

Week of January 18

Trustees -

I appreciate that the days leading up to a regular Board meeting are packed with reading the agenda materials. And much of what I would otherwise report here will be covered in tomorrow's meeting. Thus, I'll keep this morning's report brief, and to just one point.

You're aware, from my previous weekend emails, of our plan to increase COVID testing substantially -- to once weekly during the semester that starts tomorrow for every UMS student, faculty, and staff member who has on campus, in-person interaction with any other member of the UMS community, whether in a class, office, or research lab. The mobile testing laboratory that will make this possible is in place on the Orono campus, the staff who will operate it are in training, and lab and testing supplies are being procured and inventoried at all System campuses. We're as ready as we can be, under once-in-a-century circumstances, to start another semester of teaching and learning, research, and public service and engagement.

Our test-and-retest return-to-campus strategy to bring our out-of-state, residential, and other special populations of students back safely (which in our planning nomenclature is Phase 4 and 5 of our testing plan) is well underway. As of yesterday, we've gotten more than 4,400 test results back from the Phase 4 initial test round, with several thousand more results pending. Phase 5, the retest, starts tomorrow. So far with these rounds of testing, we're monitoring a manageable one percent positivity rate.

With UMaine President Joan Ferrini-Mundy, I toured the testing site at the University of Maine Friday morning, along with the ongoing preparations I mention above. What stands out to me most about our entire testing operations across every university in our vital System, and to the single point I'd like to leave you with here this morning, is that none of this would have been possible without the work, dedication, and resilience of our faculty, staff, and students.

I've used the term *herculean* before to describe their efforts, and it remains the appropriate description. You're familiar with some of the names of the leaders of the various planning and operations groups who've reported our progress to you in previous Board meetings, but there are so many more -- literally hundreds more around the System -- who deserve our recognition and thanks, and unfortunately too many to name simply here. Almost without exception, they all are juggling these testing and COVID-related duties on top of jobs that had full-time duties before the onset of the pandemic last spring. Add to that others who may not directly lead or manage testing or COVID operations, but who have had to fundamentally rethink how they carry out our academic operations through the realities of the pandemic, from enrollment managers and admissions staff who have to engage with potential and current students in new ways all the way to our world-class faculty, who've displayed flexibility and patience with the transition from in-class to remote teaching and learning and, now, the hybrid balance that has some students in class and others engaged from a distance.

Simply put, we could not be successful without the work and dedication of every single member of our university communities, and I invite you to join in my expressions of gratitude at every opportunity.

I'm looking forward to seeing you all and reporting more tomorrow in our Zoom meeting.

Regards,
Dan