

Pittsburg State University
Legislative Testimony
House Appropriations Committee
March 11, 2021

1. Thank you for this opportunity to tell you about the journey we have been on for the past 12 months. Let's remember...all of this happened as we faced a global pandemic more deadly than anything the world had seen in 100 years.
 - a. In fact, it was exactly one year ago Saturday March 13, President Trump declared a national emergency.
 - b. Exactly one year ago tomorrow, we stood up our COVID-19 website and formally began the journey; as we did so, we defined three main goals:
 - i. Take care of the health and well-being of our employees.
 - ii. Communicate our decisions and the rationale behind them.
 - iii. Ensure our students continue to make progress in their programs.
 - c. I'm pleased to represent the nearly 800 employees at Pitt State and the 6,000 students how have navigated this year, and I believe we have done so with grace and perseverance, and most importantly, with measurable outcomes.
2. 'Believe' is a word that can be challenged and have many different perspectives. But the facts I'd like to share with you are in essence indisputable and tell a story of success not failure...of leaning into the most significant health emergency of the past 100 years...not being cowered by it. We said from early on that we would learn to 'live with the virus.'
3. We all read in the paper and online about schools needing to open and businesses needing to be allowed to operate, employing their staff and seeking to make a profit.

4. Well, in southeast Kansas, we have done just that. Here are some numbers behind that statement:
- a. When we moved to remote learning one year ago from this very moment, we refunded \$x.x in unused student housing; refunded \$2.7M to students who were financially harmed by the conversion; and received xxx appeals for additional refunds that we eventually paid out to the tune of \$x.x.
 - b. As we began the fall and spring semesters, we denoted the delivery format for every course in the course schedule; hence, the students knew exactly the model that would be used. In both the fall and spring semesters, 57% of our courses were delivered in person. KTC labs practically demand this. We did not shorten the semester!
 - c. So how have we done?
 - i. We graduated 549 students at the end of the fall semester and will graduate more than 1,000 students this spring. Oh yeah...and we'll do so in in-person ceremonies.
 - ii. We have reviewed retention data and we have seen no difference; in other words, how many Fall 2020 students return for Spring 2021 classes – that number stayed at approximately 90% which is typical.
 - iii. We have reviewed GPAs to see if there is a difference; consider this...for students who were at Pitt State in the Fall of 19 and Fall of 20, their average GPA went from 3.16 to 3.20.
 - iv. We have reviewed pass rates for programs that lead to licensing and we see no difference.
 - 1. Consider nursing – 95% pass rate well above the national average.
 - 2. Teacher education licensing exams – no difference
 - 3. CPA exams – no difference
 - 4. Clinical psychology exams – no difference
 - v. Conclusion: None of this sounds like a loss of learning or a slowed pace toward graduation.
 - vi. Career services – Interest in our graduates remains unchanged, for example, Teacher Interview Day this year was held virtually, and we had 94 school districts participating,

compared with 98 last year. Internship placements are running on track to meet last year as are placement rates of graduates; Employers are not seeing our graduates as tainted or less prepared.

vii. How about sports? They are very important in a Division II community. Consider:

1. We played football...only 11 institutions did so in Division II out of 160+ schools that play football.
2. Our athletics conference of 14 men's and 14 women's basketball teams, played over 616 games and completed a post season championship. Multiple testing (4,500 administered) revealed less than a 1% infection rate.

d. It's well known that our institutions care not just about what happens within the confines of the university footprint, but we care deeply about our communities and regions that surround us. Our decisions always reflect that commitment.

i. USD#250...Pittsburg Community Schools and the other districts in the county offer an exemplary model of how to deal with a pandemic. Just 16% of USD#250 students used remote learning over the fall and spring semesters. They started on time as we did and have missed more classes due to weather than to the virus. Just as we did, the district was committed to maximizing in-person instruction.

e. Community of Pittsburg and Crawford County

i. In April of 2020, the Crawford County Recovery Task Force was created to lead the business community through the pandemic and out of it. We co-chair that group, and I'd say it has been wildly successful. Consider:

1. The unemployment rate for Crawford County is 3.5%
2. Sales tax collections for November and December of 2020 were 10% and 12% above 2019 levels.
3. 6 new restaurants opened in downtown in the fall of 2019 ... they have all survived

4. Our small business development center has helped over 100 businesses, helping 661 individuals in employed.

5. Summary

- a. Given all of this, we were surprised and disappointed with the Governor's recommendation to reduce our allocation by 5.5% or 2M and I am concerned that this committee has embraced that recommendation.
- b. And even more painful was the Governor's decision to sweep funds we were carrying forward and now need to match a \$1.6M federal grant facilitated by Senator Jerry Moran. Cite Rep. Proehl and Chair Waymaster conversation about this issue. Chair Humpreys is correct...I did not address this during my testimony. However, we did appeal it to the Governor.
- c. The sense on campus of navigating this historic era is now followed by painful impacts on our budgets.
- d. I'd ask your consideration for expressing support for our campuses and a recognition for what we have accomplished.

6. Thank you, Mr. Chair...I'll be glad to stand for questions.