



Tab 5 COVID-19 Update

Coordinating Board for Higher Education
September 16, 2020

BACKGROUND

COVID-19 began impacting American colleges and universities in late winter 2020. In March, institutions across the country moved students off campus and to all online instruction. The Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development (DHEWD) began convening college leaders for weekly online meetings on March 17 and have worked closely with institution leaders since that time.

Higher Education as a Resource

In the early stages of the state's response to COVID-19, colleges and universities served as a key resource. At the local level, institutions supported healthcare providers, food pantries, and other service providers. At the state level, DHEWD collected information about resources on campuses, ranging from physical space to serve as alternate care sites to 3-D printing of personal protective equipment. Staff at institutions with research and healthcare facilities have been integral in every element of the state's response.

Gathering Information about Needs

DHEWD surveyed institutions several times over the course of the spring and summer to identify campuses' most critical needs, including testing, personal protective equipment, equipment to improve ability to successfully deliver online education, professional development, and other areas. This information helped DHEWD formulate the list of topics on which the department engaged institutions over the summer and was used by Governor Parson's staff as they made decisions about CARES Act allocations.

Information-Sharing

DHEWD staff continued to bring higher education leaders together over the course of the summer to help them prepare to bring students, faculty, and staff back to campus safely for the fall semester. Bi-weekly meetings with presidents, chancellors, and leadership teams provided an opportunity to disseminate information, identify and answer frequently asked questions, and develop a sense of community. Weekly meetings with a broader group of staff from colleges and universities and local public health agencies (LPHAs) allowed department staff to provide information from experts, highlight the approaches different kinds of institutions are taking to shared challenges, take questions, and provide answers. Department staff also developed resource guides on key topics and provided them to institution staff.

CURRENT STATUS

Students, faculty, and staff are returning to campus in some capacity at every institution, although some have delayed start dates. Many students will take a combination of online and seated classes, with in-person instruction prioritized for the kinds of classes that can be taught most effectively in that format. Institution leaders are monitoring the number of positive cases on campus, in addition to other factors that are relevant to decision-making around moving to online instruction or implementation of other mitigation strategies. DHEWD staff have encouraged institutions to consider factors such as percent change in cases over a 7-14 day period in the county or on campus; percent change in hospitalization rates over a 7-14 day period in the county or on campus; cases per 100,000 in the county in which the campus is located; percent positivity of tests in city/county or campus; access to adequate testing to support contact tracing, including turnaround times of 72 hours or less, as reported by the LPHAs, hospital and ICU bed capacity; quarantine space availability; and absenteeism.

NEXT STEPS

DHEWD staff will continue to meet with higher education leaders and staff as long as the need exists. DHEWD staff are reviewing publicly available information about the number of cases on campus and staying in contact with institution leaders to provide assistance when possible. DHEWD staff are working with the Department of Health and Senior Services to explore options for additional testing as testing methodologies evolve.

RECOMMENDATION

This is an information item only.

NO ATTACHMENTS