



July 2, 2020

The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
Chairman  
Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor and Pensions  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor and Pensions  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray,

On behalf of the American Council on Education and the undersigned higher education associations, I am writing in response to questions that arose at your recent hearing regarding the costs involved in safely reopening college campuses this fall.

Colleges and universities were among the first segments of our society to close in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are keenly aware of the unique symbolic, economic, and educational value of opening our campuses. As Chairman Alexander recently said, the “surest step back toward normalcy in our country is when 70-75 million college and high school and elementary school students go back to school.” Our institutions are committed to reopening in the fall and have previously submitted a request to Congress to help offset the financial challenges that students and colleges are facing. Bolstered by assistance from Congress, we will work to provide a quality education as safely and as expansively as possible.

Doing this will not be easy for institutions. As you know, colleges and universities face a complicated, constantly-shifting environment as they plan for the fall semester. Presidents and their staff are making decisions based on factors such as state and local requirements, local health conditions, and the unique circumstances of their students and campuses. Irrespective of the manner of instruction for the fall, all institutions are implementing measures to reopen physically when it is safe to do so.

In order to provide your committee with a better understanding of the scope of this challenge, we requested that our member institutions share their anticipated reopening costs. Dozens of institutions, collectively enrolling over 1.1 million students and including two-year and four-year; public and private; religious and secular; and rural, suburban, and urban locations responded. After analyzing that data, we estimate that colleges and universities will spend approximately \$74 billion to prepare for the fall semester.

The detailed financial information institutions provided covered eight categories of costs specific only to reopening safely in this environment. It did not include items that will

undoubtedly have significant impacts on institutions, such as declining state support, loss of charitable donations, enrollment declines, and financial need for students given the difficult financial environment. As a result, these estimates are conservative in nature and likely underestimate the actual financial challenge facing campuses.

Chairman Alexander recently noted that “when we go back to college...the country will begin to move back toward normalcy.” Colleges are similarly anxious to reopen for “normal” operations for the fall semester, and some schools have already announced plans to do so. But these openings will be unlike any others in the history of American higher education. All institutions will be adjusting to a new normal as a result of public health concerns necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes will force campuses to spend money to alter and modify virtually every aspect of campus operations. In general, these expenses will fall into a few broad areas such as testing, tracing, cleaning, personal protection, and distancing. But even those categories fail to do justice the huge array of steps that schools are taking to make the educational experience as safe as possible. After consultation with our member institutions, we have compiled a list of at least 70 separately identifiable actions that schools are taking, which is appended to this letter.

Given the vast array of colleges in our country and the diversity of their campuses, it is understandable that each school’s circumstances are unique. Some institutions are so massive in size and physical plants that their individual costs can run into the tens of millions of dollars. Indeed, Mitch Daniels, president of Purdue University, recently testified before your committee that Purdue had purchased over a mile of plexiglass and estimated reopening costs would exceed \$50 million. These costs are no less onerous for smaller schools which, while responsible for fewer students, staff, and facilities, may not be able to leverage resources like larger institutions such as comprehensive medical centers can that could make testing and quarantining more affordable and accessible, as just one example of how these costs vary across institutions.

While residential institutions often face higher costs because they must prepare for students living on campus full-time, even institutions that adopt an online or hybrid approach will face significant additional expenditures. Schools expanding their online programs report significant new expenditures to upgrade campus IT systems; distribute laptops so that all students have sufficient access to courses; provide tutoring and health services remotely; convert library materials into online formats; retrofit classrooms for virtual instruction; and buy additional video equipment for live streaming. Other new expenses are far less obvious. For example, some schools have reported purchasing anatomage tables for their science programs, which allow students to engage in virtual dissections without a cadaver. These tables cost \$100,000 each.

No less important than the problems institutions are grappling with, it is critical to note that without adequate financial aid, many students will not be able to return to campus in the fall regardless of measures taken by institutions or the federal government.

More than 40 million Americans have lost jobs, and many of their families must soon decide whether they can afford to start or return to college in the fall. A recent National

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Bureau of Economic Research study found that “(w)orking students suffered a 31% decrease in their wages and a 37% drop in weekly hours worked, on average. Moreover, roughly 40% of students lost a job, internship, or a job offer, and 61% reported to have a family member that experienced a reduction in income.” The study also found that “lower-income students are 55% more likely to delay graduation due to COVID-19.” A substantial amount of research has documented that low-income and first-generation students are the most likely to interrupt their educations during a severe economic downturn. For too many of these students, it is the end of their hopes and dreams for a postsecondary education.

Ensuring the safety of all members of our campus communities while reopening will be extraordinarily difficult. While presidents, faculty, and staff are committed to meeting the serious and unprecedented challenges before them, we know that those efforts will necessarily be limited by the dire financial circumstances’ schools are operating under. We hope this information will help inform your deliberations.

