

March 12, 2021

Highland CUSD No. 5 Parents and Staff,

It has been a good, but very long week. We received some really good news this week regarding outdoor activities and the number of spectators allowed as well as new guidance on remote learning. I sent a mid-week update regarding the guidance on the number of spectators at outside events. Our priority is making sure parents have the opportunity to see their kids participate in their activities. Beyond that we are simply trying to be as fair and consistent as possible across the board.

It is important that our student body have an opportunity to get out and support the BULLDOGS just as it is for our community members. We will continue to have discussions about the best way to distribute the limited tickets we have. Please be patient and cooperative as we work through these challenges. If you go back a few months, our discussions were around just giving kids an opportunity to compete, now it is about how to manage only having 750 tickets to distribute to a football game. This is a good change!

We also received guidance that the CDC and Illinois State Board of Education now support in-person learning. I would really like to make a couple of snarky comments here, but I will refrain. The guidance included language that remote learning must be provided to students who are at high-risk of significant health concerns from COVID and/or reside with family members who are at high risk. The door was opened to requiring doctor notes documenting high risk for any student to continue in remote learning. Highland CUSD No. 5 will not be requiring any changes in this status for the remainder of the school year. It is very possible that remote learning may be required in the Fall for high health risk students. The district will hold the line on these issues starting with the 2021-2022 school year.

Remote learning creates a number of staffing issues for the district. We will be reviewing the possibility of adopting online curriculum content to address all remote learning students next year IF it is required by the State. This will free up our staff to ensure that a full attendance day is protected, for example, full day in-person attendance rather than 12:30 p.m. dismissals at HMS and HHS. The remote online process may prove a little more difficult for primary and elementary age students. We will continue to update as we move through this process.

This is the time of year when many staff decisions are made about retirement, resignations, transfers, new positions, etc. Sometimes it is hard to say Goodbye to these folks. However, I want to report that the quality of candidates we are talking to in interviews have been fantastic. I am not sure if the year of COVID or coincidence is playing into this, but we have been very excited about the quality of candidates who are desiring to work in HCUSD No. 5 so far in this hiring season. I like to think some of it has to do with the pride that our parents, teachers and community have felt this year in particular in our schools😊

COVID Report for the week – Highland Primary reported zero positive cases for students or staff and 2 students on quarantine due to outside exposure. Alhambra Primary reported zero new cases or quarantines this week. Highland Elementary reported zero new cases or quarantines. Grantfork Elementary reported zero new cases or quarantines. Highland Middle School reported zero new cases or quarantines. Highland High School reported zero new cases or quarantines.

Wait a minute, did you just read that last paragraph? Knock on wood! Zero positive cases and only 2 quarantines district wide, both due to outside exposures. So, guidance that loosens restrictions and zero positive cases, best week ever! Perhaps that's a little overreaction, but the weekend is going to start off pretty good. I don't want to say anything I will come to regret in a few weeks or months down the road, but right now it feels pretty good to say "I think we have weathered the storm and came out pretty good". Thanks to everyone who is reading this update!

That sums up another weekly recap. Keep the umbrellas out for the weekend, but get out and enjoy the wonderful fresh air between the rains. Be safe and have a great weekend!

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent