

May 7, 2021

Highland CUSD No. 5 Parents and Staff,

Let me just start off with showering of praises to the awesomeness of our school district. I have had the opportunity to attend some in-person (yes, I said in-person) celebrations that make me marvel at the efforts of our staff to go above and beyond so that our students have the best possible experiences as the year comes to a close. First, I attended the FFA banquet at Highland High School over the weekend and it was unbelievable to see the amount of work that went into that production. I was supposed to stay in my car until I was called in for a specific portion of the ceremony, but I couldn't help myself. I needed to peek behind the curtain to see what was really going on inside and WOW, what an effort! The technical piece that was needed to be sure that many parents and participants were able to view the entire ceremony from the parking lot on 4 very large screens strategically placed while enjoying a wonderful night from the comfort of their lawn chairs. Amazing effort! I can't even begin to list the names of all the individuals involved in this effort in fear of missing many of them.

Last night I attended the Highland Middle School Awards night and again it was so wonderful to see our students and parents during their proud moments of receiving a number of awards. Today, as this weekly update reaches you, I will be in the middle of our Staff Recognition Ceremony where I am honored to present our accomplished staff with awards for their service to the school district. We take time each year to celebrate the careers of the retiring staff and recognize those who have achieved 10 and 25 years of service to the district. These are special times that perhaps in the past have been taken for granted, but not this year. Every opportunity we have to gather and celebrate is special!

As the days go by, the following list continues to diminish☺ Here are some significant end of year dates and times:

- Last Day of School – Thursday, May 20th
 - HP and HE dismiss at 11:00 a.m.
 - AP and GE dismiss at 11:05 a.m.
 - HMS and HHS dismiss at 12:35 p.m.
- HHS Final Exams for 9-11 grades – May 19th and May 20th

We have many other important dates for programs, banquets, etc. Information for those events will be communicated through the appropriate channels.

In the coming weeks I plan to provide some rationale as to why the district continues to focus on following the guidance provided by IDPH and our local health department. It is not as easy as just saying it's a fear of losing money, which is what I hear from those who question our continued commitment to the mitigations. There are so many factors that go into the decisions that we make. I am also keeping my eye on legislation currently proposed in the Illinois legislature to empower IDPH and local health departments to go as far as closing schools for noncompliance of guidance. We are totally against any type of legislation that prevents local control in educational decisions for OUR children. The continual movement of the goalposts provided for schools necessitate that we see how some things shake out before making any decisions about mitigations for next school year. Please be patient as we work through all of the challenges and eventually create a plan moving forward.

The weekly updates may not continue to come every week throughout the summer, but it has become a useful way to communicate to our stakeholders when pertinent information is available. I will likely continue the weekly updates through May and then utilize them when necessary to provide updates on important information as it becomes available.

COVID numbers this week: Highland Primary reported zero new positive cases and 2 new quarantines due to outside exposure. Alhambra Primary reported zero positive cases and zero quarantines. Highland Elementary reported zero new positive cases and zero student quarantines. Grantfork Elementary reported zero new positive cases and 0 new student quarantines. Highland Middle School reported zero new positive cases and zero students quarantined. Highland High School reported zero new positive cases and zero new quarantines.

This was a very eventful week with lots of activities, which is exactly what we love to see this time of year. The COVID numbers within the district and regionally continue to improve and we are very hopeful that progress towards normality continues. Meantime, I wish everyone a happy and safe weekend!

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent