

Cross to seek funding for campuses for COVID-19 testing, PPE

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UW System President Ray Cross told regents he will be petitioning Gov. Tony Evers today for additional emergency funding to cover COVID-19 tests and personal protective equipment.

During an emergency board meeting yesterday, Cross warned the system could see additional costs upwards of \$50 million if it had to purchase the necessary supplies for the fall semester on its own.

“We’re working hard to find ways to reduce this cost,” he said. “We don’t know exactly what this cost will be, but if we have to absorb everything it’ll be in excess of \$50 million.”

Cross added the system is in talks with university chancellors, local counties and the Department of Administration to find ways it can save costs and still gain the necessary equipment for the fall semester.

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The system’s latest fiscal estimate suggests it could see a more than \$100 million net loss through the summer months alone, even after accounting for cost-savings measures and federal aid.

Cross and Administrative Vice President Rob Cramer both broke down elements of the system’s fall semester safety guidelines.

Each campus chancellor ultimately decides what the semester will look like for their students, but the System provided a framework for campuses to follow. Regent Scott Beightol applauded system administrators “for having the guts to present a skeleton plan” while COVID-19 studies are ongoing.

While regents largely agreed with Beightol's sentiment, some, including Regent Olivia Woodmansee, who attends UW-La Crosse, pressed Cross, chancellors and administrators to consider requiring students and staff to wear masks as a safety precaution during the fall semester.

Some campuses, such as Eau Claire and Whitewater, require masks while indoors, but others are relying on recommendations and "peer pressure."

"I know my peers and I know that they won't wear masks, a lot of them won't, without it being a requirement even if I believe there are some of those peer pressure points," Woodmansee said. "I agree that recommendations are important, but I think masks is something that is truly needed."

Woodmansee said the patchwork of mask rules could be confusing for parents with multiple children attending different schools where the mask requirements may not all be the same.

Ahead of the fall semester discussion, regents met in closed session to "consider employment, promotion, compensation and performance evaluation data and personal histories of candidates for the position of interim UW System President."

But regents have yet to reveal details on what they discussed.

Cross said last October he would retire once the system named a successor, but he's already stayed in the role more than seven months since his announcement.

See the system's fall plan:

<https://www.wispolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/200614RECOMMENDATIONS.pdf>