

April 9, 2021

Highland CUSD No. 5 Parents and Staff,

It appears the next couple of weeks are going to be very spring-like as it pertains to weather. I hope we see temperatures stay mild for a host of reasons, not the least of which is it certainly makes wearing a mask more tolerable for our students and staff. I am not sure what I have for you this wonderful Friday so I am just going to let it flow.

First of all, we sent out the survey to gauge the number of families who will seek documentation to pursue remote learning for next year. You already know the story from last week's update. I do want to mention that some questions have come back to me regarding my crystal ball in what the mitigations are going to look like in August, specifically if masks will be required to be worn. The answer is "I don't know". As we have for this entire year, we will attempt to follow the requirements handed down to us from the Illinois Department of Public Health, Illinois State Board of Education, and the Governor. Unlike private businesses, there are strings that attach us to these organizations that require we adhere to the guidance to the best of our ability.

We know that we have students currently in remote learning for a number of reasons. Some students have health factors that necessitate extra precautions, some stay remote due to fear of wearing masks and whether there are any health effects, some stay home because of specific family beliefs and/or it is simply easier to not send students to school for whatever reasons. We believe our responsibility is to provide opportunities for students to learn in the best environment possible to ensure each student is prepared for their next step, whether it be college, career, vocational or simply the next year in school. We also believe that the interaction with our teachers and staff as well as social interaction with other students is a vital part of the learning process. This means we will use every tool in our toolbox to ensure in-person opportunities remain.

We have begun the process of trying to get back to in-person for many of the end-of-year activities. Of course, we continue to work with the current mitigations that require masks and limit numbers of spectators. We have now planned or assisted in planning in-person awards nights, baccalaureate services, graduation, etc. We plan to start allowing use of our facilities when possible as was done pre-COVID. All of us are likely excited about things starting to get back to normal. Please, I ask for continued patience and support in this transition while respecting the fact that we still have rules that we are expected to enforce. We continue to ask for masks to be worn in required areas and distancing as appropriate. We will not ask anything from our families that is not explicitly required by the state organizations mentioned above.

This community and district continues to benefit from the dedication of our teachers, Board of Education, administrators, students, family and staff. When many (actually most) school districts were remote or hybrid, our district worked through the challenges with complete cooperation from all of these groups to maintain the best option for our students. I continue to hear from folks outside of the Highland area and they want to know how we have maintained consistency in our school year. The answer every time is, well, I usually say "I don't know", but then the real answer "We have a great and dedicated team of educators, families, and community". They desired it and they pursued it through

many challenges and obstacles. Once again, thanks to everyone in our school community, towns and cities making up the Highland School District.

COVID numbers this week: Highland Primary reported zero new positive cases with 2 staff members and 7 students quarantined due to outside exposures. Alhambra Primary reported zero new positive cases and zero new quarantines. Highland Elementary reported zero new positive cases and 3 students quarantined due to outside exposure. Grantfork Elementary reported zero new positive cases and 1 student quarantined due to outside exposure. Highland Middle School reported three new student positive cases resulting in zero students quarantined and 3 students quarantined due to outside exposure. Highland High School reported 1 new student positive resulting in 7 new quarantines.

While you might hear about spikes in COVID numbers and hospitalizations across the country and even in Illinois, the regional and county numbers remain very good. I am hopeful that the progress we have made in recent weeks with the lifting of some mitigation rules continues through the end of the school year so that planned in-person activities throughout the next couple of months remain possible. Much attention is on the vaccination effort and whether students should be vaccinated. I encourage all parents to research and make a decision that best fits their family needs.

That concludes this week's update. Have a safe and wonderful weekend!

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent