

October 8, 2021

Highland CUSD 5 parents and staff,

I was out of the district at the end of last week and unable to provide a weekly update, which is why I prepared you a few weeks ago that the weekly message might not be so weekly in the future. While I looked forward to not typing a weekly update, I realized that I actually missed sharing our story last week 😊 This is true especially when I have good things to share and there are certainly lots of great things to share at this point. It almost seems to be normal in the sense that I have actually had some issues brought to my attention of late that are not COVID or politic related. Yes, I realize how absurd that statement was, but it's true.

The district seen a homecoming parade this week, we anticipate a full stadium for the football game tonight, we are looking forward to a homecoming dance tomorrow night on the square, we have taken groups of kids on field trips such as Springfield and planning the annual Washington D.C. trip, we are planning all sorts of other "normal" activities for our students, and we continue to look for ways to ensure our students experience the educational opportunities they are supposed to experience during their school years. We also wrestled with ways that we can safely hold Christmas programs this week. I am not sure what that will end up looking like, but please know that we will do everything in our power to provide those opportunities for our students and parents. All of these things create an excitement that has been absent for many months due to the pandemic.

Speaking of the pandemic, we can't go through a weekly message and not address the fact that there is evidence that the amount of transmission around the country, county and locally seems to be decreasing from the recent spikes in cases. We are also seeing that trend within the schools as I will report in a moment. This positive trend gives me hope that some of the most fearful strategies being implemented in other areas of the country will not be considered here in Illinois. The vaccine/testing requirements have already caused much division throughout our country. I am happy to report that through many conversations with our labor associations and staff, we have managed to provide options for our staff that have paved the way for excellent relations to continue. We value our teachers and staff for what they do every day for our students and families and will continue to support them in every way possible.

Now, let it be clear that the numbers I am reporting to you today are from this week and this week only. These are real numbers as reported from each building and include all cases of which we are aware. Many times I report that cases and quarantines are from outside exposures because there is evidence that this is the case. We are dealing with some instances of positive cases in a close proximity that may or may not have resulted from transmission within the school environment. The complexity occurs when close contacts within the school environment become positive, but there are also connections within the same groups of students outside of the school environment. When there is evidence that clearly demonstrates transmission or close contacts occurred outside of the school setting, I will report it as such. If I don't report it as such, then assume there is not the confidence to report it that way. This is not code for any particular message, I simply want to be clear that we are making our best effort to keep our parents and staff informed of what we observe.

The COVID numbers for this week: Highland Primary reported 7 new student positive cases and 1 new student presumptive positive case all related to outside exposures. They also reported 7 new student quarantines, 6 from outside exposures and 1 from a school related exposure. Alhambra Primary reported 2 student quarantines from outside exposure and zero new positive cases. Highland Elementary reported 3 student positives and 4 new student quarantines. Grantfork Elementary reported 1 student quarantine from outside exposure and zero new positive cases. Highland Middle School reported 3 student positives and 1 student quarantine that was due to an outside exposure. Highland High School reported zero new positives and 1 new student quarantine due to outside exposure.

This week was a little challenging due to the number of instances of social emotional distress I have been involved in with students throughout the district. Much of this distress is being caused by the use of social media and electronic forums. I have no doubt that there are many adults experiencing similar issues of social emotional distress as well. I encourage you to unplug this holiday weekend and enjoy time with your families and/or friends. It has been a difficult couple of years and I have been SOOO proud of our staff, parents, students and community for the way we have worked together to overcome all of the challenges between the pandemic and politics. Have a great, long weekend and we'll continue to solve the world's problems next week😊

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent