

10/9/2020

Highland CUSD 5 Parents and Staff,

I realize that yesterday may have seemed like Friday to many of you since school is not in session today, so for you this will be a Saturday weekly update. I had to go back through some of the previous weekly updates to, first of all, remember exactly what week we just completed (Week 8 for those counting) and to get a sense of what the tone has been in each of the updates. I generally sit down on Friday and start typing what I know about the week. Some have been up and some have been down. Now that first quarter is completed, it seems moving forward with in-person learning is a given. Still, many questions remain.

Parents have contacted me this week with questions like: When will the middle school and high school go to a full day of instruction? How much longer will masks be required? When will a full slate of activities be scheduled? Field trips? Athletics? Unfortunately, I do not know the answers to any of these questions at this time. There are so many organizations involved in these decisions that I prefer to put my head down and simply focus on what we are doing. I am confident that we have provided the maximum number of opportunities for our students to resume as close to normal lives as possible. We plan to take each week separately and do our best to keep students and staff safe and at school.

Second quarter begins on Tuesday, October 13. The window to change educational settings has closed and we ended with 135 requests for changes. 117 students will be returning for in-person learning and 18 students will be moving from in-person to remote learning. Please keep in mind that this is a difficult adjustment for our staff. Our in-person classrooms must add additional desks with limited space (limited in the sense of COVID era) and our remote teachers must adjust the programs that they utilize. I do however anticipate a seamless transition next week.

This week was again very calm in comparison to past weeks as it pertains to positive COVID cases. I am aware of one positive staff case this week at Highland Primary, which could result in 4 students in quarantine and 1 additional staff member in quarantine. The main office had their first known positive COVID case and one additional main office staff is being tested (not related to my knowledge). There were no anticipated quarantines due to either of these situations. I hesitate to even type the following words, but I am not aware of any cases at the middle or high school this week (Positive cases or quarantines). That is wonderful news!

We have seen an uptick in the number of staff staying home due to some symptoms, but I am not aware of any positive tests other than what was reported above. We know that the collision of COVID and flu season is going to create some issues moving forward. This brings me to my next topic, substitutes. I am so grateful for the response to my update a couple of weeks ago. We have signed up 13 additional substitutes. This will position the district to survive some additional absences down the road. We would love to have more substitutes come forward.

A little insight: we use a program called Aesop. When a staff member needs to be absent, they enter the absence into the program. Substitutes are able to look at what absences are available and choose if they want to fill the absence. If the absence is not filled, we have a person (Tammy) that makes personal phone calls until the absence is filled. If it cannot be filled, we move personnel around to cover

the most crucial areas. If we have an abundance of substitutes, the shifting of teachers, program assistants, and other staff would not be necessary. Every school district across the State is dealing with the same shortage issues right now. Thank you to those of you who stepped up and helped us out. We could use many more like you.

I noticed in reviewing my past updates that many kudos have been given to a number of groups, including staff, vendors, and parents. All of those are well earned, but perhaps it is time to give kudos to the group that is the reason we are even talking about this stuff. Our students are amazing! Yes, I have complimented them before, but come on. They wear their face coverings just like we ask of them. They are attempting to socially distance to the extent possible (sometimes it could be a little better). They use good hygiene and stay home when sick. But it doesn't stop there, they respect other students and staff. They know these are unprecedented times and the number of rule infractions are minimal compared to other normal years. I think it is a sign that they want to be in school. They know the social and educational benefits of being in school are crucial. Thank you to all of our students, you are the best!

I don't want to make this update unnecessarily long, but I have to say this. I am out in the public often and the most common thing said to me recently is "I love your weekly updates; I hope it continues even after COVID". No promises there, but my point is not many students comment to me about the weekly update. My son doesn't read it to my knowledge and probably doesn't care about any of this. So, I ask you to take the time to talk with your child and tell them how proud we are of them for following rules that allow us to be in school, putting their best foot forward, and continue to be respectful to those around them. Thank you all for another great week!

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent