

November 5, 2021

Highland CUSD No. 5 Parents and Staff,

I was hoping for a long Fall with some good mild temperatures, but this 28-51 degrees' range is a little too chilly for me this time of the year. At this rate we might have some conversations about snow and emergency days before we get to Christmas break, but I am going to be optimistic and hold off that information for some time.

We have already seen several Fine Arts programs already conducted and soon will be in the middle of our Christmas program extravaganza where 3-4 nights per week is normal. It is great to see our staff and students back performing "in-person" and entertaining our parents with their talents and humor. I have been involved in several conversations of late on how to conduct these activities with large audiences while maneuvering the mitigations of COVID. You all know that expectations and beliefs are different across the board and it is very difficult to please everyone so we are doing our best to adapt to the situation and provide clarity on expectations. Beyond that, we trust our parents and visitors to follow the procedures put in place to provide the best environment for everyone to attend in peace and harmony.

The programs that involve our youngest students generally have the largest crowds and thus create the most difficult situations to live up to everyone's expectations. So, for clarity, I want to provide you my advice to our administrator's and staff when planning and executing these functions. The masks are required for all indoor activities so that is clear. However, when attendees do not follow the protocols, we do not plan to cause disturbances within the crowds to enforce these rules out of respect for our students and staff. If there is blatant disregard for safety protocols, we will obviously address those situations. It has forced us to limit crowd sizes in several instances to provide everyone an opportunity to choose where they sit and seek the spacing desired for their family. We ask that everyone please respect one another and remember that we are providing these opportunities for our students. A huge KUDOS goes out to our administrators and teachers who are trying their best to meet the expectations of everyone attending these programs.

Since the beginning of COVID I have attempted to communicate on a weekly or bi-weekly manner. At various times over that period I have mentioned strategic planning and the intention to engage you through these opportunities. Well, the time has finally arrived that I feel comfortable beginning that engagement. We have identified a number of building priorities over the last couple of years. One of the top priorities is providing a safe and secure environment for our students throughout the district. The Board of Education approved at our last meeting a couple of projects to address the entrance areas at our schools in Alhambra and Grantfork. The purpose is not to limit access to our parents, but provide entrances that secure our building from unwanted advances by persons wanting to do harm.

Similarly, a top priority exists with the Highland Primary building and the fact that students so often travel between buildings throughout the day for activities such as lunch, PE, Music, Library, Art, visiting the office, etc. We have been reviewing possibilities to bring all students at the primary level under one roof to provide the safety and security that we should all agree is imperative. In doing so, we must either renovate and build an addition to the current structure or build a new school. We are in the

process of reviewing options that provide cost effective solutions to these issues while addressing a host of other issues at the same time, i.e. traffic at the Lindenthal campus. As the solutions are identified you can expect a number of opportunities for community engagement on the specifics of the project, costs, and plans for how these projects will be funded. I want to encourage everyone to take advantage of the community engagement opportunities to provide feedback and ask questions so that we can accomplish our objectives with clear action plans and limit the false information that may surface as we navigate these issues. I am really excited about the possibility of talking with our families and community members about how we can accomplish our goals in cost effective and financially responsible way.

Moving on to the weekly talking points☺ As you all know there is growing desire to relax COVID mitigations as the numbers continue to decline in many areas of the country. There is much confusion and concern about the labor shortage, vaccination and testing mandates. We continue to work with our staff (though there is a lot of stress across the board) to provide options that have kept our 350 employees focused on teaching students through all of the NOISE that surrounds them. We have been able to fill all teaching positions with great candidates. We have struggled with filling our non-certified positions such as program assistants, custodial workers and substitutes for all classes of employees. I urge anyone interested in employment in any of these positions to please reach out to the main office and express interest or apply at our district website: highlandcusd5.org.

I digress in the above commercial for our vacancies. The point I was going to make is that masks continue to be required and the district made a commitment at the beginning of the year to see that through until an opportunity to revisit the topic surfaced. Many of you may know that much litigation has been filed and the main issue is that of masks and vaccination/testing requirements. The district will comply with whatever results come from the adjudication of these issues. The good news is that clarity should result in whether the executive orders must be implemented or not. I look forward to the day that we know 100% what our options are when developing procedures. I encourage cooperation and working together until these issues are resolved through the court system. I read about so much controversy and outrage in other school districts throughout this great nation and am encouraged every day to see our staff, parents and community coming together to make everything work on a daily basis. Thank you to every one of you for supporting our schools, our students, and our staff.

I know this update is dragging on, but I have to mention one more thing before getting to our weekly numbers and signing off. Next week is Veteran's Day. This is always one of my favorite holidays of the year because it is so emotional to see the way our students and staff celebrate with and for our veterans. I encourage you to step back and think about how great our country really is and WHY it is this way. It all goes back to the individuals who have served to protect our freedoms over the decades and centuries of the United States of America. Please join me in thanking our veterans and enjoy the always well intentioned efforts to bring honor to these individuals through several Veteran's Day assemblies in our district.

Our weekly COVID numbers are as follows. A reminder that these numbers are real and come directly from each building and include every situation of which we are aware. Highland Primary reported 1 positive staff, 1 positive student, 1 staff quarantine due to outside exposure, 3 student quarantines due to outside exposure, and 7 student quarantines due to an in-school exposure. Alhambra Primary reported zero positive cases and zero quarantines. Highland Elementary reported zero positive cases and zero quarantines. Grantfork Elementary reported zero positive cases and zero quarantines.

Highland Middle School reported 1 positive student and zero quarantines. Highland High School reported zero positive cases and zero quarantines.

One last reminder: there will be no classes next Thursday or Friday. Thursday is Veteran's Day and Friday was amended a few weeks ago to be a "Not in Session" day. I wish everyone a wonderful and safe weekend!

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent