

December 3, 2021

Highland CUSD 5 parents and staff,

It has been a few weeks since I last sent a Friday Update. During that time, I have had a number of requests/recommendations for the weekly update. It was requested to share more things going on around the district and less narrative on the weather. So, I won't talk about how grateful I am for the unseasonably warm weather the last couple of days☺ December is a hectic and fantastic month all at the same time. Everyone is worn out and trying to make it to the end of the semester/calendar year whether it is the kids trying to get their grades up before the end of the semester or the staff trying to cover the last few units before the 2-week Christmas break. On the other hand, the holiday season during Thanksgiving and leading up to Christmas gives us many opportunities to make special memories with our family and friends. Attending Christmas programs, parties, athletic holiday tournaments and the such should give everyone an opportunity to see the amazing things our staff and students are doing every day.

I would like to make special mention of our HHS basketball coach Deryl Cunningham, who reports that he is recovering from a successful kidney transplant this week. Our hearts and prayers are with him and his family as he continues to make progress towards his return. It is amazing to see the school community rally behind those who are facing different challenges in life. Our district is full of outreach programs and efforts to support those in need. We have toy drives, clothing drives, donations to several local charities including His Kids and the Humane Society, food drives and many other efforts to support our local organizations. I would like to extend a warm "thank you" to all those individuals who play a role in any of these efforts. This is what makes our community unique and desirable to all of us.

Good luck to the HHS madrigal group who will be performing tonight and over the weekend to many patrons and live streaming their event to those who are unable to join in person. I am certain it will be a highlight of the holiday season. We have a large group from Highland Middle School going Mac's Family Fun Time to enjoy some local fun opportunities and give them their first big party group experience. Good luck to the workers over at Mac's☺ Highland District athletics are in full swing and we encourage our community to come out and support our students and coaches. You will see our kids give 110% when they compete and it is great to honor them with large crowds and encouraging spectators.

If you have a student at Highland Primary, ask them to tell you about the Gratitude Challenge and how they are focusing on positive things that are going on in the world. Or you can ask your 2<sup>nd</sup> graders to tell you about the Balloons over Broadway parade and what they are learning about the history of the Macy's Day Parade. These are great opportunities to engage your children in what is going on in school. Highland Primary experienced their first Christmas program last night and the kids and parents were fantastic. We thank all of you for your patience and cooperation as we continue to navigate the difficult landscape that COVID has created.

I have a couple of special mentions. Congratulations to Makayla Korsmeyer for her 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the Madison County Recycle Day Poster Contest and a special "Thanks" to Mary Beil, district librarian, who pursued and received grant dollars to make available Ag in the Classroom units of study. There are many individuals, students and staff, who go beyond the call of duty or make special efforts to bring

honor to our district and community. Thanks to all of the unmentioned individuals who play pivotal roles every day in the lives of our children to provide them a great educational experience.

I would like to spend a little time with an update on our strategic planning. Many of you may have read in recent articles or seen on television that the Highland School District is planning to build a new primary school as well as a couple of other capital projects. We are a long way from moving forward with these projects. We are finalizing the scope of each of these projects and plan to have a number of community engagement opportunities in the coming months to share “how”, “why”, “when” and answer any other questions that our public have about the projects. In the end, voters will determine if and when we will move forward through a referendum on the ballot during the next election, which is in June 2022. I only ask that each of you engage with us and allow us to explain how and why these projects are prioritized. I will provide information on the estimated costs and what impact it will have on tax rates and all of that. I am excited to get that process going and hopeful that I have an opportunity to engage with all of our community members about these potential projects.

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 new positive staff, 5 new positive students resulting in 9 student quarantines and 1 staff quarantine, and 6 student quarantines due to outside exposure. Alhambra Primary reported 1 positive student case and 1 student quarantine. Highland Elementary reported 1 positive staff case, 2 positive student cases and 7 quarantines resulting from outside exposures. Grantfork Elementary reported zero positive cases and zero quarantines. Highland Middle School reported 2 positive student cases while 2 are awaiting test results and 5 student quarantines resulting from outside exposures. Highland High School reported 5 positive student cases resulting in 1 quarantine.

We continue to see cases of COVID in and around our school communities. I am sympathetic that each case may present a different result, some may have little to no symptoms and/or illness while others result in significant illness or lingering effects. The numbers reported above are not just numbers, they are individuals and families who are dealing with things that they may have never dealt with before. Our thoughts are always with our students and staff and their families as they deal with the challenges of COVID and other issues that result.

Have a wonderful weekend and I hope to see everyone next week safe and healthy.

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent