

Draft Letter to the Editor: Version 1: Focuses on needed change to SUNY reopening plans

To the Editor:

My name is XXX and I am a member of United University Professions, the union that represents the faculty and staff at the State University of New York. As a UUP member, I am writing to alert the public to the concerns that our members have about the reopening plans for SUNY campuses.

The reopening plans for the fall semester, which SUNY campuses are individually devising and are now releasing, vary in detail but do have one thing in common: they do not go far enough to make our campuses safe for students, parents, faculty and staff when classes resume in the fall.

Generally, they do NOT meet the guidelines recommended by Dr. Howard Zucker, the New York state commissioner of health, for dealing safely with the coronavirus pandemic. We believe that unless SUNY adopts a uniform standard for reopening, students, faculty, staff and communities that host SUNY campuses would be at increased risk of coronavirus infection, and that campuses may once again have to shut down because of outbreaks of COVID-19.

My union believes that this scenario can be avoided, by following a few basic safety practices: testing, tracing, physical distancing, mandatory mask wearing in class and in public areas, and telecommuting whenever possible.

Campuses must have baseline and surveillance testing. They must have a way to trace the contacts of infected individuals. Private colleges in New York are preparing these plans. Why aren't SUNY campuses doing the same?

The same goes for physical distancing and mandatory mask wearing. Campus libraries must restrict their access to members of the campus community, and masks must be mandatory in classrooms. It amazes us that this one simple step, which is the most effective way to help stop the spread of the coronavirus in public settings, has not been adopted by SUNY.

United University Professions supports the reopening of the SUNY campuses. But we also know that this must be done in the safest way possible, to protect students and those who work with them. We have yet to see a reopening plan for a SUNY campus that will be done in the safest way possible.