



Expanded In-Person Learning for Public Schools Frequently Asked Questions

When will my middle/high school open?

The decision to expand in-person learning to secondary students is made by each local district or charter school's governing board. The Public Education Department now permits all middle and high schools to reopen in a hybrid model beginning Feb. 8, as long as they meet requirements. However, they are not required to do so and may choose to remain in the remote learning mode.

What is the hybrid model?

The hybrid model allows schools to divide their student population into at least two cohorts, bringing back up to 50% of students at a time. Cohorting cuts in half the number of students who would have to quarantine if one member tested positive for the virus. In addition, schools must adhere to the COVID-safe practices (CSPs) outlined in the PED COVID-19 Response Toolkit.

What has changed for elementary students?

All elementary students in New Mexico may now return to in-person learning in the hybrid mode if their district/charter chooses to do so. Previously, a district had to be located in a green county to move to hybrid for the first time.

How much time will teachers and families have to prepare for a transition to expanded in-person learning?

As much time as the district's or school's governing body feels is required. Follow announcements from your district/school about its reentry plans -- and remember: No district or school is required to move forward with in-person learning -- the new plan only allows that change if district/school leaders choose.

What requirements must schools/districts meet to move into the hybrid model?

Schools/districts must meet these requirements for every in-person learning option.

- For red counties, surveillance testing for all in-person staff at a rate of 25% per week to achieve 100% testing over a month's time;
- For yellow and green counties, surveillance testing for all in-person staff at a rate of 12.5% per week to achieve 100% testing over two months' time;
- An onsite visit to certify readiness to open safely;
- Continued cohorting of student groups;
- Consistent reporting of the number of individuals on campus;
- Strict enforcement of COVID-safe practices as outlined in the [PED Reentry Guidance and COVID-19 Response Toolkit](#);
- Signed assurance that the district will follow PED Protocols.

Will schools have to close if their county goes back to red or yellow?

No. Schools will only have to close if they reach the rapid response closure threshold of four rapid responses in a 14-day period.

What safety precautions will be required when students return for in-person learning?

COVID-safe practices (CSPs) as outlined in the PED Reentry Guidance and COVID-19 Response Toolkit **must be strictly enforced at all times.** CSPs include, but are not limited to:

- Masks available and utilized by all staff and students;

- Classrooms and common areas set up for 6 feet of social distancing with 50% student enrollment in place;
- Cafeteria and congregate eating areas set up for 6 feet of social distancing, and cohorts of students are not mixed;
- Ample cleaning supplies and daily sanitization protocols in place (including high-touch areas, playgrounds, and buses);
- Soap and supplies in bathrooms with reliable running water and hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol available across the school;
- Evacuation and dismissal plans that maintain 6 feet of social distancing;
- Compliance with indoor air quality standards;
- Proper personal protective equipment (PPE);
- Isolation rooms for symptomatic individuals;
- Protocols and signage for entry into the building;
- Signage throughout the school site about prevention practices; and
- Protocols for students exhibiting symptoms on buses or before entry.

How will school meals be handled in elementary schools? Secondary schools?

To maintain social distancing and reduce the risk of virus transmission, breakfast and lunch for all students should be served in classrooms. If it is impractical to serve meals in classrooms and they must occur in the cafeteria, then meals should be staggered by grade level or campus location to reduce the number of cohorts in the cafeteria at any one time. Students should sit on only one side of a table and maintain greater than 6 feet of distance from others. For K-12 students who learn remotely, districts will provide meals at various grab-and-go sites. Only elementary students, maintaining at least 6 feet of separation, may have snacks, and no talking will be allowed while masks are off for eating.

What happens if a student or teacher engaged in in-person learning tests positive?

The PED has provided schools with detailed protocols for isolating the individual, reporting the case to PED, shutting down the affected classroom for 24 hours for deep cleaning, and informing families of other students and staff.

What happens if there is an outbreak among teachers and there is not enough staff at a school site?

The district may decide to have a school do remote learning if there are not enough staff at a school site due to an outbreak.

If students are forced to quarantine after exposure at school, can the student go to child care?

No. Children who have to quarantine will need to stay at home.

I'm a teacher returning for in-person learning but have children remaining in remote learning at home. What can I do about child care?

Families may reach out to their local district and local childcare providers to learn about options in their community. In addition, the Regional Education Cooperatives (RECs) have information on childcare options throughout the state through the School Reentry Child Care Project. [Contact your Regional Education Cooperative for details.](#)

Will educators be required to get the vaccine in order to teach in person?

Educators will be prioritized for vaccines, along with essential and frontline workers in Group 1b, but vaccines will not be mandated.

How many students will be allowed in a classroom at the middle/high school level in the hybrid model?

Students must be divided into at least two cohorts based on 50% of school enrollment. The maximum number of students allowed in any one classroom space is limited by both the cohort and 6 feet of distance between and among students and staff.

Will sports teams and other clubs or groups be allowed to meet? What about after-school programs?

Sports may continue practices in groups of five until Feb. 22. The department will monitor the implementation of the expansion of in-person learning services over the next two weeks. If the department, in collaboration with the Department of Health, determines that expansion is not leading to significant increases in the spread of COVID-19, New Mexico Activities Association-sanctioned activities may begin on Feb. 22. Districts and schools must shift into the hybrid model prior to beginning NMAA-sanctioned activities.

Will parents who want to continue online learning for their children still have the option to stay online if their school expands in-person learning?

Yes. All families will have the option to continue remote learning for their child(ren). Guidance around enrollment remains the same at this time – students may not lose their “seat” at their school if they choose a distance learning option.

Will teachers be required to use sick days if they have to quarantine or if they contract the virus?

This will be handled at the district level with input from unions where unions are in place. Please check with your school’s union representative. All others will receive guidance from their district. Unions are considering the following:

- Supplemental paid leave for staff who come into close contact multiple times (AFTNM)
- Incentivize substitute teachers to increase the substitute pool (NEANM)
- Hazard pay for education assistants assigned to classrooms (AFTNM)

What options will teachers who are at high-risk have to remain in remote teaching if their school expands in-person learning?

Requirements for staff reporting have not changed. At this time, only those staff members who are themselves at high risk are required to have a remote option.

Does that change once a teacher in a high-risk group gets a vaccine?

No.

If a teacher has family members in the household who are at high-risk, will that teacher be allowed to teach remotely?

Districts and charter schools have the discretion to determine whether to allow remote learning for staff whose family members are high risk.