

August 27, 2021

Highland CUSD Parents and Staff,

Sometimes we have to take a step back, take a deep breath, and reflect on the big picture. Now is that time for all of us to do that. I have still been taking calls about the district's decision to enforce the executive order on masks. I have been taking calls about the district not doing enough to protect the kids in our buildings. The situation is Afghanistan has us on edge. Now, the new executive order requiring vaccines for all staff in all public schools is causing much concern among our staff. Some might refuse the vaccine because of the mandate, some might be willing to submit to the weekly testing, others refuse both. I am not sure at this time how this is all going to shake out, but please take a step back and look at the big picture.

We can't quit on our students, please don't quit on our students. I know that many of you see a much larger battle going on from a political standpoint. Believe me, I hear you loudly and I see it as well. We are educators and we want to teach kids. I have substitutes who are calling in to let me know that they will not sub if they are required to take the vaccine or submit to weekly testing. I get it, they are upset at the way things are being done. We are not supposed to let any paid employees in the building after September 5 if they have not begun the regiment of vaccination or submit to weekly testing. I don't even know at this minute what this testing is going to look like. I have a number of meetings next week to determine our next course of action. We are very concerned what the next step will be. Mandatory student vaccinations? Daily testing? Who knows?

Our district has maintained that we have no desire to be involved in the testing of individuals unless it is 100% voluntary. I am hopeful that our staff understand that this is not where we want to be and we are going to support them 100% through this next challenge. We have approximately 350 employees who by our estimates are about 60% vaccinated. That leaves many employees dealing with this personal dilemma of whether to vaccinate, test, or quit. The Governor has no skin in this situation. The local challenges we are now faced with will not impact him or the state government in any way, except the fallout at the next election. Please do not allow decisions at the state level to impact our ability to serve our students. If teachers, staff, food service, bus drivers, etc. quit on us, it will impair our ability to serve our students. It is amazing (in a bad way) that through the worst of the pandemic how we were able to come together and achieve what we did last year, but now we have all of these major hurdles in front of us.

Anyway, what else is there to talk about? Let's talk about the number of field trips that we are approving for our teachers and students to get out and experience, there is a big football game tonight, kids are happy to be amongst their friends, teachers are collaborating with one another on how best to reach their students, the high school parking lot looks great, strategic planning is moving forward, we had an increase in enrollment this year, YES, GOOD THINGS ARE HAPPENING TOO😊 I so want to focus on all of those things rather than my weekly downpour of negatives, but these are the times we live in.

Coincidentally, we have a vaccination clinic scheduled for next Wednesday, September 1. Seriously, I am glad I told you about it weeks ago, otherwise, one would be determined that it was part of the master plan to push vaccinations. The flyer for the clinic is here: <https://5il.co/xlc0> This clinic will be held at the

main office at 400 Broadway and appointments are encouraged, but walk ins are welcome. This clinic can be utilized by students, staff, or anyone outside of the school environment.

I have continued to ask our buildings to report to me the number of cases we see on a weekly basis. This week the Highland Primary reported zero new positive cases with 13 students remaining on quarantines from outside exposures. Alhambra Primary reported 1 positive student from an outside exposure, Highland Elementary reported 3 student positives and 9 student quarantines (one of which came from in school exposure), Grantfork Elementary reported 1 quarantine from an outside exposure, Highland Middle School reported 1 positive staff member, 1 student positive, and 1 student quarantine all from outside exposures. Highland High School reported zero new positive cases and zero new quarantines.

My purpose of these communications is not to cause alarm for any of our stakeholders, but I do feel it is important that all of you understand the challenges we face and the obstacles that we must overcome to simply be here on a daily basis. We will continue to have internal conversations with our staff about the latest executive order to ensure our ability to continue in person learning is not impacted. I appreciate your support and cooperation as we continue to work through each of these challenges. The next couple of days are going to be very hot so enjoy the warmth and have a great weekend!

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent