

In our words

# Many questions and few complete answers for our educational institutions [editorial]

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Millersville University campus.  
ALEX GELI | STAFF

## THE ISSUE

**Educational institutions are planning for how they hope to handle classes this fall. The Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, which includes Millersville University among its 14 schools, will have “in-person instruction in the fall, but with plenty of asterisks,” [LNP | LancasterOnline’s Alex Geli reported June 11](#). Geli also reported recently that HACC, which serves about 19,000 students and has a campus in Lancaster, [will extend online instruction through the fall semester](#) and keep its campuses closed through Dec. 31. Pennsylvania public school officials, meanwhile, told state lawmakers last week “that they could use additional guidance and funding if they resume in-person instruction in the fall,” [Geli reported](#).**

The COVID-19 pandemic has humbled us. It has forced us to accept that there are more questions than answers about how the everyday rhythms of life we once took for granted might look two, six or 12 months from now.

Who could have fathomed, for example, that [the Fulton Theatre](#) won’t have productions until the spring of 2021 at the earliest? Or that there will be no Atlantic League season [for the Lancaster Barnstormers](#) this summer?

It remains so unsettling.

Educational institutions sit firmly in the center of this uncertainty. They are being forced to assess everything they do as they continue their mission to teach children and young adults. We don’t envy their vital task.

In normal times, many would be opening campuses and welcoming students for a new academic year in less than two months. These are not normal times. And thus administrators and school boards are attempting a mixture of ideas and approaches. Half-measures, perhaps. But we believe half-measures are a good thing to try in this murky moment.

We should note, though, that none of these approaches is likely to be sufficient without stronger government guidance and assistance.

The approach that the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education has approved seems promising — for now. [As Geli reported](#), it calls for “mask-wearing, social distancing, modified schedules, single-occupancy dorms and grab-and-go dining.”

Following the announcement of these guidelines for the state system, Millersville University President Daniel Wubah [said the school will reopen in the fall](#) with the hybrid approach. Students will not, however, return to campus after Thanksgiving break; the semester will conclude with remote learning. The idea is that students shouldn’t return to campus for just a couple weeks after going home for the holiday and spending time with a different circle of friends and family. That seems prudent.

Wubah additionally indicated that modifications to the Millersville campus would wisely include reducing student and employee density. But we believe students who are on campuses this fall must do their part, too. Big crowds and parties — a traditional part of the campus scene — must be tamped down to help avoid outbreaks of the virus that could spread into more vulnerable populations.

HACC, meanwhile, is [opting for online instruction](#) through the end of the year, “with the exception of hands-on or experiential components of approved programs,” Geli reported.

HACC President John Sygielski stated that he believes this is in the best interest of protecting student and employee health. “One lesson I have taken from this experience is that our College can innovate at a rapid pace,” he wrote. “I believe that we have taken on this challenge with a positive spirit and will make improvements that will extend beyond the pandemic.”

That may be true, but we do find it regrettable that these community college students — some of whom had fewer postsecondary education options and/or are in more vulnerable situations than other college students — now face the full loss of the traditional classroom setting.

We appreciate, though, that the HACC Foundation has eliminated the past-due balances of more 500 students so that they can continue their education, and that the foundation is offering thousands of dollars in “tuition giveaways” to those who enroll for the fall semester, [according to a news release](#). That generosity is especially commendable from a community college that was facing its own financial struggles even before the pandemic.

