

June 17, 2021

TO: The Honorable Jay R. Inslee, Governor, Washington

FROM: Members of the Washington Higher Education Re-Opening Work Group

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SUBJECT: Shared Principles as Higher Education Institutions Reopen

The strategies our colleges and universities used to manage through the COVID-19 pandemic served our state well during a profoundly difficult year. This pandemic has revealed the immense impacts of access to postsecondary education, the profound consequences for those who cannot access it, and the pivotal role it plays in the health and welfare of our society.

With this joint statement, we share principles that are guiding our efforts to serve our students and communities through more fully open campuses. Whether through vaccination requirements for our students, faculty, administrators and staff or organically achieving vaccination rates at the 70% “herd immunity” target,¹ we now look ahead in anticipation of returning to in-person instruction and vibrant life on campus. We offer these commitments so that the Washington Department of Health does not have to reiterate guidance that is available from numerous other sources.

It is our sincerest hope and anticipation that the combined impact of these commitments will ensure the safety of our higher education communities and allow you to cancel Proclamation 20.12.2 effective June 30, 2021 to coincide with your previously announced statewide reopening plan. Further, we thank the state for supplying much needed testing supplies this past year, and request that the state continue to make these supplies available this coming academic year.

We acknowledge that a successful return to face-to-face instruction is of great societal consequence, and that responding to federal, state, and local directives and guidance will take different forms, as each campus is different – varying by size, geographic location, mission, mix of academic programs, and more.

With that in mind, we commit to the following:

- ▶ **Mitigate pandemic effects on low-income communities and communities of color** so that students—particularly in the high school Classes of 2020 and 2021 and for people who have lost their jobs—have specific and targeted transition support. We know these students are less likely to apply for financial aid, more likely to face technological barriers such as a lack of broadband access and equipment, and more likely to be food and housing insecure—and that they need a concerted plan of outreach.

1 [Inslee statement on reopening numbers, staying the course | Governor Jay Inslee \(wa.gov\)](#), June 15, 2021

- ▶ **Promote healthy development** through supports for all student populations, recognizing that a significant number of students are experiencing mental health challenges exacerbated by isolation, remote learning, and reduced opportunities for in-person interaction.
- ▶ **Enhance in-person opportunities** across the entire student experience including academic courses, labs and hands-on learning, student services and student life programs, recognizing that the ongoing pandemic has exacerbated inequities among students based on race, gender, geographic location, and socioeconomic background.
- ▶ **Partner with federal, state, and our local public health officials** to ensure we are guided by what keeps our communities safe, building on the prior work which has so effectively aided us to plan and implement health and safety protocols.
- ▶ **Use data-and science-driven decision-making** to make informed choices to reopen our campuses, account for increasing vaccination rates in the state, local areas, and within campus communities, and monitor and be mindful of healthcare capacity measures in terms of testing, case counts, and hospitalization rates.
- ▶ **Develop detailed operating plans** that meet the needs of each school's relevant community environments and that can flexibly adapt to changing circumstances.
- ▶ **Maintain operational and financial feasibility** to be able to flexibly act on plans as the situation evolves and improves.
- ▶ **Effectively deploy resources for students and the state** while delivering on the mission of higher education.

Thank you for your continued leadership and collaboration as we work to meet the needs of our students and state.