

Ryan Stewart, Secretary, Public Education Department (PED)
T.J. Parks, Superintendent, Hobbs Municipal Schools

ISSUES FOR HEARING

Reopening Public Schools and Enhancing Instruction Time

- PED released guidance on school reentry for the fall, requiring all schools to open with a hybrid model of instruction. This model requires schools to:
 - Cap total student occupancy at 50 percent or the number that can be accommodated while adhering to 6 feet of social distancing,
 - Require distance learning for students not in the building,
 - Maintain daily screening and rapid response testing for all staff, and
 - Require face coverings for all students and staff.

- Dependent on health conditions, schools can move from hybrid instruction to full school reentry; however, PED has not set specific criteria for determining full reentry yet. School must submit reentry plans to PED by July 15 and also state whether they will provide extended learning time or K-5 Plus programs.

- Schools will incur additional costs to provide distance learning, protective measures, cleaning, and staffing for hybrid instruction. The national school boards and business officer associations estimate the cost to be \$488.70 per student for an average district; however, 70 percent of this cost is related to new personnel (e.g. a nurse in every school, aides for every bus, etc.)

- The 1st Judicial District Court rejected the state's motion to dismiss the *Martinez-Yazzie* education lawsuit and is now evaluating the state's response to the findings. Plaintiff attorneys argued the state must provide a sufficient and uniform education to all students in spite of the public health emergency.

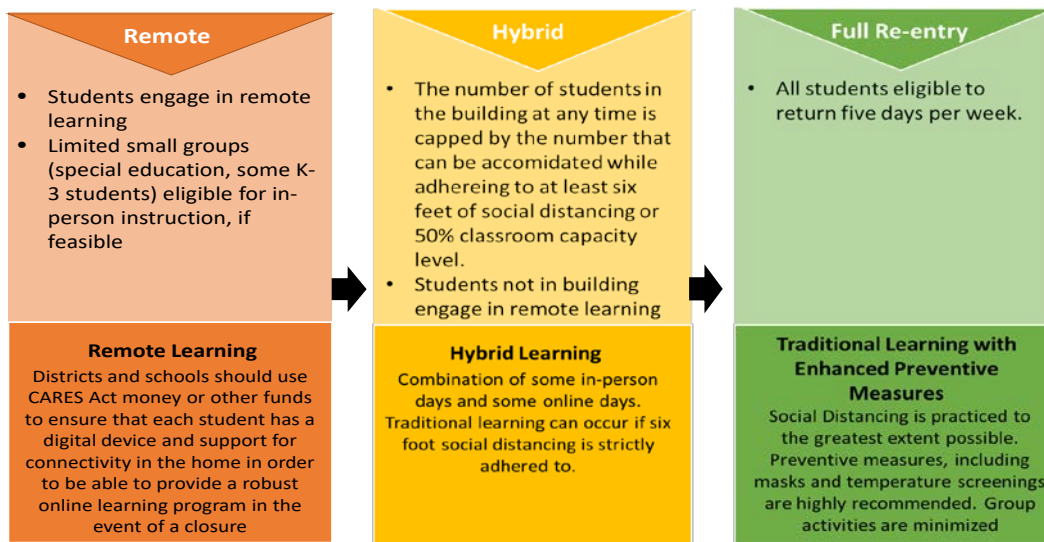
- Schools received \$97 million from the federal CARES Act for coronavirus-related costs and operations. PED has withheld \$10 million from the grant to support high need schools and plans to use \$14 million of the governor's \$22 million relief fund to provide technology, training, and additional supports.

Public School Reentry

PED Guidance on School Reopening

On June 20, 2020, the Public Education Department (PED) released guidance to schools on creating and implementing strategies for a safe return to school. Beginning on August 3, schools will be able to start the school year using a hybrid model of instruction, which limits the number of students present in a building to ensure 6 feet of social distancing at all times and requires students to alternate between in-person and online instruction. During this initial approach to re-entry, additional guidelines such as daily screening and rapid response testing for all staff, required face coverings for all students and staff, and increased cleaning and disinfecting procedures will be strictly enforced.

Dependent on public health conditions, schools can move from hybrid instruction to full reentry. Schools must submit reentry plans to PED by July 15 to be scored on a rubric. The plan must have an overall score of 2.5 or higher; categories with conditional approval must be resubmitted and earn a score of 3 by September 30.



Although PED’s guidance provides a framework for various scenarios and closely aligns with the state’s reopening strategies, many questions remain, such as:

- How should schools address student learning loss (particularly for at-risk populations) from the prior school year?
- What criteria will PED use to determine if a school can transition to full reentry?
- Will K-5 Plus programs be continued?
- How will the state measure learning and outcomes (especially in light of the court’s recent action on the *Martinez-Yazzie* lawsuit)?

Current School Re-entry Plans

Santa Fe Public Schools introduced a preview of their reentry plan that follows PED’s suggested hybrid model. In this case, one group of students will attend school in person on Mondays and Tuesdays, and another group will attend on

AGENCY: Public Education Department (PED)

DATE: July 16, 2020

PURPOSE OF HEARING: Reopening Public Schools and Enhancing Instruction Time

WITNESS: Ryan Stewart, Secretary, PED; T.J. Parks, Superintendent, Hobbs Municipal Schools

PREPARED BY: Martha Becerra, Fiscal Analyst, LFC; Sunny Liu, Fiscal Analyst, LFC

EXPECTED OUTCOME: Informational

“The state will assess the impact of school reentry on the rate of spread of the virus statewide in each of the 5 regions. When overall state data indicate that it is safe to move forward to a full school schedule, the regions will be able to do so.”

- **PED Guidance**

| Top and Bottom District Cash Balances (in thousands of dollars) | | |
|--|--------------|-------------------|
| District | Cash Balance | % of Program Cost |
| Albuquerque | \$53,838 | 7% |
| Gallup | \$39,493 | 36% |
| Gadsden | \$27,197 | 21% |
| Las Cruces | \$25,488 | 12% |
| Rio Rancho | \$16,819 | 11% |
| Raices del Saber Xinachtli | \$3 | 1% |
| Taos International | \$1 | 0% |
| Solare Collegiate | \$ - | 0% |
| School of Dreams | \$ - | 0% |
| Lordsburg | \$ - | 0% |

Source: LFC and LESC files

| Reopening Cost Assuming Additional Staff Hiring | | |
|---|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Similar District | Reopening Cost per Student | CARES Funding per Student |
| Española | \$545.11 | \$442.27 |
| Grants/Cibola | \$530.23 | \$489.20 |
| Los Alamos | \$482.67 | \$11.78 |
| Lovington | \$478.83 | \$161.84 |
| Artesia | \$469.54 | \$160.66 |

Source: LFC and LESC Files

| Reopening Cost Assuming No Staff Hiring | | |
|---|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Similar District | Reopening Cost per Student | CARES Funding per Student |
| Española | \$ 167.42 | \$ 442.27 |
| Grants/Cibola | \$ 162.86 | \$ 489.20 |
| Los Alamos | \$ 148.25 | \$ 11.78 |
| Lovington | \$ 147.07 | \$ 161.84 |
| Artesia | \$ 144.21 | \$ 160.66 |

Source: LFC and LESC Files

Thursdays and Fridays. The district claims to be “ready for anything,” relying on their 1:1 technology capacity to retract back to remote learning, if necessary. The final plan will be determined after a survey of teacher and parent preferences.

Carlsbad Municipal School’s superintendent communicated to parents the district would *not* be starting the school year on August 3. The district is hopeful that a low infection rate in the region and declining rate statewide will allow the district to have a delayed but normal return to school.

Artesia Public Schools plans to start the school year following PED’s suggested hybrid model even though 70 percent of the parents surveyed preferred a normal return to school. The survey found that 53 percent of parents are concerned with a normal return, but 89 percent are willing to send their child back to school. The district claims to be working “within the guidelines we are given” and will present a draft plan to the school board on July 13.

Other states are planning to adjust school year calendars to try to make up for lost time. Montana and Wyoming gave local districts the option to offer in-person instruction or continue distance learning. North Dakota schools will begin summer programs on June 1. Austrian schools developed a schedule where two groups of students attend school for five days every two weeks and Israel will follow a similar strategy.

Fiscal Implications

The state received \$130.9 million in Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act funding for public education. The fund provides \$22.3 million in the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund and \$108.6 million in the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund. Additionally, section 14 of House Bill 1 authorizes \$750 million of the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) for general fund expenditures in fiscal year 2021 on expenditures reasonably necessary for the operation of government – including public schools – to comply with public health orders.

According to PED’s operating budget management system, June 30 cash balances are projected to be \$344 million – a 1percent decrease from FY19 - or 9 percent of total program cost. Given flat funding levels for the FY21 state equalization guarantee distribution enacted in the special session, districts and charters will need to restructure programs and leverage savings to address additional costs related to reopening schools.

The Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO) and The School Superintendent Association (AASA) estimate that the average district¹ will spend \$1.8 million, or \$488.70 per student, to reopen schools safely. This includes hiring staff to implement health and safety protocols such as additional custodians, at least one FTE nurse per school, and one aide per bus. Assuming no additional staff is hired, the cost per student drops to \$149.26.

Applying the same methodology to New Mexico, a similar school district² will spend \$482.67 per student to reopen schools following CDC and PED guidelines assuming the original scenario set forth by ASBOI and AASA.

¹ 3,659 students, 8 school buildings, 183 classrooms, 329 staff members, and 40 school buses

² Los Alamos Public Schools – 3684 students as of October 2019