

10/30/2020

Highland CUSD No. 5 Parents and Staff,

Good afternoon and Happy Halloween a day early. I feel like there are plenty of strange things going on this Halloween season. We have had a very difficult week and look forward to a nice weekend. It seems very strange to go into a weekend knowing that we return on Monday only to be out again on Tuesday. This is the first year ever (in my youthful memory anyway) that Election Day was identified as a state holiday. School districts did not have the option to waive Election Day as with many other state holidays.

That said, school will also be out on Wednesday, November 11 for Veteran's Day. We are usually in the middle of grand plans for our Veteran's Day Assemblies that absolutely blow me away time and time again. Due to COVID, many changes are in play for this year. However, I think we are going to do some fantastic things to honor our veterans this year in spite of the restrictions. Please watch for announcements regarding our student's and staff's attempts to bring honor to all of our service men and women.

One other reminder: Saturday night is the time change, please remember to set your clocks back one hour. I generally do not like to lose the hour of daylight at the end of the day, but this coming to school in darkness is getting very old. I also worry that fog and darkness can contribute to accidents on our morning commute with school buses and folks trying to get from Point A to Point B with low visibility. Next week we can look forward to some sun on our morning commutes.

Enough procrastination, I have some difficult numbers to report this week. In all, this was the most challenging week of the school year as it pertains to COVID. First, I apologize to parents who count on the Latchkey program each morning and afternoon at the Lindenthal campus. I was as surprised as you to receive the email last night that it would be closed until November 16th. This program is not district ran and it experienced many challenges this week with some COVID related issues. They determined through conversations with both district personnel and the MCHD that closing the program for two weeks was the prudent thing to do and we respect that. I wish we could provide additional notice to our parents when these types of things occur, but please understand that the COVID era guidelines and restrictions create very difficult situations for decision makers when faced with many types of pressures.

We also had a very difficult week with COVID numbers this week. Highland Elementary School reported 4 positive cases resulting in 57 quarantine students. All of the cases were a result of exposure outside of the school day. Highland Middle School also had their worst week so far this year. We had 2 positive cases confirmed (4 awaiting test results) and 34 quarantines (25 came from outside exposures and 9 from exposure to a positive at school). We also had 5 staff members in quarantine (zero positive cases) at Highland Middle School. Highland High School reported 7 positive cases this week, 3 were confirmed and 4 were presumed, as well as 57 quarantined students currently. I have had no other reports of positive cases this week.

Through conversations, we are aware that many kids continue to participate in many outside activities. We are not discouraging any of these activities, we only want it to be understood that exposure occurs many times outside of the school atmosphere. We remain vigilant and believe that we continue to practice safe mitigation strategies that allow in-person school and athletics to occur safely. It is

important to remain mindful of the mitigation strategies so that we can continue to provide these experiences to our students.

This week has been a reminder that our nurses, teachers and administrators continue to work on the front line. This doesn't only mean working directly with positive cases of COVID. They continue to communicate the necessary protocols expected by the IDPH and state agencies to parents and staff. This is not popular with many of our parents. Generally, our parents are doing a wonderful job supporting their efforts and understanding that these protocols are not our own creation or choice, it is the only option to get kids in school. Our entire school community continue to go over and beyond to exceed our expectations on a daily basis.

The month of November has only 16 student attendance days. I am hopeful the breaks will give us an opportunity to reset and see some relief from the number of positive cases in our community. I wish you all a wonderful weekend and a Happy Election Day on Tuesday. Don't forget to fulfill your civic duty and vote on Tuesday. See you all next week!

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent