

April 23, 2021

Highland CUSD No. 5 Parents and Staff,

I hope you have had a wonderful week. My goals have changed this week. I need to get some information to you and make sure that it hits home. The week has been challenging and I think the next month or so and the transition into next year is only going to get tougher. It is not because of the number of cases or quarantines regarding COVID, it is about expectations, political beliefs, and everything that is dividing this country right now. I am a politician, only in the sense that there is a lot of politics in any leadership position, but it is elevated when it comes to a leadership position in the public domain.

So, here's the deal! It needs to be clear that schools across the state are going to follow to the extent possible COVID rules put out by the Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Department of Public Health, and the Madison County Health Department. When we have the ability to inject local decision making and local values, we will make the best possible decisions based on the needs and desires of our community. I am hearing a lot about "It's time to take a stand against....". I agree, it is always a good time to be involved and have your voices heard. BUT, it has to be directed in an appropriate way and to the appropriate source. I am in constant communication with our elected officials in a number of ways, I have weekly or bi-weekly meetings with health officials, I work through our professional organizations and the such.

Please, if you desire to invoke change I urge you to stand up and communicate with your legislators, with the MCHD, IDPH, CDC, the Governor's office and all of the organizations that are making the rules. Your displaced frustrations with the schools, teachers, administrators, etc. are not the source to create change. I would venture to say that a very large majority of our community has been pleased with the efforts of our district to keep kids in school this year. Athletics has become a major issue with very untimely quarantines and positive cases. I feel horrible about some of the specific situations that have occurred as do our teachers, administrators, coaches and staff.

The stress level and pressure being put on our teachers and administrators is becoming overwhelming. I wouldn't dare say "It's not personal" when it comes to these decisions because IT IS personal for every person involved in a situation where a student has to miss games or school because of a quarantine. Especially, when the research shows very few if any students develop symptoms of COVID when exposed to a close contact. I get it, it's frustrating. Staging a protest against masks at the local high school or refusing to follow protocol is only going to create local issues, not change in the rules. I am again asking for your cooperation and support as we attempt to maneuver through the challenges to ensure the emotional and physical wellbeing of our students and staff. If you have questions about the protocol or guidance, I probably have the answer. If you want to know why or how, I likely DO NOT have the answers.

COVID numbers this week: Highland Primary reported 1 new positive staff case and resulting in zero quarantines and 1 staff and 4 students quarantined due to outside exposure. Alhambra Primary reported 1 new student positive case resulting in 2 quarantines and 1 additional quarantine due to outside exposure. 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 zero new positive cases with 1 student quarantined due to outside exposure. Highland High School reported 2 new positive cases and 58 new quarantines (athletic team included).

We have a local group called the L.U.N.C.H. bunch who have for the last few years provided lunches throughout the summer to families in need. They would like to plan for this summer and have asked to send the attached needs assessment form to our families: <https://5il.co/rueq> This is a great program that served 8878 lunches last year and 5722 the year before. Many circumstances may have changed during the last 18 months so please assist them in gathering information to prepare for this year's program by completing the form. This is not a school sponsored program, but we certainly want to support the group in their efforts. I also want to send a BIG thank you to the volunteers of this program for their efforts in supporting our students and families.

I would like to also remind you that a survey was made available to all families who anticipate making a request for remote learning for the 2021-2022 school year. The survey is available until April 30. Please remember that **ONLY** families providing documentation that a high health risk exists in the household will be able to request remote learning. If you anticipate a request for remote learning, please use this link to the form: <https://forms.gle/9ZscUZwxbsZUtGCm6>

Finally, we have our regular board meeting on Monday, April 26 at 6:00 p.m. If you wish to view the livestream, please use the following link: <https://youtu.be/ekD7xfBfDWw> All board members and individuals who present or play a role are meeting in-person. To this point we have not opened the meetings to the public due to guidelines. However, if any individual wishes to be included on the agenda and address the Board directly, please make that request to me. These individuals are also welcome to attend the meeting in person. We ask that spectators tune into the livestream.

Thank you for your continued support of Highland CUSD No. 5. That concludes this week's update. Have a safe and wonderful weekend!

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent