

Good afternoon Highland CUSD Parents and Staff,

We have had a wonderful week of weather and it appears that we will be spared much of the heavy rainfall from hurricane Laura. It seems ironic that the beginning of the school year seemed to be like a hurricane coming our way not knowing what type of damage should be expected. We knew COVID had the possibility of wreaking havoc on schools across the state of Illinois. Highland Schools have largely been spared to this point.

We have had a wonderful two weeks of in-person learning through many challenges. I have not been made aware of a single positive test result this week from students or staff. We had a few cases where students and staff showed symptoms and stayed home, but the symptoms could be any number of things. Some students and staff have been excluded due to assumed exposure per the Madison County Health Department. Many COVID tests were taken this week by various staff and students, but to my knowledge all returned with negative results. We are awaiting results from a few.

I attribute our success thus far to the miraculous efforts of our students, parents and staff to live within the rules. Masks have not been an issue so far and we are grateful for the cooperation from our school community. Keep up the great work! We have been doing a decent job maintaining social distancing to the extent possible and staying home when symptoms are visible. I have fielded a few calls from observers expressing concerns that we are not doing enough. We are having conversations in each one of these situations to better understand how we can improve our protocol.

New guidelines from IDPH have been established and have caused some concern. I want to remind you that students should not return to school until they are completely free of symptoms. We have been told that all students in a household must stay home when there is evidence of symptoms. Please reach out to your child's school nurse if there are any questions about returning to school. Our nurses maintain contact with the Madison County Health Department and often seek feedback about the guidelines. Please show patience with them as they do their best to keep our students and staff safe and in school.

Madison County has seen decreases in some of the metrics used to determine the county and region statuses. However, Madison County will remain in the Orange (Warning) for another week due to positivity rates and number of positive cases per 100,000 populations. The Governor's office has announced that new mitigation strategies may be implemented in the near future, but it is not anticipated that they will impact our ability to continue in-person learning. As long as the district is able to sustain the current mitigation strategies and prevent the transmission of COVID in our schools, we plan to continue with the current in-person and remote options.

I am so pleased that this school year is off to a good start while maintaining a safe environment. Our staff have shown tremendous resolve to stay healthy and balance the challenges of in-person vs. remote learning. My hat goes off to them. I mean really, think about this. The traffic around our campuses is crazy because parents are transporting many of the kids to schools, keeping our buses to safe numbers. Our bus drivers are reporting to work like nothing is different. Our food service folks are bending over backwards to assist at breakfast and lunch with a variety of serving areas. Our custodial and buildings/grounds department have risen to the occasion being asked to do more than ever before. Our teachers and program assistants are staying healthy and having less absences than we see in a normal year. Our office folks are dealing with a variety of issues and questions from remote learners as well as

in-person learners. I don't have to mention the difficulty of our school nurses staying up-to-date on guidelines and communicating with everyone. Our administrators are doing a great job with plans and adjusting as necessary. This has been a true team effort! Thank you.

For now, hang in there and continue to observe the mitigation strategies so that we can continue to do what's best for kids. Please take care of yourselves this weekend and stay healthy. We will be back Monday for Week 3!

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent