



Office of the President

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August 26, 2020

To: Public Health Madison & Dane County

Cc: Dane County Board of Supervisors
Madison Common Council

Fr: President Tommy G. Thompson, University of Wisconsin System

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading 'Tommy G. Thompson'.

Re: UW System Campuses' Fall Preparations

The University of Wisconsin System was the first public organization in Wisconsin to suspend in-person operations last March in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Protecting our university communities, our lifeblood, is a key part of who we are.

As expected, and planned for, students are coming back to our campuses over the next two weeks. As part of our preparations, the UW System and UW-Madison have invested in and planned for robust testing protocols. These testing protocols go beyond addressing only symptomatic students to include the testing of asymptomatic students at residential halls.

With over 300,000 antigen tests scheduled for use this fall system-wide, and UW-Madison's plan to conduct over 80,000 PCR tests on its campus, the number of asymptomatic cases identified will increase significantly. This should be expected. Identifying potential carriers early is a key element of our strategy to mitigate risks to the overall UW and Dane County community.

Last week, we learned that Public Health Madison & Dane County continues to utilize thresholds established earlier this summer to make decisions on how or if K-12 schools can open for in-person instruction. We hope Dane County takes a more holistic view to reassess circumstances that should be used to best protect our communities. It is unrealistic to hold to a threshold of less than a few dozen cases per day on average over four weeks as we subject new populations at UW-Madison to thousands of tests.

For months, we have been preparing an environment at all of our campuses that mitigates risk for students and other members of the community. This includes communicating social distancing and hygiene guidelines, enhancing campus codes of conduct, requiring mask wearing, extensive cleaning, spatial renovations, and the purchase of millions of dollars of testing and personal protective equipment. All of these protective health measures greatly exceed what these same students would be provided in the absence of our risk-mitigation strategy.

Delivering an educational experience that students and parents expect will be different this year. We will continue to make accommodations on a case-by-case basis for personal health reasons and offer classes both online and in hybrid form to best protect students, faculty and staff as situations dictate. These decisions were meticulously deliberated and made over numerous months in consultation with national, state, and local public health guidelines.

We believe education is an essential service. Without it, students face different risks to their social and emotional well-being. It is why we have worked so hard to develop and implement our plans. Eliminating in-person classes does not eliminate the cumulative risk, especially given the testing protocols we are implementing.

Thank you for taking the time to review our correspondence. Should you have any questions or points of clarification regarding how Public Health Madison & Dane County may reassess threshold counts and contemplate the extensive testing planned in the coming weeks, please do not hesitate to contact us.