

August 20, 2021

Highland CUSD No. 5 Parents and Staff,

One thing that is the same as any normal school year is the excitement and enthusiasm our students, parents, and staff feel on the first day of school. Though many frustrations and fears existed to start this school year, it was a fantastic start that demonstrated clearly that all of our stakeholders will pull together to make this another great experience for everyone within the school district. Once again the smiles were covered with masks, but the emotions could be seen through their eyes. I want to thank everyone for their cooperation and support through many ongoing challenges we face every day.

A number of things need to be addressed at this time. I will be providing more clarity on quarantine procedures and options in the coming days. Our nurses are working with one another and through MCHD to ensure our students have the opportunities to stay in school in a safe manner. We hoped that relaxed quarantine requirements would significantly reduce the number of absences this year. When I say “relaxed”, I do not mean that we are doing anything different than provided in the guidance, only that the guidelines are relaxed from last year. We are hopeful that our current plan of mitigations will prevent transmission from occurring in the school environment. It is evident that the characteristics of the new variant may work differently in school aged students compared to last year so we will continue to monitor local statistics and make adjustments to the plan accordingly.

In past communications, I have talked about the district’s desire to leave medical recommendations to experts in the medical field and allow families to make their own decisions. We are education experts, trying to manage the mandates from the State and provide a quality experience for our students while dealing with a pandemic. Districts in Illinois have been asked to encourage vaccinations for all who are eligible. I will not encourage or discourage vaccinations, but I do find it important to support our families who choose to pursue the vaccinations. This is why we are partnering with the MCHD to provide another vaccination clinic on Wednesday, September 1. The clinic will be located at the main office, 400 Broadway, from 3:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Appointments are encouraged, but walk ins are welcome. The clinic is open to all eligible persons 12 years old and up. To access a flyer for the clinic, please use this link: <https://5il.co/xlc0>

The first week of school is nearly completed and I feel it necessary to share the number of cases we are seeing in each building as I did last year. Most of the cases and quarantines included occurred prior to the start of the school year, but I will do my best to differentiate between the two. Highland Primary reported 2 positive students in isolation and 15 students in quarantine. All were related to outside exposures. Alhambra Primary reported one positive student and 3 quarantined students all due to exposure outside of school. Highland Elementary reported 2 positive students, 13 quarantined students, and 2 staff quarantined. All were due to outside exposures. Grantfork Elementary reported 2 student quarantines due to outside exposure. Highland Middle School reported 2 staff positives, 3 student positives and 4 student quarantines due to outside exposure. Highland High School reported 4 positive students resulting in zero quarantines.

As you can see from the numbers, we are dealing with several cases as school starts. We have reviewed a number of internal processes and made adjustments so that we can limit the number of quarantines

with each case. The 3 feet of social distance is much more manageable with masks than the 6 feet of social distance that was required last year. I will continue to report our numbers on a weekly basis until it appears the need no longer exists.

I am going to miss my usual 2 p.m. delivery time by about one hour so I am going to cut my comments off here. I will have more to share with you next week. We now have 1 week under our belts and it feels great to be back. Have a great weekend, stay safe, and see you all next week!

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent