

January 28, 2022

Highland CUSD No. 5 Parents and Staff,

Over the last couple of weeks, we have prepared for different scenarios that may occur with the judge's decision in the court cases I have shared with you. I am not certain if anything will come down today or if it will be next week, but I want you to be prepared when that time comes. The mask and quarantine issue will continue to be the primary topic until a decision is known. To review, the district will continue to focus on in person learning regardless of the decision. If there is a temporary restraining order, the district will be court ordered to follow it. I plan to provide an update as soon as I receive an update on the judge's decision. It may take a few hours or even a day to decipher exactly what the ruling means, but an update will be provided as soon as possible.

There are many implications and possibilities. We may need some time to provide communications to all stakeholders: staff, students, parents and community. In preparation, please realize that we may need a day to sort some things out. If that is necessary, school would likely be cancelled, similar to a snow day so that our administrative team can get together to plan and communicate. I will give as much notice as possible if this becomes the case.

Here are the COVID numbers as reported by each building: Highland primary reported 4 staff positives, 22 student positives, 22 students in quarantine. Alhambra Primary reported 1 student positive and 4 student quarantines. Highland Elementary reported 8 student positives and 1 staff quarantine. Grantfork Elementary reported 1 student positive and 4 student quarantines. Highland Middle School reported 4 staff positives, 2 student positives, and 10 students on quarantine. Highland High School reported 15 student positives and zero others.

The last couple of weeks have been very challenging with lots of positive cases and quarantines. We have struggled to maintain substitutes for our staff so it has been all hands on deck to maintain in person learning. I want to point out the efforts of our administrators, teachers, and support staff because they are burning both ends of the candle to make this situation work. Student absences have caused tremendous challenges for our teachers to keep up with the make-up work while still addressing all of the in person needs. Please recognize these efforts are solely to serve our students, not for the purpose of gaining any recognition. The deterioration of respect for educators playing out all over the country is real and has also been felt locally. The negativity associated with education generally occurs when a school district is not in tune with the beliefs and values of its community. This is not the case in Highland CUSD No. 5.

We know the overwhelming majority of our community agrees that in person learning is critical. We know that students across the country are experiencing many social/emotional issues as a result of the pandemic and other world issues. It doesn't take much research to see the increasing numbers of suicide and child social issues resulting from the pandemic. We have walked a fine line throughout the pandemic to balance mitigations so that we can protect our highest priority. Our staff and parents have partnered, so to speak, to accomplish this feat. The challenges that we will face over the next few weeks will test these partnerships. We have staff with elevated concerns over the potential shift in mitigations just as we have students and parents with the same elevated concerns. We will work with

all groups to find common ground to continue to offer quality instruction and children the opportunity to experience the social environment every child deserves during their school years.

To that end, I hope to be in communication with you soon after the decision is reached in the litigation. Regardless when the decision comes, I hope you all have a safe and relaxing weekend. Perhaps the football games this weekend will be as entertaining as the ones last week😊 Have a great weekend!

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent