

11/6/2020

Highland CUSD No. 5 Parents and staff,

I was planning to start this update with a sense of relief that the election activities were behind us. I suppose that is not a good place to start since it appears the process will be stringing out for some time. We do know that regardless of the outcome of the politics, COVID appears to be making its presence known as cases seem to be on the rise within the school district and community. We do not anticipate any changes in the protocols and mitigations in the near future.

Regardless of politics, we have to focus on keeping kids in school. We do this by making sure our mitigations are our focus and continue to follow our protocols. Look, I am tired of repeating it so I know you are likely tired to hearing it, but please remember the importance of face coverings, good hygiene (hand washing in particular), distancing, and perhaps most importantly stay home when symptoms are evident. Research is great, but it is easy to see through our experience and use of these mitigations that in-person school has not been a super spreader type activity.

We continue to shine when much of the world continues to cast a dark shadow on these times. We continue to see the brightness on our students faces every day when they come to school. I have tried to put some brightness in the beginning of my update because getting down to the numbers is not so bright. This was without a doubt the most difficult week of the year so far. We have struggled to cover classrooms due to the number of staff who are currently out with positive cases or quarantined due to contact. Most (not all) of these are results of exposure or close contact with situations outside of the school environment. This is not surprising since we are seeing large numbers of cases within the community as well.

Transmission appears to be much greater outside of the school environment than certainly is evident within the walls of our schools. Before I get into the numbers, I would once again like to appeal to any individuals who may be interested in being a substitute. As I included in previous communications, a person needs an Associate's Degree to obtain a short term license to sub. We can help anyone through the process if interested in discussing the qualifications or duties. If interested, please contact Dena Henricks at 654-2106 (Main Office).

Okay, now for the numbers. Highland Primary reported 8 positive cases since my last update (4 students and 4 teachers). These resulted in 39 students being asked to quarantine. Highland Elementary reported 6 positive cases (3 students/3staff) with 67 students asked to quarantine. Alhambra Primary reported 2 students in quarantine from exposures outside of the building. Grantfork Elementary reported 1 positive staff member and 4 student quarantines. Highland Middle School reported 5 student positive cases with 115 students and 3 staff being asked to quarantine. Highland High School reported 11 positive cases (7 students/4 staff) with 57 student quarantines and 3 additional staff quarantines.

It may take a couple readings of the paragraph above to realize that we are now covering nearly 20 classrooms with substitutes for COVID reasons. This does not account for any other absences for professional development, personal leave, medical appointments, etc. We are at a critical juncture in planning for the possibility of remote learning and to what extent. Currently, the plan would be to change Highland High School to remote short term (possible 2 weeks). If we were able to staff

classrooms in PreK-8, we would continue to offer in-person. The next step would be for Highland Middle School to go remote for a period of time. We prefer not to allow our PreK-5 environment to go remote until it is essential.

This is only planning at this time. We are not making a decision to do this until there are no alternatives. We hope to limp along until many of our staff and students can get back. However, please be aware of this possibility should a decision need to be made in a quick fashion. I know the large impact our decisions have on teacher's planning and families daily lives so I am attempting to prepare everyone for every possibility.

I am hopeful that some breaks in the month of November will assist us in getting some of our staff and students back in the classroom. If the number of cases continue to grow, I will likely increase the number of updates so that we can quickly communicate with parents and staff. Thank you all for your continued patience and support through these difficult times. Have a wonderful weekend and hope to provide a much more positive update next week!

Sincerely,

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent