

# SUNY Cortland continues pause on in-person instruction following continued outbreak

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Democratic Party officials and the State University of New York (SUNY) have decided to continue the initial two-week pause on in-person learning after a sharp rise in the number of COVID-19 cases at the SUNY campus in Cortland, New York.

SUNY Cortland had recorded 166 new cases of COVID-19 between October 10 and October 18. The university was already in a temporary two-week pause on in-person instruction since October 7, after more than 100 students contracted the virus in a two-week period.

The University has now recorded 521 cases in total since the semester began. Cases continue to rise at the campus at an alarming rate. Forty-seven were reported over this past weekend alone.

There are currently 114 active cases on the campus. There is no doubt that if the re-opening plans are allowed to be carried through, more students will become infected. This reality is underscored by the fact that the two-week pause in in-person instruction could not stop the spread of the virus on the campus.

Despite the clear and present danger to students and staff, Cortland President Erik Bitterbaum tried claiming that there was no need to keep the school closed for another two-weeks. This perspective flew in the face of state regulations requiring that any SUNY school that reaches 100 cases in a two-week period must switch to online instruction for 14-days.

Bitterbaum stated: “there is no automatic consequence simply for hitting that benchmark [100 cases in 14 days].” Even with more than enough cases to force any other school to close, he stated that “it does not mean a new two-week period will drop into place when this one runs its course on Wednesday, October 21.”

However, the severity of the recent rise in cases

forced the SUNY system to change course.

Especially concerning is the rise in cases in the local community since the semester began. Cortland County has recorded 642 cases over the course of the pandemic. Of these, 543 have come since September 8, one week after classes began.

Lisa Perfetti, the public health director of Cortland County, noted the spread of the virus within local communities and urged residents not to lay the blame on students. “A significant number of the recent cases in the community are SUNY Cortland students, but we are also seeing a significant number of non-student cases as well,” said Perfetti, according to WXHC news. “Faith-based services, school settings, family birthday parties and small gatherings where social distancing and mask-wearing is not adhered to are identified sources of recent spread in the Central New York area, including our county.”

The unbridled spread of COVID-19 in this community as well as others is certainly not the fault of a relatively small number of students who may have not been as careful as possible on campus. Rather the public health disaster unfolding throughout the SUNY system is the direct consequence of the reckless policy of reopening schools prematurely, at the behest of the American ruling class, Democrat and Republican alike.

New York state has seen a massive increase in COVID-19 cases since the beginning of September. Daily new infections have grown from around 750 a day to now between 1,000 and 1,500 new daily cases. Several days reached nearly 1,900 new cases, surpassing the highs that were reached in June.

The state and in particular, New York City, was the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring, with nearly 33,000 deaths.

Much of the resurgence of infections has been driven

by Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo's decision to open primary and secondary schools in September, along with the large State University of New York (SUNY) system, which serves 1.4 million students.

What has set Cortland apart from other schools that have been forced to pause in-person instruction is that school administrators have not been able to trace the outbreak to student gatherings.

This, however, has not stopped university offices from victimizing the students a second time—on top of the COVID-19 infections. On October 10, the *Cortland Standard* reported that SUNY Cortland had disciplined 255 students for guideline violations. The school is now considering even harsher and stricter punishments for guideline violations.

Of course, there will be no disciplinary action against Bitterbaum or SUNY Chancellor Jim Malatras for placing students in a situation where hundreds of students have been exposed and thousands could be infected. Their actions are in line with the policy of “herd immunity” that has been openly embraced by President Trump and enforced by Democratic Governor Cuomo.

Cortland and SUNY are putting students and the local communities at risk. Students, faculty, staff and community members must form Rank-and-File Safety Committees to organize resistance to these dangerous policies and demand adequate protection from the virus, as well as adequate resources for all people affected by it.

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