

March 26, 2021

Highland CUSD No. 5 Parents and Staff,

The last Friday in March marks another milestone for Highland CUSD No. 5. We say "HELLO" 4th quarter and hopefully "GOODBYE" to winter. This spring is especially exciting with the COVID light at the end of the tunnel getting brighter each week. The regional numbers have been decreasing for several weeks, though perhaps we are in a bit of an increase this week. However, some exciting announcements were made last week.

Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker announced Thursday new metrics and guidelines aimed at transitioning the state to a full reopening, unveiling what he called a "Bridge Phase" that would allow for higher capacity limits prior to entering Phase 5.

In order for Illinois to advance to the Bridge Phase, the entire state must reach a 70% first-dose vaccination rate for residents 65 and older, in addition to maintain the current required metrics of at least 20% ICU beds availability and holding steady on hospitalizations for COVID-19 or COVID-like illnesses, mortality rates and case rates over a 28-day monitoring period.

To move to Phase 5, the state must reach a 50% vaccination rate for residents age 16 and over and meet the same metrics and rates required to enter the transition phase, over an additional 28-day period. Yeah, Yeah I know, just tell you what you need to know. The new guidance did provide some immediate relief on restrictions. The outdoor venues for athletics and activities was increased to 25% from 20%, allowing 937.5 spectators to attend events in the stadium, rather than the previous 750. In addition, anyone with proof of receiving the COVID vaccine do not count against the capacity. This is good news and we hope that further relief will be given prior to our graduation ceremony in May.

Speaking of graduation, we have narrowed our planning to focus on Saturday, May 15, 2021 at 2 p.m. The alternative dates are Friday (7 p.m.), Saturday (7 p.m.), and Sunday (2 p.m. and 7 p.m.). If Mother Nature cooperates, we should have a wonderful outdoor ceremony for our students.

I was reminded last week that I failed to provide an update on the numbers of remote learners for 4th quarter. We currently have 108 students in Kg through 5th grade who remain fully remote. 43 students in middle school (6th through 8th grades) remain fully remote and 100 students at Highland High School remain fully remote. The fully remote students at Alhambra Primary and Grantfork are included in these numbers. The total of 251 students in full remote represent 9.2% of our K-12 students.

COVID Numbers through Thursday afternoon: Highland Primary reported zero new positive cases and zero new quarantines. Alhambra Primary reported 1 new positive student case and zero new quarantines. Highland Elementary reported zero new positive cases and 1 student quarantined due to an outside exposure. Grantfork Elementary reported zero new positives and zero new quarantines. Highland Middle School reported 2 positive student cases with 27 students quarantined. Highland High School reported 1 new student positive resulting in 10 student quarantines.

Easter is next weekend so remember no school on Thursday, April 1 through Monday, April 5. Those are the only school days off in April so make plans to get out and enjoy the spring weather. That concludes another week, please have a wonderful, safe and healthy weekend!

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent