



The State University
of New York

Office of the Chancellor

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May 5, 2020

Message from Chancellor Kristina Johnson

To the SUNY Community,

Throughout the unprecedented novel coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis, SUNY has responded as a system. Students, faculty and staff at each of our 64 individual campuses continue to contribute what they can and when they can, leveraging their own distinctive expertise.

I am writing to you now for two reasons. First, to thank you for your courage, grit and resiliency as we navigate these uncharted waters. Though there have been some bumps in the road with our near-universal shift of classes to distance learning, this never-before-attempted experience has been largely a success. That's thanks to you and your passion for higher education and carrying out the SUNY motto – to learn, to search and to serve.

And in addition to our students, faculty and staff moving to remote instruction within a fortnight, you used 3D printers to make face shields and sew masks, producing more than 55,000 personal protection equipment for New York State medical center staff. You are carrying out research on COVID-19 diagnostic tests, clinical trials of promising therapeutics, novel tracing technologies, and genome sequencing to further our understanding of the virus and accelerate a path towards solving this pandemic.

Our first responders and frontline health care workers from Upstate Medical University left the safety of their homes to volunteer downstate, where SUNY hospitals have cared for thousands of COVID-19 patients. SUNY campuses on Long Island are home to temporary field hospitals, and campuses all over the State are setting up regional drive-through testing sites.

And this past year we invested time and resources in building a system-wide, online platform- SUNY Online, which allows faculty from any SUNY campus to follow their students and oversee academic progress anywhere and at any time. This preparation paid off in an unexpected way.

All of this is part of what it means to be #SUNYTogether, with everyone pulling together toward the same ultimate goal to deliver absolute inclusivity - high quality education for all New Yorkers. And I thank you for your fighting spirit and support.

My second reason for writing is to be informative and transparent about what we are doing and how we are planning to resume face-to-face, on campus instruction, research and scholarship.

The infection curve thankfully is now flattening as a result of Governor Andrew Cuomo's "PAUSE" effort and the State is moving toward a phased-in re-opening of the economy.

This is a complicated undertaking with many moving parts, and it requires collaboration with a wide range of partners. We have established a SUNY COVID-19 Re-Imagine and Resume Residential Education Task Force (Task Force), with *seven* working groups focused on specific areas integral to a safe and successful resumption of residential education - from student wellness and academic operations to community engagement, campus resources, research and the science of re-opening, physical plant preparedness and community colleges.

Just as the State is working in concert with neighboring states on a regional re-opening approach, SUNY is working in consultation with its 64 campuses, the Governor's New York Forward Advisory Group (Advisory Group), New York's private colleges (CICU), CUNY, local and state elected officials, public health experts, and others. We are also reaching out to higher education leaders across the country to compare notes on best practices and determine the safest and most effective route forward.

We understand that resuming face-to-face instruction cannot occur in a vacuum; each of our campuses is a complex ecosystem with regular engagement with their respective surrounding communities. The Task Force is working collaboratively with the Governor Advisory Group, to develop plans and a checklist of criteria that must be met before on-campus learning resumes.

In addition to a checklist, and part of our resume strategy, SUNY is creating a risk wheel that will dynamically pull real-time data from a number of dashboards to help all of us manage operations during the transition back to face-to-face instruction and beyond.

Again, this is a complicated and fluid process that is changing by the day and informed by the input of a wide array of experts. We recognize that this situation has been both challenging and frustrating, and we thank the members of our SUNY community for being both resilient and patient as we work to determine the safest path forward.

Our main goal is to be able to fulfill our mission of providing high-quality education to all students with the broadest possible access, while prioritizing the health and wellness of the entire system. There are numerous challenges ahead, and we are assessing the changing landscape daily and responding to them as quickly as we can. We will continue to provide updates as they become available. Thank you again for your resiliency, courage and grit during this difficult time.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kristina M. Johnson'.

Kristina M. Johnson, PhD.
Chancellor