

9/11/2020

Highland CUSD Staff and Parents,

Week 4 is nearly complete and another weekend is upon us. Regarding COVID, we had a pretty good week, especially considering how poorly last week went. If you are still in favor of the full in-person option, you are likely not a parent of a quarantined child. That's a good place to start. I would like to begin this week's update with a little background to the quarantine situation.

I have talked with several staff and parents about their concerns with the number of quarantine students with each positive case. In July and the beginning of August we were making the final adjustments to our Return to School Plan. At that time close contacts were identified differently than they are currently. If masks were worn, the threshold to require quarantine was higher. Now, it doesn't matter whether a mask is worn in this determination. The number of students required to quarantine is based on the ability to socially distance six feet. If any person is within six feet for more than an aggregate of 15 minutes in a day, they are considered a close contact and must quarantine for 14 days. We already know that we cannot allow every student to attend every day and distance six feet in all classes.

Please do not take this to mean that masks are no longer essential. I believe the masks have been crucial in mitigating the transmission within the school environment. I also know that information about COVID and the way it spreads changes every day. We have stayed on top of the changing landscape and continue to believe that our mitigation efforts provide a safe environment for our staff and students.

That said, the inability to socially distance equates to just over 200 students currently in quarantine at Highland High School. This number is extremely high due to students changing classes each period. We encourage our staff to utilize any space available to distance students when possible. The primary and elementary schools do not have the same impact with a positive case due to primarily staying with the same groups of students throughout the day.

Another situation starting to be evident is the assumed positive cases. When a student who is in close contact with a positive case shows symptoms, that student must be treated as a positive case. This means additional contact tracing for additional individuals in close contact with the assumed positive. We know the quarantines are having a negative impact on the educational environment for those students. This is primarily impacting Highland High School. I will be providing all of this data to the Board of Education at the September board meeting on September 28. A discussion will follow regarding the benefits of continued full in-person learning versus an alternative learning environment.

This week we dealt with two positive results from last week and four assumed positives at HHS. These alone equated to approximately 90 students being forced to quarantine. Many students will be returning to class next week and we welcome them back. However, we will continue to monitor the number of positive cases and the number of quarantine students to determine if educational opportunities are still better in an everyday model versus an alternative day model (blended). The benefit in a blended model would be less quarantined students while the detractor is less instructional minutes. As you can see the balance is delicate.

I have to take the opportunity once again to provide a well-deserved and sincere thank you to all of our students, staff, and parents. Their cooperation and commitment have been astounding. When many

school districts across the area are trying to get kids back in school, we have been there for four complete weeks. Thank you.

We have some wonderful weather this weekend so please get out and enjoy the fresh air. We hope to see everyone on Monday for the start of week 5!

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent