

July 12, 2021

Highland CUSD No. 5 staff, students, and parents,

I trust that you have enjoyed the summer so far and continue to take opportunities to rest and recharge as the planning for next school year continues. There has been much talk (and email) over the last several days regarding the new school year and what it is going to look like. I felt it was time to clarify some things and provide an overview of where we are currently.

First of all, the most common question I am receiving is regarding the masking requirements for next school year. Let me address that first. Masks are recommended by ISBE/IDPH for unvaccinated individuals, but the door has been left open to allow masks to be optional for local school districts. Highland CUSD No. 5 plans to make it clear that masks are recommended, but optional for students and staff, vaccinated or not. The decision to wear a mask or not should lie with the individual and that is our current plan. The only place that masks are not optional is on public transportation, therefore, as it currently stands students will be required to wear masks when on a public school bus to and from school. We will address transportation during situations like field trips, athletics, etc. at a later date.

Highland CUSD No. 5 will run 5-days per week full schedule at each building matching our pre-COVID schedules. This means Highland Middle School and Highland High School will dismiss at the normal times (2:35 PM and 2:40 PM). All primary and elementary school will run normal schedule just as they did last year. We anticipate normal procedures during the school day, regular lunch, recess, and passing period. The district is not in favor of collecting any COVID vaccination records unless it impacts quarantine procedures (I have not met with our school nurses to work out these details at this time). We do not favor any types of COVID testing in our schools, testing is readily available locally without any intervening of the school district. The district will work with the Madison County Health Department to communicate quarantine requirements to the best of our ability. Social distancing will be 3 ft. or to the extent possible with an emphasis on educational values. We will serve our student's interest with the best educational practices above all other things while providing a safe environment.

Another concern that seems to be finding me often is that of curriculum. Highland CUSD No. 5 has not implemented any changes in curriculum to incorporate recent attempts to "indoctrinate" students. This will continue to be a discussion point at the district and building level. We believe that this topic may be the most hot-button issue in the near future. As it stands, we are actively trying to identify any efforts within the district and/or from outside entities to incorporate any curriculum changes that may be controversial. We will likely be engaging our staff and families on these topics in the near future. There is no reason for alarm at this time.

Remote learning will be a difficult topic as we move forward. We have a few families interested in full remote learning and we are in the process of researching whether remote learning will be available to those students. In these cases, there are significant health concerns that need to be considered. We will provide some updates on remote learning as we proceed with planning. Right now, remote learning is only to be offered to students who are not vaccinated AND are in quarantine. Since quarantine is a short term period, remote learning is difficult to plan for staff and families. It may be that quarantined students are better served by treating the period as a normal absence and providing the student with work from the actual class rather than placing the student with a different cohort of students during the

quarantine only. We will continue to work out those details. We certainly hope quarantines are significantly less impactful this school year.

In an attempt to keep this correspondence brief and clear, I will end this update at this point. We know there are still unknowns and will continue to identify the issues and provide clarity when possible. Just like last year, we will find our way to success with some patience and hopefully much support from our stakeholders. I have heard from many teachers and parents throughout the summer about the pride they felt due to the tremendous efforts of our teachers and staff last year. Our staff are excited to continue to serve our students and community and they have provided much support to district efforts to continue into next school year.

I hope this update provides some clarity for all of our staff and families. Please reach out to me if there are some unaddressed issues that need to be addressed. Online registration is open and the process seems to be going very well to date. Enjoy the next few weeks of summer break and I will be in contact periodically with updates.

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton