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## OFFICE OF STRATEGIC OUTREACH

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### Back-to-School FAQs

*Updated: September 4, 2020*

#### A note to our school communities

Thank you for helping us ensure a safe, healthy, and productive start to the school year. We know it hasn't been easy and we're grateful to everyone who has adhered to the public health order, maintained their distance, washed their hands, worn their masks, and more to protect themselves and their neighbors. Secretary Stewart recently shared the following requirements for schools who choose to begin in-person learning through the phased-in, hybrid approach (beginning as early as Tuesday, September 8, 2020). Reentry requirements include:

- 1) New Mexico is meeting the [statewide gating criteria](#);
- 2) The District/School's county is in the "green zone" for [new daily cases and test positivity rates](#);
- 3) The District/School has a PED-approved reentry plan; and
- 4) The District/School has safety and support plans in place.

In addition to the information provided here, **we encourage you to review the reentry guidance documents available at <https://bit.ly/BackToSchoolNM>**, reach out to your local school leaders, and connect with the following points of contact, as needed:

#### Contact Information

Health-related inquiries: 1-855-600-3453  
NM Crisis Line: 1-855-NMCRISIS (622-7474)  
Child Care Resource & Referrals: 1-800-691-9067

#### Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

##### **Who makes decisions about public school during a global pandemic?**

The NM Department of Health (NMDOH) and Governor's office determine health orders and guidelines for the state. Because New Mexico public education exercises "local control," school districts and charter schools will make decisions to fit the needs of their communities. The PED's back-to-school guidance is a framework within which local educational agencies (LEAs) have built their reentry plans. We encourage you to reach out to your school's administration for additional details.

##### **How do I know if my school is able to reopen?**

Schools are placed in a category based on analysis of the available health data and under guidance of the Medical Advisory Team. The PED has identified three categories for school reentry: Remote, Hybrid, Full Reentry. To begin the school year, all schools will begin in the remote category through Labor Day. At that point, elementary schools will be eligible to move into hybrid learning, followed by middle schools and high schools at undetermined points in the future, as long as public health conditions allow for this. The New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) and the Medical Advisory Team will continue

to monitor the spread of the virus during school reentry. A complete list of districts and schools eligible for in-person learning can be found on [the PED website](#).

### **Will my child be safe returning to in-person learning?**

Our priority is the health and safety of students and staff while maximizing opportunities for in-person learning. To that end, PED and local school leaders have spent weeks analyzing and mitigating risk to students and staff. Every school building will have COVID safe practices in place, including mask-wearing, physical distancing and rigorous cleaning protocols. Additionally, we've created a tool you can use to anonymously report any COVID-safety concerns you may have with a particular school or classroom.

### **What will happen if a positive COVID-19 case is identified in my school?**

PED's Rapid Response Protocol establishes a clear chain of actions school administrators must follow in case of a positive case. These instructions include reporting to the proper authorities, isolating the sick individual, identifying and notifying close contacts, how and when to clean the affected area, and whether one or more classrooms, an isolated wing, or an entire school must close for 14 days. Schools have the responsibility to notify families of all Covid positive cases, and the PED will publish case number updates on the website. **Please note that the rapid response hotline and email are reserved for school personnel responsible for reporting positive cases.**

### **What socio-emotional supports are available to me/my students/my family?**

There are a number of resources available to students and families as we return to school. The PED has included a list of social emotional learning resources in the [guidance document](#) (pp. 7-8), and encourages schools to recognize and attend to trauma and grief that students, families, and educators may be facing. Please reach out to your school counselor, family engagement coordinator, or community schools coordinator for additional information about local resources. Additionally, School-Based Health Centers (SBHC) are a great source for public health information and support. For more information and guidance on finding a local SBHC, please click [here](#). Finally, the New Mexico Crisis Access Line is available 24/7 at 1-855-NMCRISIS (1-855-662-7474) and you can download the [NMConnect](#) app on your iPhone or Android.

### **What about childcare?**

In reviewing the results from a recent child care survey, the PED continues to work with the Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) and local providers to support additional programming, policies, and supports for child care. For additional information, please see [the latest from ECECD here](#). In addition, you can download a childcare assistance application [here](#) and explore resources [here](#). **Finally, you can learn more about the Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) provider program by calling 1-833-551-0518.**