

Week of August 24

Trustees -

Given our present work underway to safely return our students to campus and resume in-person instruction tomorrow, I'll keep my focus for this weekend's brief message, as I did last week, on our safe return efforts. And I'd like to start with an expression of gratitude.

First, to the hundreds of UMS administrators, staff, and faculty who've worked for months to realize what our universities undertook over the last week -- the successful, but more importantly, the thus far safe return of our residential students to our COVID-changed universities to begin as normal a fall semester as can be possible in a pandemic.

Next, to the thousands of students and family members who displayed patience and goodwill with our Safe Return move-in and asymptomatic testing requirements as they returned. If we are to successfully and safely maintain in-person/on-campus instruction and activities through Thanksgiving, as we've planned and hope, it will be in no small measure because our entire UMS community maintained the discipline, patience, and communal concern for our university communities' welfare that was so evident among our returning students this past week.

I visited two of our student testing sites this week, Tuesday at UMaine with President Ferrini-Mundy and Wednesday at USM's Gorham campus with President Cummings. I want to thank too here our testing partners from ConvenientMD, who, along with university volunteers, staffed an orderly testing operation that kept students moving through the testing process without unreasonable delay. To be sure, students at Farmington experienced testing delays that we did not expect, so campus, System, and ConvenientMD staff met into the evening that day to address the resource and logistic challenges that contributed to the delay. We don't expect to experience such problems again as our testing continues.

My message last weekend previewed the scope of testing we were to undertake this week -- nearly 10,000 tests in all, almost certainly the largest concentration of asymptomatic testing occurring in Maine, if not all of New England, over the last 7 days. And we've done it in full public view. With news of unchecked virus spread on college campuses and quick transitions back to online learning in the various virus hotspots around the country, it is critically important that we maintain public credibility and confidence in what's happening on our campuses as students return. We're updating our [public dashboard of asymptomatic testing results](#) every 24 hours and, more importantly, providing [daily 1:00 p.m. media updates](#) of the status of all known COVID cases anywhere within the UMS community. So far, as much as science allows us to know it, our communities are safe.

In operation, what we achieved this week was near monumental. More than 5,800 of the asymptomatic tests taken over the last week have already been logged for processing with The Jackson Laboratory, which has reported 3,172 test results to us, with only one additional positive case reported thus far (at USM) and another 2,648 pending results. We continue to

receive results twice daily. Since we started testing in July, we've logged 7,267 tests; of the 4,573 for which we have confirmed results, we've had just two positive asymptomatic cases. It is the nature of these results that permits us to retain our confidence that we can safely begin the semester as planned.

As I said last weekend, *we want to find these cases*. Our ability to safely resume in-class instruction and on-campus operations depends on finding these cases, isolating them, quarantining their close contacts, and maintaining public credibility in our ability to safely manage our universities in the present COVID environment.

I'll return next weekend to reporting more broadly about the status of various initiatives, our FY21 budget picture, and related matters. But let me close this summary report with an appropriate note of cautionary realism. While we are eager to resume in-person academic operations and retain a sense of optimism based on testing results so far, I am fully cognizant of our ultimate responsibility to the public health of our universities and the communities they call home. Working in close and regular coordination with the Maine CDC, we will continue our in-person, on-campus operations only so long as it is safe to do so. If we must adjust course in the coming weeks, we will.

We have no greater responsibility to our students, staff, and faculty and the people of Maine.

Regards,  
Dan