

UUP tells lawmakers SUNY reopening plans are inadequate

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The reopening plans being released by individual SUNY campuses for the fall semester do not go far enough to promote safety during the coronavirus pandemic, and United University Professions believes the state should mandate testing; contact tracing; and mask-wearing and social distancing in classrooms and common areas.

“At this moment, the health and safety of our students, our members and our communities are paramount,” Frederick E. Kowal, president of United University Professions, said during testimony before the state Senate and Assembly committees on higher education. “Unfortunately, SUNY’s plans do not go far enough to promote safety on campus. To safely reopen campuses, to spur the economy and return to our way of life, we need four basic systems in place: baseline and surveillance testing; contact tracing; mask-wearing and social distancing; and telecommuting to reduce campus density and enhance safety for all.”

UUP on June 2 released its own guidelines to safely reopen campuses, which go much farther than SUNY’s campus reopening plans. UUP’s guidelines call for face masks to be worn in classrooms and in common areas —not only when students come within six feet of other people. UUP urged SUNY to use the union’s guidelines as a basis for working together to develop a systemwide reopening plan that addresses UUP’s concerns.

To date, SUNY has not acknowledged the UUP guidelines, which Kowal submitted to lawmakers during his testimony. A copy of the UUP reopening plan can be downloaded at <https://uupinfo.org/resources/covid19/pdf/UUPReopeningPrinciples.pdf>

Many private colleges in New York have, in contrast to SUNY, developed rigorous plans for baseline and surveillance testing, and “have not resorted to excuses about testing being unnecessary, impossible or too expensive,” Kowal said. “The students and the academic and professional staff at our campuses should not be compelled to play roulette with possible exposure to asymptomatic spread on campuses, while private colleges recognize and proactively attempt to protect against the possibility.”

Kowal also told lawmakers that several SUNY campus administrations are flouting a telecommuting agreement with the state that UUP originally established in the spring, shortly after SUNY shut down its campuses and converted to remote learning. The telecommuting agreement, which allows UUP-represented faculty and staff to work and teach from home, is in place until Oct. 2. But some faculty and staff at several campuses have been told that they must report to work on campus unless they have a compelling health issue or a child care problem.

UUP represents 42,000 academic and professional faculty and retirees, with members at 29 New York state-operated campuses, including SUNY's public teaching hospitals and health sciences centers in Brooklyn, Buffalo, Long Island and Syracuse. It is an affiliate of NYSUT, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association and the AFL-CIO.

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