

August 21, 2020

Dear Students,

Last night I was contacted by several neighbors in town letting me know they had witnessed a gathering of students off campus in or near houses on Hall Avenue here in Henniker. The students were described as not socially distanced, not wearing masks, and gathering in large groups. These individuals were confirmed as NEC students by college staff who were in the area. There have been other isolated reports about students in residence halls other than their own and one report of athletes informally gathering and practicing off campus.

I cannot express how incredibly frustrating and disappointing it has been to get these reports. What these few students have done in pursuit of 'fun' is to put at risk our goal of having a face-to-face learning opportunity for all of our students. They have put all of us who wanted to teach, live, learn, and work on the campus of New England College at greater risk. All of the amazing activities, classes, gatherings, and events we have planned were jeopardized so a few, selfish, individuals could get together and have a little fun. This behavior is wrong. It is reckless. It is unnecessary. And, it is dumb.

That these actions took place within hours of their arrival is equally disappointing. Let me be clear. There is no chance these students did not know and understand that it was wrong to gather in large groups, standing and sitting in close proximity, all without a mask. They chose to ignore what they knew to be the right thing to do. To gather in smaller groups. To wear masks. To socially distance.

A full investigation of these incidents is underway. Any student found to have been violating the Pilgrim's Promise is subject to dismissal from the residential campus without refund. Sadly, I fear some of you who engaged in this behavior will be sent home before classes have had a chance to begin.

Now, I know many of you have been following the guidelines we set out before you returned to campus. You paid attention to the messages, Zoom sessions, webpages, social media posts, and the requests of the many faculty, staff, and students who helped you move and check in to campus over the last week. Thank you. Your support for and commitment to the Pilgrim's Promise gives us a chance to have a full semester and a full year living, learning, teaching, creating, competing, and performing on our campus.

Folks, we have one shot to get this right. If we allow recklessness to take place, community spread will happen. We will expose our community to COVID-19. There will be positive cases. We will get sick. And we will infect others. We have one shot. Watch the news. Listen to the voices out there who are saying you will fail. I believe we can prove them wrong. I believe we can defy expectations and show others how it's done. It is up to you.

Sincerely,

Dr. Wayne F. Lesperance, Jr.  
Vice President of Academic Affairs  
New England College