Thank you for your continued support of American higher education, and we look forward to working with you and your colleagues to help colleges and universities recover from this pandemic.

Sincerely,



Ted Mitchell  
President

On behalf of:

Achieving the Dream  
ACPA-College Student Educators International  
American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers  
American Association of Community Colleges  
American Association of State Colleges and Universities  
American Association of the Colleges of Nursing  
American College Health Association  
American Council on Education  
American Dental Education Association  
American Indian Higher Education Consortium  
APPA, Leadership in Educational Facilities  
Association of American Colleges and Universities  
Association of American Universities  
Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities

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Association of Community College Trustees  
Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges  
Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities  
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities  
Association of Research Libraries  
College and University Professional Association for Human Resources  
Common App  
Council for Advancement and Support of Education  
Council for Christian Colleges & Universities  
Council for Higher Education Accreditation  
Council of Graduate Schools  
Council of Independent Colleges  
EDUCAUSE  
NAFSA: Association of International Educators  
NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education  
National Association for College Admission Counseling  
National Association of College and University Business Officers  
National Association of College Stores  
National Association of Colleges and Employers  
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities  
National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators  
National Association of System Heads  
Phi Beta Kappa Society  
State Higher Education Executive Officers Association  
UPCEA

## **Examples of Costs Incurred by Institutions**

### **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

- Disposable masks (for guests)
- Washable cloth masks (for students and employees)
- Disposable gloves (medical and other staff; cleaning and lab use)
- Safety glasses (science classes)
- Face shields (for music students and instructors, studio students and instructors, some nursing labs)
- Gowns and coveralls
- Laundry charges to clean cloth masks
- Non-contact thermometers
- Keychain and lever tools

### **Cleaning and Sanitation Supply Costs**

- Hand sanitizer, sanitation stations, and dispensing equipment
- Disinfectant wipes
- Gel soap and sanitizers
- Disinfectant spray and misters
- Disinfectant cleaning supplies
- Microfiber towels, paper towels, and other absorbents
- Residential clean kits with wipes, spray sanitizer, and gel hand sanitizers
- Sanitation tools

### **Testing Costs**

- COVID-19 testing kits (both self-administered saliva and administered swab tests)
- Antibody tests
- Temperature check stations
- Forehead scanners
- Rapid volume scanners
- Symptomatic response testing for suspected COVID-19 cases

### **Contact Tracing Costs**

- Software for COVID-19 symptom tracking and alert platforms
- Software for mobile apps
- Additional camera installation
- Keycard access points and other protocols to be utilized in contact tracing plans

### **Quarantine Protocol Costs**

- Costs of housing for quarantined students, faculty, and staff
- Essentials for displaced students
- Housing for international students

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- Thermometers, disposable food containers, and other materials
- Increased shipping and delivery costs for course materials, supplies and technology to students in dorms and off-campus
- Vehicles, drivers, and cleaning costs for transportation to quarantine sites

**Technology Costs**

- Distribution of laptops or other devices
- Touchless appliances and surfaces
- Bandwidth and connectivity stabilization
- Increased cyber security support
- Retrofitting classrooms for virtual instruction
- Webcams and microphone systems
- Additional virtual meeting platform licenses and additional virtual classrooms
- Remote support for students, faculty, and staff
- Video equipment for lecture capture and live streaming of events
- Academic equipment rentals
- Exam proctoring software
- e-tutoring services
- Library materials purchased for online format
- Additional data cabling and electric wiring

**New Labor Costs**

- Sanitation labor and dining overtime labor charges
- Enhanced custodial costs, including additional housekeepers
- Additional faculty
- Temperature takers
- Staff and training to perform safety and health checks
- Consultant and legal support
- Staff time to prepare documentation and consent forms for students to return to campus; addendums to housing contracts; addendums to Student Codes of Conduct; and updates of HR policies

**HVAC and Air Filtration Improvement Costs**

- HVAC labor and materials
- Filters and air handling equipment
- Air filtration stand-alone systems

**Social-distancing Protocol Costs**

- Sneeze guard materials and labor
- Plexiglass barriers, partitions, and stanchions
- Dining hall reconfiguration
- Residence hall reconfiguration, including retrofitting houses, clubs, and residence halls for single occupancy
- Renovations to common areas (including bathrooms) to accommodate social distancing

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- Classroom reconfiguration
- Recreation and athletic reconfiguration
- Reconfiguring entrances and exits, including adding touchless doors
- Materials and furniture moving and storage costs
- Mobile desks for social distancing
- Additional card access to buildings
- New campus signage for mask reminders, COVID-19 symptoms, elevator capacity, temperature screening notice and instructions, etc.
- Increase in number of vehicles and drivers to insure social distancing
- Mobile flu and health clinic services