

Good afternoon Highland CUSD No. 5,

It has been a long, tedious week in Highland Schools this week. We have had ups and downs throughout the week, which is exactly what we expected. We have been dealing with changing guidelines throughout the week and appreciate the cooperation and patience from our community, parents, staff, and students. It has been a true team effort this week!

Here is what we know at this point. We expected positive cases of COVID to come to light this week because school is in session. They did! We had a couple of staff members test positive, a few student positive tests were confirmed, and a few exclusions occurred due to parents testing positive. A number of students were contacted this week to stay home until a complete investigation was completed by the MCHD. I am attempting to stay in contact with those impacted to understand the severity of their illness. Some of them have felt poorly for a few days, but are feeling better. We will err on the side of caution every time when communicating to parents about possible exposure. If your child is in close contact with a positive case, you will be contacted.

I had a long conversation with the Madison County Health Department today regarding their assistance in helping identify any cases of transmission within the schools. So far, no cases of transmission have occurred to our knowledge. Of course, we are only five days into the school year with students present. We remain vigilant about our protocols. A few reports from students, parents, community members, and staff have caused us to be fluid in adapting protocols and communicating expectations.

I was told of a rumor that the district was moving to remote learning due to the county metrics being placed in the Warning today. Through conversations with MCHD, we are planning to continue the current schedule with no changes. We will attempt to give official notice prior to any decision to move to a full remote learning environment. I am hopeful notice will be at least one week. We know that a move to remote will have drastic impact on our parents and families, however, please remember that we are dealing with a pandemic, which none of us have ever experienced. We will continue to look at the data and try to understand how it impacts our school community.

As mentioned before, guidelines are changing daily. The rules we have focused on have not changed. Please continue to wear a masks, socially distance to the extent possible, remain home when sick (even one symptom when not explainable), and practice good hygiene (washing hands). If you have a sick member of the family, keep all your children home and communicate to the school so the impact does not extend to many. If we can continue to do these things, the chances of continued in-person learning will be much higher.

For those of you who have selected remote learning, we will continue to review our processes and the way in which we can best provide instruction remotely. We have added technology and many programs improve our ability to effectively teach. Staff are trying to teach in-person and engage students remotely. It's hard! We will find our stride and continue to improve as time goes on. Students and families, you have to do your part! Communication between remote teachers and home are crucial in understanding expectations. Please be patient and continue to communicate with our staff.

Please forgive the "off the cuff" manor in which I communicate to you. We are attempting to be honest with you about our challenges and our successes. I hope the efforts of our teachers and staff do not go un-noticed because they have been truly amazing so far. The cooperation and communication with our

school community has been unparalleled. This shows the importance of education in our community. As we continue to look for ways to safely conduct school, please stand with us in support and encouragement. As always, please reach out if you have questions. For now, enjoy the wonderful weather this weekend!

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent