

2/6/2022

Highland CUSD No. 5 Parents and Staff,

The update sent yesterday was only the beginning of many potential clarifications that need to be made as a result of the changes made in the court ruling. All districts named in the lawsuit are grappling with very difficult decisions and face liability regardless of the continued path forward. We will likely see complaints of contempt of court or additional adverse action depending on decisions we make. We have additional meetings this afternoon with different groups of staff, including the school nurses to digest and attempt to get everyone on the same page as to what procedures should be moving forward. I may need to send updates through the week as well if additional questions surface.

First, I would like to address the issue of bus transportation, which I didn't mention in yesterday's update. It is my understanding that this is one issue that all school law firms are in agreement on, masking on school buses remains required through federal requirements. **All** individuals who choose to ride a school bus will continue to be required to wear a mask. I have communicated with First Student and they must continue this mandate, there is no choice or gray area.

Next, the district will continue to follow IDPH guidelines for individuals who test positive for COVID. Because of the ambiguity of the ruling from Judge Grischow, we believe all individuals still must follow isolation guidance, meaning an individual may return to school on day 6 (only if symptoms are improving), but must remain masked for days 6-10. Individuals who elect not to wear a mask during this time may elect to return on day 11. Individuals specifically named in the lawsuit cannot be required to wear a mask even during these times. Students who return on day 6 also must socially distance at all times. The district will continue the previous procedures during lunch to ensure distance is kept at that time.

The Illinois State Board of Education has encouraged in person learning throughout this year and districts are not required to provide remote options for students. As we navigate this current transition, I do not anticipate any additional remote options being available. Staff for remote options are not available if we stay committed to in person learning. Shortening the school day at middle school and high school was the only way we could offer remote learning last year. Even then, our teachers and staff made an impossible situation work, but we could not sustain the same effort into the future. Unfortunately, we are in the midst of creating a new norm during the COVID era.

I do not anticipate any issues with bullying or stray comments being made towards individuals who elect to wear a mask or those who elect not to wear a mask. I don't anticipate a problem because we have very respectful students and staff who respect each individual's right to make that decision. However, I do want to make clear that any type of negative comments or bullying as a result of COVID mitigations **WILL NOT** be tolerated. Please talk with your children about the importance of respecting other individuals. We don't know circumstances that many individuals may be dealing with in environments away from school.

This is a very emotional time for everyone. Some students and staff have dealt with COVID during their entire school experience (younger students and newer employees). Individuals across the district have had very different experiences during the COVID era that has shaped their views and behaviors. This is a

time as a community we need to step up, support and be respectful to one another. I am sure that additional communications will follow as questions arise. Please stay home if sick or showing any symptoms of any illness.

Be careful tomorrow morning, many country roads are still very slick. For now, enjoy the rest of your weekend!

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent