

School Reentry Task Force

Recommendations to

the New Mexico Public Education Department

June 2020

Introduction

The School Reentry Task Force was an advisory group made up of 32 diverse and inclusive stakeholders from across New Mexico. Task Force members met weekly from May 20, 2020 to June 10, 2020 to **advise the New Mexico Public Education Department, NMPED, on guidelines and protocols for students and staff to safely reenter school buildings** during the 2020-2021 school year. Members included:

Valentin Anaya, Parent, Socorro Public Schools
Patricia Beecher, Superintendent, NM School for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Olivia Calabaza, President, NM School Boards Association
Kathy Chavez, Executive Vice President, American Federation of Teachers of New Mexico
Victoria Chavez, Parent, Albuquerque Public Schools
Michele Coleman, Founder, Attachment Healing Center
Tami Coleman, Chief Financial Officer, Albuquerque Public Schools
Lisa Crawford, President, New Mexico School Nurses Association
Farra Fong, Program Supervisor, Office of Youth Homelessness, Children Youth and Families Department
Pattie Gipson, Chair, Public Education Commission
Joe Guillen, Executive Director, NM School Boards Association
Jamie Iglesias, Parent, Deming Public Schools
Patricia Jimenez-Latham, Project Manager, Transform Education New Mexico
Julie Lucero, Special Education Director, Santa Fe Public Schools
Stephanie Ly, President, American Federation of Teachers of New Mexico
Sally Marquez, Executive Director, NM Activities Association

Thomas Massaro, State School Health Officer, NM Department of Health
Marvin McAuley, Superintendent, Mora Independent School District
Pandora Mike, Principal, Ojo Elementary School
Silvia Miranda, Elementary School Teacher, Clovis Municipal Schools
Louella Poblano, Principal, DEAP Charter School
TJ Parks, Superintendent, Hobbs Municipal Schools
Mary Parr-Sanchez, President, National Education Association of New Mexico
Helena Ramirez, Student, Animas Public Schools
Arsenio Romero, Superintendent, Deming Public Schools
Jennifer Sanchez, Parent, Albuquerque Public Schools
Jennifer Schoolcraft, Middle School Special Education Teacher, Carlsbad Municipal Schools
Bill Soules, Chair, Senate Education Committee; High School Teacher, Las Cruces Public Schools
Mandi Torrez, Elementary School Teacher, Bernalillo Public Schools
Charlotte Trujillo, Principal, South Valley Prep Charter School
Linda Trujillo, Vice Chair, House Education Committee
Kalvin White, Education Administrator, Department of Dine Education

Thirty-one leaders from the state served as Task Force observers and staff support:

Ryan Stewart, Secretary, PED
Gwen Perea Warniment, Deputy Secretary, PED
Tim Hand, Deputy Secretary, PED
Adan Delgado, Deputy Secretary, PED
Kata Sandoval, Deputy Secretary, PED
Kara Bobroff, Deputy Secretary, PED
Allison Briceno, Managing Director, PED
John Sena, Policy Director, PED
Jacque Costales, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, PED
Lisa Chai, General Counsel, PED
Nancy Martira, Communications Director, PED
Ashley Garcia, Health Services Coordinator, PED
Greg Frostad, Safe and Healthy Schools Director, PED
Deborah Dominguez-Clark, Special Education Director, PED
Antonio Ortiz, Transportation and Capital Outlay Director, PED
Michael Chavez, Student Success and Wellness Director, PED

Felix Griego, Student Success and Wellness Deputy Director, PED
Mayra Valtierrez, Language and Culture Bureau Director, PED
Leslie Kelly, Behavioral Health Coordinator, PED
Heidi MacDonald, Deputy Policy Director, PED
Terry Bryant, Director of Accountability, PED
Alexis Alvarez, Deputy Director of Accountability, PED
Rebecca Reyes, Deputy Director for Indian Education, PED
Alan Brauer, Charter Schools Director, PED
Seana Flanagan, Director of Educator Quality, PED
Lynn Vasquez, Director of Assessment, PED
Brenda Kofahl, Director of Early Childhood Programs, PED
Mariana Padilla, Children's Cabinet Director, Governor's Office
Stephanie Rodriguez, Senior Policy Advisor, Governor's Office
Sunny Liu, Education Analyst, Legislative Finance Committee
Rachel Gudgel, Director, Legislative Education Study Committee

Task Force members produced high-level recommendations in response to COVID-19 for the NMPED's consideration. Recommendations are listed in five broad categories: **Safety and Hygiene; Meals and Transportation; Academics and Student Support; Communication, Partnerships and Tribal Collaboration; and Staffing and Labor.**

The NMPED will publish reentry guidance informed by the Task Force recommendations and feedback from Advisory Groups, surveys, articles, reports, other state's plans, national and international research and other sources. NMPED will work in close alignment with the Governor's Office and other state agencies to advise how to promote the wellness of New Mexico's students as much as possible during this unprecedented time.

Safety and Hygiene Recommendations

- **Ensure personal protective equipment, PPE, quality complies with local, state, and Centers for Disease Control and Protection, CDC, health requirements.**
- **Implement standard screening and surveillance protocols, including those for students with disabilities.**
- **Share sanitation and hygiene standards and procedures.**
- **Name social distancing promising practices.**
- **Offer timely, accessible communication - in multiple languages - to students, parents, and school staff.**

Personal protective equipment, PPE

Students and staff wear effective cloth face coverings, which are different from surgical or medical masks and should be reserved for essential workers, except when students are actively exercising, eating, or drinking or unless they have a condition that prevents them from doing so. Accommodate young students, students with disabilities, including students who are deaf/hard of hearing, who will have difficulty communicating and making social connections if coverings hide facial features that show emotions or prevent lip reading. Provide washable face masks to those who forget or cannot afford one. Offer latex-free gloves. Conduct training before and throughout the school year on use and disposal of PPE and COVID-19 safety and cleaning protocols.

Screening and surveillance protocols

Watch for COVID-19 symptoms: fever; cough; shortness of breath; sore throat; headache; muscle pain; chills; repeated shaking with chills; loss of taste or smell. Screen students, school staff and bus drivers daily with contact-free thermometers. Record and keep the results to allow for proper contact tracing. Isolate people with symptoms. If a student or staff member becomes infected, close for two days and work with health officials to do contact tracing and deep cleaning.

Sanitation and hygiene

Work with administrators and school healthcare providers to identify an isolation room to separate anyone who has COVID-19 symptoms or tests positive. Use “Standard and Transmission-Based Precautions.” Establish procedures for transporting anyone sick home or to a healthcare facility. Call before transporting and communicate the person may have COVID-19. Close off areas used by individual. Wait at least 24 hours, or as long as possible, before cleaning and disinfecting. Individuals who test positive for COVID-19 should be retested before returning. Air out spaces in general when possible. Flush out water systems/fountains.

Maintain stringent daily cleaning and sanitizing, especially frequently touched items. Make handwashing, sanitizer, and other hygiene support available. Stagger times for classes to wash hands. Make hand sanitizer, gloves and disinfecting wipes available in every classroom. Train all employees on sanitization, hygiene, and respiratory etiquette. Ensure safe and correct use and storage of sanitizing products that meet EPA criteria. Ensure adequate ventilation when sanitizing.

Teach students to avoid touching their eyes, noses, and mouths. Wash hands for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water is unavailable, use hand sanitizer containing 60% alcohol for staff and children old enough to use it. Encourage staff and students to bring their own water with lids to minimize use and touching of water fountains. Discourage use of shared items.

Social distancing

Maintain at least six feet of social distance or the greatest distances that can be achieved. Find ways for high-risk populations to connect without face-to-face contact. Avoid congregations by closing common areas or modifying them to minimize contact. Follow promising practices for bathroom use, such as adding plastic flexible screens between bathroom sinks.

Communication

Utilize signage to communicate occupancy limits, PPE requirements and proper hygiene procedures. Create easily accessible recommendations with clarity about requirements and guiding questions for local implementation. Timestamp as updates occur. Use multiple languages to communicate with and educate families ongoing. Provide consistent training and support for staff.

Meals and Transportation Recommendations

- Use “Breakfast after the bell” model for all elementary meals and serve pre-packaged foods for secondary students.
- Offer hot meal options (for variety) for all students, if possible and safe.
- Eat in same groups as much as possible.
- Stagger attendance for full-day programs to ensure distance between students when eating and fewer bus riders.
- Be responsive to the needs of students with disabilities.
- Prepare bus drivers, attendants and monitors as first responders to screen students as they enter the bus.
- Promote walking and alternative transportation as available.

Meal preparation, service and distribution

Serve individually plated meals in classrooms using “breakfast after the bell” model, instead of communal space, while ensuring the safety of children with food allergies. If food is offered at any event, have pre-packaged boxes or bags for each attendee. Avoid sharing food and utensils. Provide as much meal variety as possible. Consider eating outside when possible.

Provide single-use items and do not leave them in common areas or on tables for self-service. If single-use items are not feasible or desirable, ensure that all non-disposable food service items are handled with gloves and sanitized. Individuals should wash their hands after removing their gloves or after directly handling used food service items. Prohibit refilling reusable containers. Stagger lunches. Stay with the same group throughout the day including to eat. Have children bring their own meals as feasible. Temporarily suspend food delivery truck drivers from entering the building unless to use the restroom. Arrange for contactless signatures for food deliveries. Expand food delivery times to spread out deliveries and prevent overcrowding.

Transportation

Follow CDC guidelines. Create distance between children on school buses when possible. Drivers practice all safety actions and protocols as indicated for other staff. Sanitize transport vehicles using guidance for bus transit operators. Take special precautions for the transportation of medically fragile students either by reserving a specific seat on a bus that is not used by another person or arranging for separate transportation.

Prepare adults on transport vehicles to be first responders and provide necessary daily PPE. Bus drivers/monitors/attendants check student temperatures and monitor for COVID-19 symptoms. Accommodate transporting students with disabilities who may require different preparations. Consider staff rotating on “bus duty” to take temperatures and facilitate communication with families. Establish protocols for communication with schools and parents if/when a student has COVID-19 symptoms. Research how other states address students who have COVID-19 symptoms and want to get on a bus.

Avoid field trips, inter-group events and group gatherings greater than 6 people. Restrict group transportation. Prioritize transportation for K - 3 students. Stagger full-day attendance; half-day programs may be unrealistic given sanitation requirements for transport vehicles. Consider staggered pick up and drop off during hybrid reentry. Promote “walking school buses” and other alternative transportation. Repurpose the cost savings from the unused K-5+ legislative appropriation to district transportation costs. Utilize FEMA reimbursement when possible. Create bus routes for where students live and specific service areas. Offer feeder route stipends to families who drive students to bus pick-up/drop-off sites.

Academics and Student Support Recommendations

- **Maintain academic rigor and grades.**
- **Flex attendance and instructional hours if schools continue as hybrid or remote with Continuous Learning Plans.**
- **Provide practical guidance and updates as soon as possible, including a state-wide framework of supports: social emotional; well-being of students, families, and educators; etc.**
- **Offer electives, activities and career technical education, CTE.**
- **Build out a state-wide technology infrastructure including a learning management system, LMS.**

Academics

All school systems must have strong, agile Continuous Learning Plans that provide standards-aligned instruction using high-quality curriculum during modified operations, including provisions for: A strategic communications plan to connect with every student on a daily basis, provide weekly feedback on students' work, and communicate a family's role in supporting their child's continuous learning; versatile delivery methods for instruction, related services, and professional development; adaptive staffing models that enable feedback on students' work and frequent communication with students and families. Allow home-school environments in collaboration with districts and charter schools for particular students. Space seating as far apart as possible. Stagger arrival and drop-off times or locations by cohort. Limit contact between cohorts and direct contact with parents as much as possible.

Identify every student's academic needs at the beginning of the year using a high-quality, standards-aligned diagnostic tool. Measure the impact of learning loss and implement strategies to respond. Create individual plans for students with the most significant learning gaps. Prioritize the needs, scheduling and supports of English Learners, Native American students, Students with Disabilities, students who are highly mobile, and students who are economically disadvantaged. Loop students in with the same teacher when they return for a sense of familiarity. Hire substitute teachers. Ensure that student and staff groupings are as self-contained as possible. Discourage sharing of items that are difficult to clean or disinfect. Keep children's belongings separated from others'. Ensure adequate supplies to minimize sharing or limit use of supplies and equipment by one group of children at a time and clean and disinfect between uses. Turn desks to face in the same direction. Have students sit on only one side of tables. Provide physical guides - tape on floors and signs on walls - to ensure that staff and children remain at least six feet apart. Support having students and teachers together as much as possible while social distancing safely. Prepare flexible calendars and schedules that maximize learning opportunities in a dynamic public health context. Minimize the number of transitions, when possible. Rotate staff instead of students when self-contained classrooms are not feasible. Provide alternative class times to high-risk individuals. Utilize outdoor spaces to the greatest extent practical.

Framework of supports

Provide routine check-ins and access to support services such as nutrition support and counseling. Include extra time and support for students with the most unfinished learning from the prior year. Support families, especially those in rural areas. Coordinate between schools and other wrap around services. Create clear next steps for every high school student and recent graduate. Develop methods to communicate concerns about students and families. Increase recess time. Have daily activities and frequent breaks to reduce stress. Conduct wellness checks on disconnected students. Develop protocols for distance referrals - suicide, threat assessments, etc. Get kids back into routines. Develop re-engagement strategies for students. Schedule one-on-one personal support and small-group instruction for students who need them. Support parent meetings and engagement in person when possible; even if it needs to be through virtual environments. Value families. When needed, set up a schedule so parents can set up appointments to access school services and staff.

Activities

See NMAA guidance on athletics and activities.

Technology infrastructure

Provide 1:1 device and internet access, including assistive technology for students with disabilities. Build up and support local co-ops for internet service. Provide curriculum that can be purchased and delivered digitally. Offer statewide LMS.

Communication, Partnership and Tribal Collaboration Recommendations

- **Communicate plans, options and changes with families and other stakeholders as soon as possible via multiple methods including websites, telephone, radio announcements, smartphone applications, television announcements, email, social media and text messages.**
- **Publish and use consistent methods of communication, in multiple languages, so families and other stakeholders know how to receive updates.**
- **Provide families and community stakeholders a hotline number to call for consistent and accurate information.**
- **School boards and governing councils should review and update policies to ensure they align with reentry requirements. Further, school boards and governing councils should communicate policy changes to families and community stakeholders.**
- **Consult with local Tribal and Pueblo leaders, and Tribal Education Departments, on how to best communicate and collaborate with their communities.**

Communication with families

Employ a greeter to communicate safety restrictions and protocols. Post signs in highly visible locations that promote everyday protective measures. Broadcast regular announcements on reducing the spread of COVID-19 on PA systems. Establish weekly newsletters/emails/calls with families. Describe behaviors that prevent the spread of COVID-19 on school websites and social media accounts. Communicate in English, Spanish, and any other relevant languages. Check health department notices daily and adjust operations accordingly. Identify sources that will be used to maintain consistent communications, protocols and processes.

Develop a COVID-19 communication plan and provide a forum for answering questions. Designate a staff person to respond to COVID-19 concerns (e.g., school nurse) and ensure students, families and staff know who this person is and how to contact her/him/them. Put systems in place for staff and families to self-report to the school if they or their student have COVID-19 symptoms, test positive for COVID-19, or were exposed to someone with COVID-19 within the last 14 days. Notify staff, families, and the public of school closures and any restrictions to limit COVID-19 exposure. Inform those who have had close contact with a person who tested positive for COVID-19 to stay home, self-monitor for symptoms and follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop. Provide a plan for if a student in an in-person class has been exposed to COVID-19 and has been nearby other students. Communicate with caregivers of foster children/youth and make recommendations for older youth in congregate care/shelter who live with other young people who do not attend the same school.

Partnerships

Ensure organizations that share or use school facilities follow the same considerations and receive the same training as school staff. Possibly use FEMA practices. Limit any nonessential visitors, volunteers, and activities – especially with individuals who are from a different geographic area. Ensure partners have the best interests of students in mind and are striving to meet similar goals and objectives. Engage community partners in social distancing, health monitoring practices and information dissemination.

Tribal collaboration

Honor sovereignty of Tribal nations and COVID-19 deadlines, curfews and lockdowns. Use relevant, local Tribal data and collaborate with Tribal governments when considering school reentry and closure plans and decisions. Identify a point of contact for each Tribe and Nation to share school information. Identify alternative instructional delivery for schools still closed. Work with Tribal and Pueblo leaders on unique issues they are faced with in their schools and communities. Collaborate with Tribal Education Departments as resources to the education community. Engage with the Indian Education Advisory Council.

Staffing and Labor Recommendations

- **Define high-risk staff and protect them.**
- **Deliver professional development for teachers around distance learning, academics and safety procedures.**
- **Hire enough staff to start the year and ensure coverage if others are sick.**
- **Give flexibility to bring back retired teachers without having to sit out a year.**
- **Identify work centers for teachers/students/families who can't work from home.**
- **Offer internet support to those who work from home.**
- **Evaluate teachers using a system that provides feedback.**

Attendance and leave policies

Review employee leave policies and modify as needed to ensure compliance with the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. Implement flexible leave policies and practices that enable staff to stay home when they are sick, have been exposed, care for someone who is sick, or stay home with children due to school or childcare closures. Examine and revise policies for leave, telework, and employee compensation. Leave policies should be flexible and not punish people for taking time off when they are sick.

Professional development, training and staff support

Train staff on: all safety protocols; use of technology in the classroom and implementation into the lesson plan; and [universal design for learning](#) (UDL). Ensure familiarity with tech in the classroom to encourage students and teachers to transition into distance learning if schools close. Create a bank of recorded lessons. Conduct staff meetings and PD sessions virtually. Encourage employees and students to take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories about COVID-19 if they are feeling overwhelmed or distressed. Promote employees and students eating healthy, exercising, getting sleep, and finding time to unwind. Encourage employees and students to talk with people they trust about their concerns and how they are feeling. Share social emotional learning resources with staff and students.

Screening, testing, isolation and return to work

If a student becomes infected with COVID-19 and there was social distancing and appropriate PPE used, then the teacher must get tested and will continue to teach. Protect the privacy of people at higher risk for severe illness regarding underlying medical conditions. To support contact tracing, retain a daily log of staff in attendance for at least four weeks. When scheduling staff to cover shifts, consider additional breaks to provide for frequent handwashing, more frequent and longer timeframes to sanitize equipment, etc. Monitor absenteeism of students and employees. Cross-train staff. Create a roster of trained back-up staff. Minimize non-essential travel.

Job requirements and expectations

Teacher evaluations account for the various policies. Appoint a COVID-Safe Practice leader or team to enact safe practices in the workplace. Assign high-risk workers duties that minimize their contact with students, families, and other employees. Provide guidance, training and PPE for staff who work in close-contact scenarios, for example: with medically fragile students, with students who need feeding, etc.