

August 9, 2021

Good afternoon Highland CUSD No. 5 Parents and staff,

I want to provide an update regarding the Return to School Plan. I do not have all the answers for you at this time, but it is important that you know where things currently stand. Since the Illinois Governor's Executive Order on August 4, 2021, we have reviewed the order and gathered information to determine how the district would proceed with the expectations to start the school year. The question above all others is whether masks will be required per the executive order or encouraged, but not required. We have received hundreds of email and phone calls with differing opinions.

The Board must consider the risks of all potential actions taken and determine to what degree those risks are acceptable. These include health risks and non-health risks alike. The discussion will likely become public at a special board meeting on Wednesday night where the Board will make the final decision whether the Return to School plan will include a mask requirement or something less. I cannot guess in what direction the outcome will be, but please know that the Board and I are not taking lightly the burden of this decision and how it will impact the education process to start the school year.

The meeting will be held at 6 p.m. on Wednesday at the Highland Middle School Plaza. The meeting will be live streamed, but interaction will occur in person at the meeting. The public is certainly welcome to attend. We will not entertain questions or comments from the live stream. The link for the live stream is: <https://youtu.be/rLwYyv0TSWs> The agenda for the meeting can accessed through this link: <https://5il.co/wrwl> We ask that anyone planning to attend the meeting to please be respectful and courteous to all persons wishing to address the Board. The Board president may limit comments to 2 minutes to ensure we can hear everyone who wishes to address the Board. There will be a sign up sheet on the table at entry for all persons wishing to address the Board. Each person will be called to speak, moving through all individuals until the list is exhausted. The Highland community has been very supportive of the district's efforts throughout the COVID pandemic and we anticipate this continued support to minimize the divisiveness of this controversial issue.

I am very sorry that the final decisions for the Return to School plan are so close to the beginning of school, but that is the reality of this year. I can't imagine that there is an argument for or against masks that I (and the Board) have not heard, but we will listen with an open ear and do the best we can to ensure that our students, staff, and community know we are making the best decision we can on behalf of the entire Highland School community, not on our own political beliefs.

Please be with me in supporting (not necessarily agreeing with) the Board of Education during this meeting and the decision that must be made on Wednesday night. I anticipate many other decisions being made later this week as well. I know that we will persevere through all of these challenges and make it a great year for all of us and our students. I look forward to seeing all of the students and staff next week and making the beginning of the school year a celebration that it deserves. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent