they also sacrificed the possibility of getting the first dose because of the effort to vaccinate our staff on Friday. I want to acknowledge that and again extend a huge THANK YOU to all of the staff at St. Joseph's Hospital for their support and care provided to Highland CUSD No. 5 staff. We were able to offer the 1st dose to every individual full-time employee who requested it, every food service employee who requested it, most of our bus drivers who requested it, and several of our substitutes who requested it. We still have a list of school staff who for whatever reason couldn't make the Friday clinic work and will be contacted through the Madison County Health Department for an appointment in the near future. We were also excited to hear the new CDC guidance that may exempt vaccinated individuals from quarantine requirements once the vaccination is in full effect. These things are all very positive and certainly give me confidence that in-person learning will be offered for the remainder of the school year (knock on wood).

Let's talk a little about weather. We had a couple of days this week that might have prompted some of you to watch television, or check for an email/text from me hoping for a snow day. There are so many factors that play into the decision to cancel school. I assure you that I was out driving around the countryside each of those mornings between 3:30 and 4:00 a.m. Sometimes it is hard to predict what the roads will look like 2-3 hours later. That said, temperatures also play into the consideration. It appears that significant snow is in the forecast for Monday and very cold temperatures/wind-chill. The combination of these factors will likely cause some refreezing on Tuesday morning. I will be making a decision at the earliest possible time if school cancellation becomes necessary. Messages will be sent through Apptegy via email, text, and the live feed on our district website, as well as all the normal television and radio stations.

COVID numbers for the week: Highland Primary reported 2 staff positives resulting in 14 student quarantines and 5 additional student quarantines due to in school and outside exposures. Alhambra Primary reported 1 student currently being tested and no other cases. Highland Elementary reported 4 students in quarantine due to outside exposure and zero other cases. Grantfork Elementary reported zero cases. Highland Middle School reported 1 positive student and 1 quarantined student due to outside exposure. Highland High School reported 2 positive staff and zero students currently on quarantine.

Of course I would love to report zero cases in the district every week, but relatively speaking this was a pretty good week. I am not an epidemiologist and I cannot definitively attribute any specific mitigation efforts to our decrease in numbers, but I can say that we will continue to follow the protocols provided/required by the Illinois Department of Public Health. Our staff continue to work hard to provide your children the best that they have (which is pretty awesome). I don't know how long current mitigations will stay in place, but we have proven that it is possible under these requirements to continue with in-person learning. If you are reading this update, you likely play a pivotal role in supporting or providing education to our nearly 3000 students. Thank you.

Monday is President's Day and school will not be in session. Keep your eye on the weather for Monday/Tuesday and have a wonderful 3-day weekend!

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent