

Tulane plans to launch COVID-19 testing program for teachers to help public schools reopen

September 01, 2020 3:00 PM Keith Brannon

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Tulane University's plan to develop an ongoing screening program for asymptomatic teachers and staff at 78 public schools throughout New Orleans is designed to detect cases that may be hidden as a significant proportion of people infected with COVID-19 have no symptoms.

Tulane University is planning to launch a new COVID-19 testing program to help the city's public schools reopen for in-person learning this fall.

Tulane University School of Medicine is working to develop an asymptomatic testing program for NOLA Public Schools (NOLA-PS) to screen teachers and school-based staff on an ongoing basis, beginning in September. Tulane will donate the first 6,000 tests to get the program started.

“Tulane University is committed to delivering proactive, asymptomatic testing to our community,” said Tulane President Michael Fitts. “The reopening of our schools is essential for students and the community, and we are committed to helping make classrooms as safe as possible – for teachers and students. Screening these populations, in addition to our Tulane community, helps to make NOLA safer for everyone.”

“We at NOLA-PS thank Tulane University for their partnership and tremendous gift in support of providing robust COVID-19 testing to teachers and staff across all NOLA Public Schools,” said NOLA-PS Superintendent of Schools Dr. Henderson Lewis, Jr. “During these tough times it is wonderful that our community partners, like Tulane, are stepping in to support our schools and help ensure the safety and well-being of our students and staff.”

The School of Medicine established a COVID-19 testing facility downtown in March when the city confronted a critical shortfall in testing capacity as the coronavirus spread throughout New Orleans. The facility, which was expanded to include an adjoining lab, offers the PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test.

The Orleans Public School Board is planning a multi-layered COVID-19 testing plan. LCMC Health’s Children’s Hospital New Orleans and Ochsner Hospital for Children will provide COVID-19 testing for students and staff experiencing symptoms.

Tulane’s plan to develop an ongoing, routine screening program for asymptomatic teachers and staff at 78 public schools throughout the city is designed to detect cases that may be hidden as a significant proportion of people infected with COVID-19 have no symptoms.

“If we can detect cases early by testing — isolate them, identify their close contacts and quarantine them — we will decrease the overall infection rate in the community, and the epidemic will be controlled,” said Dr. Lee Hamm, School of Medicine dean and senior vice president.

Orleans schools will begin a phased return to in-person learning, beginning with Pre-K through 4th grade students starting Sept. 14th through Sept. 25th. The [Roadmap to Reopening](#) plan calls for middle and high school students in grades 5th through 12th to continue distance learning until at least mid-October. At that time, if health data trends remain positive, these students will return on a hybrid model of in-person and distance learning.

The district is also offering students the option to take classes online.

The decision for a measured return to in-person learning was made following weeks of carefully tracking the latest health indicators – including a sustained decrease in the daily number of new COVID-19 cases at or below Phase 2 targets, a positive test rate of 5 percent or below and increased testing capacity.

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President Michael Fitts