

Report of 08/27/2020 State Board of Higher Education Meeting

by Retha Mattern, North Dakota State Board of Higher Education Staff Advisor

The SBHE met late this afternoon with the primary purpose of sharing an update on the NDUS Smart Start task force and also provide us with the opportunity to ask Dr. Wynne questions regarding COVID and the NDUS.

I wanted to share a few highlights from the meeting, which lasted slightly longer than one hour.

Dr. Wynne shared some overall information about COVID in North Dakota, including that overall, 1.4% of the state's population has been documented to have been infected. The actual rate of infection may be up to ten times higher. The mortality rate in North Dakota has been about 1.3%, mainly among the elderly population and those with underlying health conditions. He compared this to a bad season of influenza which he stated would have a mortality rate around 0.1%. Dr. Wynne shared that those in the traditional college age group are most likely to be asymptomatic and are effective in transmitting the virus to faculty, staff, and the community, and shared that while one student infecting another student may not be a high risk situation, it would post a substantial risk to the community.

Dr. Wynne shared that testing among the campus populations is not where they had hoped it would be but that it is improving. Positivity test results among the student population who have been tested has been higher than the positivity rate in the general population, at 8% compared to 5%. Extrapolated to the ND college student population, this would lead to an estimated 2,000 students who have COVID, many of them not knowing it yet, but are capable of spreading it to the community. When questioned regarding participation in test events within the system, he shared that 29,000 tests were available to colleges and about 14,000 tests were completed by faculty, staff and students, leading to a test utilization rate of 45%. Among students, the participation rate was about 14%, with UND reporting the highest student participation rate of about 30%.

There are testing events planned throughout September and Dr. Wynne says the message is "test, test, test." Student leaders including SBHE member and student representative Erica Solberg have been instrumental in promoting testing participation to students.

Other topics discussed included reporting dashboards, challenges of congregate living and learning settings, testing turnaround time, and hotspots in the state.