

October 16, 2020

Highland CUSD 5 Parents and Staff,

It was another short week with four days of school. The seasons seem to be changing over the last few days with cooler temperatures and leaves starting fall. With the change in seasons comes additional challenges during this COVID era. Seasonal changes will likely drive increased indoor activities and seasonal allergies, both creating challenges for school districts.

The first challenge is to find creative ways to allow mask breaks for children and staff when weather does not cooperate. We will continue to look for ways to make this happen. The second challenge is making sure students and staff stay home when sick. Many of us have allergies that cause many of the same symptoms as COVID, which will make it difficult to determine when to stay home. At the risk of increased absences, I encourage you to take the cautious route. Please stay home if there is any doubt. We want to continue to provide opportunities for kids to attend in-person and it is imperative that we minimize the number of quarantine students through the next few months.

Our district experienced another relatively good week on the COVID numbers. I am very pleased to report that zero new positive cases were reported this week at Highland High School and Highland Middle School. Many times I focus on the middle and high school aged cases because it appears to be the age group most likely to transmit COVID through the extensive amount of activities in which they participate. We do know of a few students who have submitted to COVID testing due to symptoms that may align with COVID, but results have not been reported. I have been surprised about the number of students and staff who thought they probably had COVID, but then tested negative.

We were not so fortunate at Highland Primary this week. I am aware of two staff members who tested positive resulting in five additional students being quarantined. We also had one student test positive resulting in seven additional students and one staff member being quarantined. I am not aware of any positive cases reported in the other district schools. Just to clarify, there are several instances throughout the district where students and/or staff may be required to quarantine due to exposure from outside the school. I do not report on those instances so the number of students absent at any given time due to COVID may be higher than what is described in the weekly reports.

October 15 was the exclusion date for students who are not in compliance with the mandated immunizations and physicals. The process of identifying and communicating to those who are not in compliance consumes our school nurses at this particular time of the year. I want to thank them for their perseverance, especially at a time when COVID is occupying much of their time. I also want to thank the parents who are cooperative with them as they communicate the requirements. These are not district requirements; they are State requirements that must be enforced. Students who are not in compliance have been allowed to continue to access educational services remotely until the requirements are satisfied. This was a COVID amendment to the Illinois statute for this year only.

Due to the limitations on group meetings, our school board meetings have been live streamed to limit the number of in-person attendance, but provide opportunities for participation by the public. We will continue to do this until the limitations are removed for in-person attendance. The next board meeting

is October 26 at 6:00 p.m. I will be providing a link to the YouTube Live streaming a couple of days prior to the meeting.

That's it for this week's update. To continue to support us in providing in-person learning, remember: wear a face covering, social distance to the extent possible, wash hands frequently (good hygiene), and stay home when sick! Have a great weekend!

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent