



Date: July 16, 2020

Prepared By: LESC Analysts

Purpose: Assess national research and local school district implementation of continuous learning plans during physical school closures due to the public health emergency. Address challenges and highlight strengths, best practices, and research for considerations on effective teaching and learning during school reentry.

Witness: PED, New Mexico superintendents, teachers, legislative staff

Expected Outcome: Flexibility on continuous learning requirements that led to uneven implementation across the state. Lessons from spring implementation and best practices should inform reentry guidance.

Teaching and Learning in a Public Health Emergency: Lessons Learned from Physical School Closures and the Transition to School Reentry

Executive Summary	2
A Framework for Learning while Social Distancing	3
Access to Remote Learning During Physical School Closures	4
Preparing New Mexico for Successful School Reentry	6
Assurances for Remote Learning	7
Social Distancing.....	8
A Path Forward: Frameworks for Success in the Digital Learning Environment.....	10
Student Achievement During Remote Learning	12
Continuous Learning Plans and School District Implementation	12
Learning Loss Due to COVID-19	16
Prioritizing Student Achievement During School Reentry	18
Student and Staff Health and Wellness as Priorities	21
Impact of Distance Learning on Student Mental Health	21
Student Nutrition During Physical School Closures.....	23
Health Screening as a Tool for COVID-19 Mitigation.....	24
Cleaning and Sanitization for School Reentry.....	25
Family Communication and Tribal Collaboration.....	26
Tribal Consultation and Collaboration	27
Special Considerations for Reentry Collaboration.....	27

Executive Summary

On March 11, 2020, the same day the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the spread of COVID-19 met the criteria of a global pandemic, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham declared a statewide public health emergency. The governor and the state's Public Education Department (PED) closed public schools through April 6, and later extended the closure for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. By May, 48 states enacted social distancing strategies aimed to reduce the spread of the virus, closing schools for the remainder of the academic year.

Immediately following school closures, PED was tasked to solve the difficult challenge for New Mexico schools that other states were facing; to design a response to the pandemic that would work for the entire state public education system. **See Attachment 1, Timeline of PED's Guidance to School Leaders.** Much of the department's work during the closures prioritized the health, safety, and wellbeing of staff and students, including work to ensure that students did not lose access to meals. PED also distributed federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds to school districts to purchase supplies needed to respond to the virus, including personal protective equipment and educational technology. To support teaching and learning, [PED required school districts and charter schools to author continuous learning plans](#) (CLPs) describing how they would offer education services during physical school closures.

Differences in how CLPs were authored and implemented may have widened the achievement gap between New Mexico's economically disadvantaged students and their more affluent peers. According to a nationwide analysis of 477 school districts by the [Center for Reinventing Public Education](#), a lack of specificity nationally created a situation in which school districts left learning to chance. Within New Mexico, most educators took to the Internet to provide the state's [constitutionally required](#) "uniform system of free public schools," but faced immense challenges in offering services previously only available in a brick-and-mortar setting. PED's guidance waived certain elements of law designed to ensure students are attending and engaged in their education, including statutory requirements for attendance, instructional time, standardized assessments, and teacher evaluations; though it still remains unclear if the state department of education had the legal authority to waive these provisions.

New Mexico's initial response to the virus highlighted several gaps in remote education services, most of which were attributed to an education system that was unprepared to provide distance learning. Some students were unable to access the Internet at home for any number of reasons, ranging from their family's income status to a lack of Internet infrastructure. Even families with Internet access may have lacked an Internet-capable laptop or tablet for daily use. Students with disabilities may have lost access to necessary in-person services. Moreover, most of New Mexico's teacher workforce was never trained to use online platforms like Zoom or Google Classroom to effectively deliver basic education services. [Initial findings from the Legislative Finance Committee](#) (LFC) mirrored a trend [seen nationwide](#): students lost significant amounts of instructional time due to remote learning, with

the largest losses affecting at-risk students, low income students, and younger students.

Recent COVID-19 trends from the [Department of Health](#) (DOH) and the [federal Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC) show an uptick in transmission of the virus, suggesting that virtual learning may be far from over. During summer 2020, PED assembled a task force of educators, administrators, parents, legislators, and other stakeholders of the education community, to gather [feedback and recommendations](#) on issues to tackle as schools begin reopening their doors. Using this feedback, PED authored [school reentry guidance](#) which describes the state’s plan to reopen schools in the fall. However, PED has noted the guidance is not yet complete, and additional guidance documents will be published in the weeks before schools reopen in August. As New Mexico prepares to begin the Fall 2020 school year, public schools will continue to rely on effective leadership from PED to develop practical strategies to keep teachers and students safe and healthy, but also engaged in a rigorous academic curriculum.

PED’s school reentry task force offered feedback on five major topics:

- Safety, logistics, and distancing protocols;
- Meals and transportation;
- Academics, student support, social and emotional learning, mental health, technology, and extra-curricular activities;
- Communication, outreach, community partnerships, and tribal collaboration; and
- Staffing and labor.

A Framework for Learning while Social Distancing

On March 24, PED released a [continuous learning plan implementation guide](#) to superintendents and charter school leaders to assist them in supporting learning during physical school closures. PED’s guidance focused on ensuring high school seniors were supported through graduation, emphasizing academic support for all students, and encouraging social and emotional support availability and family and community communication. The guidance was authored with measured flexibility for school districts and charter schools, allowing for local implementation to address a host of unprecedented challenges and critical needs facing students and families. The nonregulatory guidance offered recommendations, suggestions, identified supports available from PED, and resources from outside organizations.

PED’s guidance was founded on an effort to “extend grace to all,” reflective of the unique and challenging times the state continues to face as it wrestles with an ongoing public health crisis. During the physical school closures, PED’s guidance notified school leaders of waivers for specific public school state statutory requirements regarding attendance, instructional time, assessments, and teacher evaluations. The recommendations and guidance represented considerable deviation from the norm, including no expectation for attendance and moving grading to a pass or fail grading system. It is unclear whether public school laws and regulations designed to ensure access to a free education for all children can be waived during a public health emergency. However, in an effort to provide continuous learning while extending flexibility and grace to students and families, PED’s guidance led to a wide variation in the nature of school districts’ continuous learning.

During physical building closures, PED advised schools to retain all school personnel and continue to pay them, including school transportation contract employees. Expectations for these employees changed to help deliver meals, assist in school call centers, and deliver materials and supplies, among others.

Access to Remote Learning During Physical School Closures

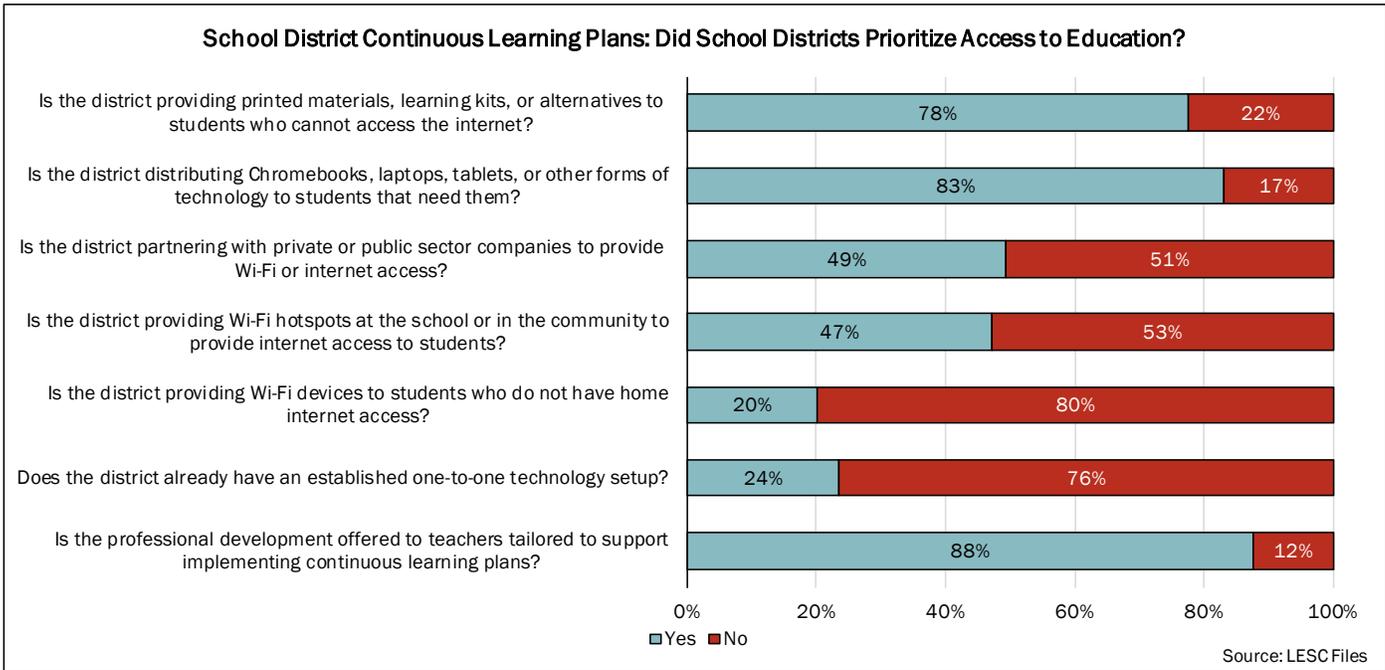
U.S. Census Bureau data indicate New Mexico ranks 48th in the nation for percentage of households with broadband Internet subscriptions at 73.7 percent, compared with the U.S. average of 81.4 percent. Counties with the lowest broadband rates (less than 55 percent) include Cibola, Doña Ana, Guadalupe, Harding, Mora, McKinley, Rio Arriba, San Miguel, and Socorro.

Of the 89 school districts completing CLPs, 20 stated they already had a “one-to-one” technology policy or a provision that guarantees every student has access to an Internet-capable device.

In New Mexico, a large portion of the challenge is aligning funding sources to meet the immense cost of improved access and infrastructure. School districts can cut costs by leveraging partnerships with Internet service providers. One such partnership of note is being built in Cleveland’s EmpowerCLE+ initiative. If the initiative is successful, Internet would become similar to a public utility in the city of Cleveland, with school districts and families paying a flat \$16 per home to get all students connected to the Internet by 2022.

Variations in statewide Internet access presented a barrier to equitable online instruction. According to a statewide survey by the [Public School Facilities Authority \(PSFA\)](#), approximately one in five New Mexico students did not have access to the Internet at home, and one in three students did not have access to an Internet capable device. The so-called “digital divide” disproportionately affects low-income students, both in rural areas of the state, including among New Mexico’s Native American tribes and pueblos, but also low-income urban areas of the state, where families struggle to afford home Internet access.

Improving access quickly became a focus of school districts statewide. A staff review of school district CLPs revealed 73 of 89 school districts distributed Chromebooks, laptops, tablets, or other forms of technology to students. Some school districts explored strategies to provide students with Internet access, like entering into partnerships with public or private Internet service providers, sending portable Wi-Fi routers home with students, or leveraging new or existing Wi-Fi hot spots in parking lots or centrally-located community buildings. Other school districts, seeing no way to close the digital divide, chose to distribute hard copies of instructional packets to students without Internet access.



Instructional Strategies. The shift to online content also necessitated a change in teacher instructional strategies. At the onset of school closures, school districts

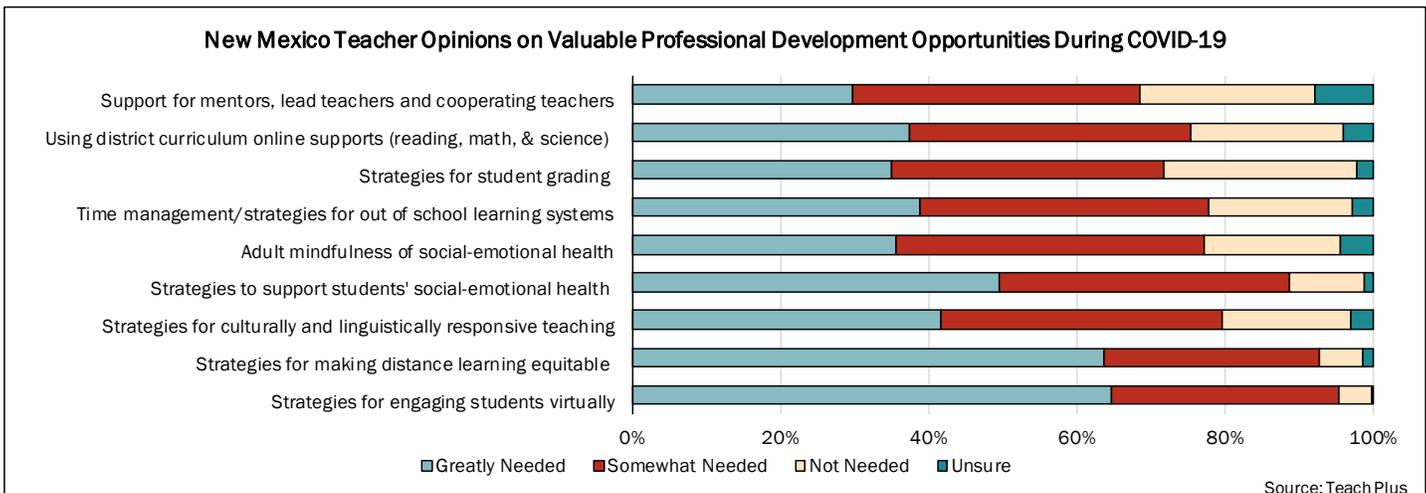
attempted to build upon recommendations from PED that align with research from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the Council of State Science Supervisors, acknowledging that “the available options for learning during sudden school closures might not be consistent with best practices for teaching and learning.” To remedy this inconsistency, PED suggested that schools leverage “assets of home-based learning, rather than trying to recreate school.” A March 2020 survey by Teach Plus New Mexico of 550 New Mexico teachers from 57 school districts and 16 charter schools showed that most teachers were using a blended learning approach consisting of on-line and paper based instruction. While 74 percent of teachers engaged students in remote learning through online programs and assignments, only 51 percent engaged students through teacher-led remote instruction. These findings are consistent with the results of a LFC survey of 4,170 New Mexico teachers in which 51.7 percent of teachers indicated engaging students in teacher-led one-to-many virtual instruction.

Changing Responsibilities for Teachers. In addition to learning new strategies to deliver content, school closures required teachers to assume new roles to keep students engaged. Many educators became responsible for providing immediate educational triage, handling new challenges ranging from technology assistance to student and family wellness check-ins. According to the Teach Plus New Mexico survey, during CLP implementation, only 30 percent of educators surveyed were confident they knew what was expected of them. A quarter of educators were unsure or did not know what was expected of them. LFC’s recent teacher survey indicated teachers spent about a quarter of their day in active learning and instruction and the rest of the time engaging in other teacher duties such as planning, professional development, meetings, and connecting with parents and students, with 44 percent of educators surveyed indicating an increase in work compared with a normal school year.

School districts statewide provided students with varied methods of continuous learning including: printed packets, lessons loaded onto flash drives for students or parents to pick up in person, Internet based computer-assisted learning programs, and synchronous or asynchronous virtual teaching via online platforms such as Google Classroom, Canvas, or Blackboard.

Teach Plus, a national non-profit organization with affiliated groups across the United States including New Mexico, works to select and train teachers for leadership roles in education while teachers remain in the classroom. During the physical school closures, Teach Plus New Mexico conducted three surveys, with over 4,000 educators participating.

Allowable expenses for the federal elementary and secondary school education relief fund (ESSER fund) include professional development for educators or families to support remote or distance learning activities. Federal Title II applications were due on May 22. Based on FY21 planning awards, school districts and charter schools in New Mexico have access to \$20.6 million in Title II federal funding which can be used for professional learning for school personnel.



Teacher Supports and Professional Learning. Data shows inhospitable working conditions and a lack of support can contribute to educator attrition. PED issued

PED issued guidance notifying school districts and charter schools teacher evaluation reports for the 2019-2020 school year were not required, a deviation from rule that requires annual evaluations. PED encouraged school districts and schools to use data already collected through the teacher evaluation platform to support educators and provide feedback. Although PED's continuous learning plan assurances document did not specifically ask school districts about teacher evaluations, no school districts' plan mentioned using formal feedback through the teacher evaluation tool. Some school districts said they would be meeting with teachers weekly to assess how plans were working and providing feedback to adapt practices. New elements of the teacher evaluation system are still under review following the conclusion of PED's Teacher Evaluation Task Force in January.

recommendations to school districts encouraging a five-day professional learning plan giving staff time to prepare and learn the technology related to implementing CLPs. See **Attachment 2, PED sample professional learning plan**. Eighty-eight percent of school districts' CLPs demonstrated tailored training aimed at implementing CLPs. A survey of New Mexico superintendents identified some school districts decided to continue with already scheduled professional development. Additionally, school districts reported using their budgeted federal Title II funds or partnering with regional educational cooperatives to provide their staff with additional professional development opportunities. Some school districts reported professional development opportunities did not occur because of the physical building closures or because teachers were already comfortable utilizing continuous learning platforms. According to a Teach Plus New Mexico survey conducted in May, more than half of New Mexico educators surveyed indicated they would appreciate professional development in

strategies for virtual student engagement, making distance learning equitable, prioritizing classroom health and safety upon return, and promoting students' social-emotional health.

COVID-19 and the Potential for Early Retirements

At the conclusion of the May Educational Retirement Board (ERB) meeting, ERB Executive Director Jan Goodwin suggested the state may see more retirees than usual due to COVID-19. Data suggest individuals over the age of 65 and individuals with preexisting conditions that contract COVID-19 are at higher risk of requiring hospitalization or dying, raising concerns for older teachers as they prepare to reenter schools. As of June 19, ERB reported 858 retirement applications, which is somewhat lower than retirements in previous years. However, PED released reentry guidelines the following week; and it is unknown how potential retirees have reacted to the guidelines.

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has promoted a flexible work option for staff who are 65 or older or who have chronic health conditions. The National Education Association (NEA) New Mexico chapter has noted offering early retirement is not a good option as New Mexico is [already facing a shortage of teachers](#). NEA argues few school districts in state were set up with the tools they needed to make the switch to distance learning, and some parts of the state, like the Navajo Nation, have [low rates of access to the Internet](#). NEA New Mexico has suggested making the issue of school reentry a mandatory subject of collective bargaining under state law.

[AFT's national reopening guidance document](#) includes protections for at-risk staff and at-risk students. COVID-19 disproportionately affects people 65 and older and those with underlying chronic health conditions. AFT's guidance stresses reopening plans should consider providing these workers with the option to deliver instruction remotely while students are in the building, with students under the supervision of qualified staff. The document further suggests collective bargaining is the best way to ensure that workers are represented in decision-making and that health and safety standards are established to the benefit of workers and the communities they serve. AFT notes in the absence of collective bargaining, workers and employers can use meet-and-confer arrangements to formalize reopening plans and ensure accountability.

Preparing New Mexico for Successful School Reentry

Similar to the department's rubric for CLPs at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, PED's reentry plan contains a heavy emphasis on keeping students and staff safe and healthy. PED's school reentry framework was founded on three guiding principles:



prioritizing the health and safety of students and staff, maximizing the amount of safe in-person learning opportunities, and making decisions based on science and data. These three values serve as a foundation for eight minimum reentry requirements, and an additional 20 pages of recommended best practices.

PED's model for school reentry separates the state into five geographic regions: northeast, northwest, southeast, southwest, and central. In each of these regions, the department plans to use data analysis spearheaded by Los Alamos National Laboratory and DOH to identify trends in virus transmission. Based on whether the virus is increasing or decreasing in severity, school districts will be categorized into one of the following three reentry models:

- **Remote Learning:** Schools will remain closed, and all content will be delivered remotely, with exceptions for small in-person learning groups for students with special needs, including English learners and students with disabilities.
- **Hybrid Learning:** Schools may open at either 50 percent capacity, or a greater capacity if more students can be accommodated while maintaining six feet of social distancing. Students who are not at school will engage in remote learning. School districts and charter schools have local flexibility to determine how they meet the requirements of the hybrid model.
- **Full Reentry:** All students may return to school full time, but social distancing and preventive measures are still practiced to the greatest extent possible.

Given the differences in the statewide transmission of the virus, a regional model for reopening is an appropriate means to maximizing in-person learning time statewide. School districts should be prepared to operate according to all three models of reentry, and should be prepared if an outbreak of the virus necessitate a transition to the remote or hybrid models.

Assurances for Remote Learning

For the upcoming school year, PED will require school districts and charter schools to submit assurance documents, first vowing that schools will abide by the reentry requirements, but also detailing how schools plan to provide remote learning instruction or make-up instructional hours if a physical school is shut down. The requirements resemble those included in CLPs submitted during initial school closures. It appears PED learned from feedback about the weaknesses of initial CLPs, given that new remote education guidelines include specific sections for extended learning time, attendance, and specific programming requirements for at-risk students.

In addition to PED's school reentry guidance document, the department has released [specific topic-oriented guidance](#) on several issues left unaddressed in the original guidance document. These one- to two-page documents include strategies for career technical education, English learners, bilingual and multicultural education programs, prekindergarten, equity councils, and many other topics.

PED has not yet shared which school districts would be included in each "region" of the state reentry model. PED's reentry guidance notes all schools should expect to begin the school year in the hybrid learning phase.

However, on July 9, the governor announced that due to recent increases in virus transmission rate, some school districts may be required to begin the 2020 school year in the remote learning phase. If COVID-19 cases continue to increase statewide, school reentry could be delayed from the previously announced August 3 to later in the fall, or even the winter.

By July 15, school districts and charter schools must submit a determination to PED on how they will make up instructional time that was lost during the 2019-2020 school year through extended learning time programs, K-5 Plus, or other means determined by the school district or charter school. Both assurances for continuous learning during the closures and for reentry focus on similar high school senior considerations asking school leaders to describe how they will implement flexible graduation requirements and provide support for dual-credit completion. However, PED now requires school districts and charter schools to describe how schools will handle grading, attendance, ensuring student engagement and participation, and using high-quality instructional materials.

Both CLPs and remote learning assurances require school districts and charter schools to demonstrate how they will provide access to devices and connectivity, additional academic support for at-risk students, and expectations on teacher communication. Although CLPs required social-emotional supports and strategies, the new assurances document requires an explanation of how teachers will continue to conduct wellness checks and mandatory report, if necessary. Additionally, the remote assurance asks school districts and charter schools to expand on how they will adopt school-wide social-emotional curriculum, partner with community organizations and provide social emotional training for all school personnel. One final consideration not included in the original CLPs is a description of how school districts and charter schools will collaborate with childcare providers to support families access to childcare.

Social Distancing

Given that there is currently no vaccine for COVID-19, the primary means of combatting its' transmission is limiting contact with others and vigilantly screening for the virus. [Research from the American Society for Microbiology](#) notes COVID-19 spreads primarily through person-to-person contact. As such, social distancing is a “non-pharmaceutical intervention” that can slow the spread of the virus and decrease the number of virus-related deaths. While research on the virus is still in its developing stages, experts tend to agree that as long as the virus remains a threat, people in public spaces should wear face masks, maintain six feet of physical separation, and use physical barriers as often as practicable. As schools prepare to reopen, they will need to tackle these and other questions, including how staff and students will be screened for the virus, and how school facilities will be sanitized after housing a large number of people.

PED guidelines for reentry offer a picture of how students should be transported, but social distancing guidelines become more difficult to maintain on school buses. For instance, PED states no more than two students may sit together on a single bus seat, placing these students much closer than the minimum six feet required in schools. PED encourages schools to “take reasonable steps to limit bus seats to one student,” but doing so would increase the cost of student transportation substantially and require the creation of new bus routes. The guidance recommends, but does not require, screening students and bus attendants for symptoms as they enter the bus. In other countries, parents are encouraged to provide transportation when possible. In all cases, school buses must be strictly cleaned and disinfected at the end of each journey.

PED's guidance for school reentry contains a mixture of requirements and recommendations regarding social distancing in schools, making it difficult to understand what is required for schools to open their doors. Regardless of which reentry phase a school is undergoing, one clear requirement is that all students and staff will be required to wear face masks or face shields except while eating, drinking, and exercising. PED allows exceptions to this requirement for individuals with medical conditions that prevent them from wearing a mask, but does not clearly state conditions that will constitute an exception. Other ambiguities in the reentry guidance further muddy the waters; PED states “schools must adhere to the social distancing requirements” of their reentry category, but it's unclear which specific guidelines in the 25-page document are required, and which are recommendations.

Facility Capacity and Social Distancing: Physical space limitations and staffing will drive how school districts and charter schools plan for reentry. During the hybrid phase of reentry, PED will require schools to operate at either 50 percent capacity, or at a greater capacity if they are able to maintain six feet of distance between students at all times. Some schools, particularly schools in rural areas and elementary schools, may be better poised to tackle this requirement than others. Based on an initial

analysis of PSFA data, LESC staff estimate that excess space at approximately 32 percent of schools serving 18 percent of students statewide may allow these schools to accommodate all of their students during the hybrid reentry phase using only general education classrooms. An additional 50 percent of schools may find success by relying on “flexible” spaces to a greater capacity, including specialty science, art, and music classrooms, career technical education classrooms, computer labs, libraries, cafeterias, and gymnasiums.

Even if ample physical space is available to accommodate all students during the hybrid phase, schools may have a difficult time finding sufficient staffing for all classrooms, especially given the current statewide shortage of licensed educators. Educational assistants and substitute teachers could be used to supervise children in extra spaces, but would need to rotate periodically with students’ regular teachers to ensure students have access to valuable in-person learning time. Even after accounting for some flexible spaces, LESC staff estimate about 17 percent of schools statewide, serving approximately 22 percent of students, will be unable to physically accommodate all of their students with six feet of separation. These schools, many of which are middle schools and high schools and already at- or near-capacity, will need to resort to alternative scheduling to meet the requirements of the hybrid model.

While PED’s reentry guidelines make suggestions on potential scheduling options, school districts will have flexibility to craft schedules that meet the social distancing requirements of the hybrid reentry model. School districts and schools may consider schedules where half of the students attend Monday and Tuesday, schools close Wednesday for cleaning and sanitization, and the other half of students attend Thursday and Friday. School districts may also choose to rotate students attending schools on a weekly basis, or prioritize in-person attendance for younger grade levels or low-income students.

Research-Based Social Distancing Strategies. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released [considerations for schools](#) in May which include social distancing strategies designed to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In addition to cloth face coverings, the CDC recommends that schools stagger their schedules by rearranging arrival and drop-off times, create flexible worksites and hours, and author policies and culture shifts to facilitate social distance. Schools should also pursue modified layouts, like spacing seats at least six feet apart and turning desks to face the same direction, and physical barriers and guides such as sneeze guards at reception areas or physical markings to reinforce six feet of social distance.

While PED’s social distancing guidance contains little distinction between recommendation and requirement, other state plans offer clear checklists for reentry. For instance, [Virginia’s reentry plan](#) includes a required checklist school districts must meet to be considered eligible to reopen. As a mandatory prerequisite for reopening, Virginia school districts must accomplish all of the following:

- a. *Create an education/training plan for staff, students and families. Consider COVID-19 prevention education (hand washing, staying home if ill, etc.). Education should be part of staff and student orientations and be sent to all parties before reopening schools and include:*
 - i. *Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette,*
 - ii. *Use of cloth face coverings,*
 - iii. *Staying home when sick,*
 - iv. *Encouraging physical distancing.*
- b. *Maintain adequate supplies to promote healthy hygiene.*
- c. *Provide signs and messaging to promote healthy hygiene.*

- d. *Promote physical distancing*
 - i. *Modify layouts of classrooms, communal areas and buses to ensure social distancing is maintained.*
 - ii. *Develop strategies for food/dining services; these should be consistent with plans to optimize physical distancing.*
 - iii. *Limit size of gatherings consistent with Executive Orders and impose strict physical distancing during gatherings.*
 - iv. *Follow relevant Virginia Phase Guidance for Schools and CDC guidance for recreational sports for school-related sports and other recreational activities.*

Without sacrificing local control, Virginia’s guidance clearly enumerates steps school districts must take to promote social distancing and follow best practice recommendations from the CDC. Even within the requirements, there remains flexibility and recommendations to allow school districts to describe how each enumerated requirement will be met.

Recently, education finance experts from the Learning Policy Institute [modeled the impacts of declining state revenues](#) on public education, noting preliminary estimates show state revenue declines of between 10 percent and 20 percent. According to the LPI calculator, federal aid for schools would need to increase by \$21 billion in FY21 to hold school districts harmless for a 10 percent reduction in state revenues. LPI estimates FY22 reductions are likely to be even larger and notes education advocates are asking for \$200 billion over the next 3 years. In addition to asking for federal funding, LPI recommends states provide increased flexibility for schools, such as prioritizing formula funding rather than categorical programs to allow school districts greater freedom.

Budgeting for School Reentry: According to information from the School Superintendents Association and the Association of School Business Officials International, a school district with 3,700 students could face additional costs of \$1.8 million to reopen schools, mostly in the form of additional cleaning, nursing, and transportation staff. PED’s reentry guide contains one concrete recommendation for school district and charter school budgets. The department recommends the use of CARES Act funding to purchase digital devices and support Internet connectivity, for use with remote learning models, which comes with significant costs. Under a statewide price agreement, PED recently purchased laptop computers with an educational upgrade for \$249 each.

A Path Forward: Frameworks for Success in the Digital Learning Environment

School districts should create strategic technology plans that broaden access to technology and encourage its effective use. Until COVID-19 no longer poses a threat to students and staff, PED’s school reentry plan will require remote learning for 50 percent to 100 percent of the time. The [National Center for Excellence in Education](#) notes high performing countries had effective responses to the global pandemic because they were initially better prepared for transition to distance learning. New Mexico school districts should plan and prepare processes that recognize the need for greater access to technology and more effective use. The American Enterprise Institute’s seminal report, “[A Blueprint for Back to School](#),” lays out the following action steps:

- *By the beginning of the school year, all students should have the device and connectivity they need to access learning at home, particularly among low-income and rural students.*
- *Schools should have devices and mobile hot spots for students to take home in the event of remote learning. Schools will also need to consider ways of providing technical support in remote learning contexts, including providing just-in-time support for teachers.*
- *Professional development should be tailored to the tools, services, and content districts use.*

- *Teacher evaluations and improvement strategies (including observation, feedback, and coaching) should consider the need to deliver online instruction and be modified accordingly.*

Other states have created powerful frameworks to reimagine remote learning as a useful tool to supplement in-person instruction, rather than a Band-Aid response to the pandemic. For example, [“Launch Nebraska”](#) provides a “Digital Learning Profile and Plan” classifying a hierarchy of digital learning needs beginning with infrastructure and progressing through devices, software, instructional content, and professional development and training. Under each of the criteria, Nebraska provides specific, immediate action steps to help school districts create an effective technology framework. Moreover, the program is founded on clear values, like “equity of broadband Internet access in every home,” “a computing device for every student,” and “effective methods for teaching and learning in a digital world, whether virtual or face-to-face.”

PSFA and PED should support school districts and individual schools in conducting space studies with the goal of maximizing the physical space available for in-person learning time. School districts and individual schools that have not done so already should begin a space study to determine how many students can be served in each classroom while maintaining six feet of social distancing at all times. School districts may even wish to redefine attendance zones to right-size enrollment at each school site. Schools should also decide to what extent it is possible to use flexible spaces like cafeterias, gymnasiums, and libraries. PSFA regional managers should work with school districts to create plans that maximize enrollment, especially those that may struggle finding the capacity to execute a meaningful space study. Schools that open at full enrollment while social distancing should be attentive to other social distancing best practices, and should have stringent cleaning, sanitization, screening, and social distancing requirements.

School districts and charter schools should be prepared for other additional costs related to reopening schools. While few directly address school district budget issues, reentry plans from other states and countries point to several major potential cost drivers: student transportation, cleaning and sanitization, face coverings for students and staff, and the cost of recovering instructional time.

PED, school districts and charter schools should work together to ensure teachers and school personnel have access to responsive professional development. As teachers begin the 2020-2021 school year, professional development should be tailored to support remote instruction, classroom health and safety upon reentry, and addressing students’ social and emotional needs.

PED should issue guidance that addresses how teacher evaluations will occur during the 2020-2021 school year. Even if PED does not require teacher evaluations for the upcoming school year, feedback is necessary for teachers as they continue to teach in new learning environments.

School districts should work with parents and local stakeholders to build plans responsive to needs of the community. Under the hybrid model, school districts will have

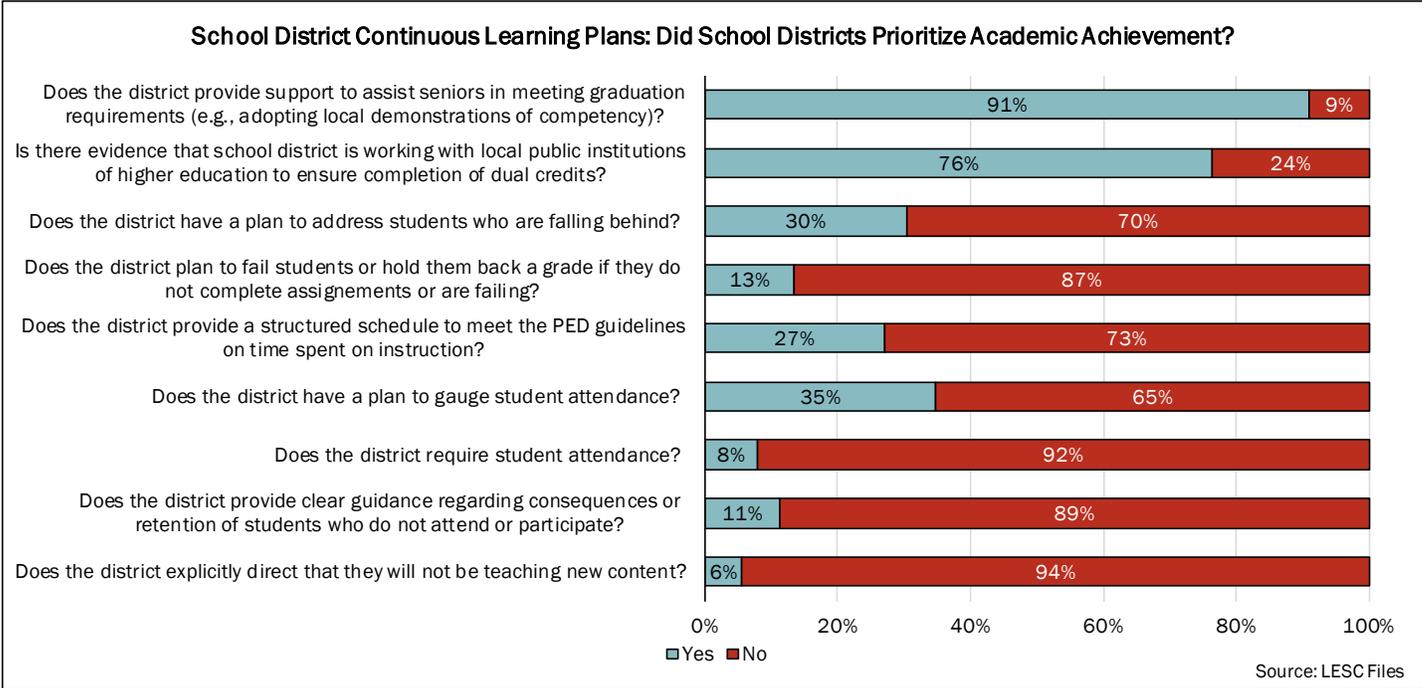
significant flexibility to decide how schedules will be built. While PED’s reentry values emphasize student well-being, school districts should also consider engaging their local communities in building values to prioritize student academic success. School districts should ensure students are held to high standards, regardless of the method of content delivery.

Student Achievement During Remote Learning

Despite the best efforts of stakeholders to mitigate disruption, evidence suggests school closures negatively impacted student learning and other measures of performance. New Mexico’s experience and that of other states, however, offer lessons that can help educators and school leaders address learning loss when schools reopen in the fall.

Continuous Learning Plans and School District Implementation

Instructional Time PED recommended grade-specific maximum times for daily direct instruction. Direct instruction does not encompass student time spent on other forms of remote learning such as project-based learning and independent student work. Although schools can be closed due to a public health emergency, it is unclear if PED has the authority to waive the annual minimum number of instructional hours required by Section 22-2-8.1 NMSA 1978. Statute requires 990 hours for kindergarten through sixth grade and 1,080 hours for seventh grade through 12th grade.



The [Foundation for Excellence in Education](#) found New Mexico was one of only 11 states to allow school districts flexibility to decide how to deliver instruction to students.

Although PED did not require school districts to submit schedules of instructional time, 24 percent of school district CLPs provided a structured schedule that adhered to PED’s recommendations. Several

school districts also submitted detailed weekly teaching schedules with daily blocks of instructional time identified by content area.

PED Daily Instruction Time Recommendations

Compared with Statutory Requirements

	PED CLP Guidance	Statutory Requirement	Percent of Required Time
Prekindergarten	30 min.	N/A	N/A
Half-Day Kindergarten	45 min.	2.5 hours	30%
Full-Day Kinder. and First Grade	45 min.	5.5 hours	14%
Second Grade - Third Grade	60 min.	5.5 hours	18%
Fourth Grade - Fifth Grade	90 min.	5.5 hours	27%
Sixth Grade	3 hours	5.5 hours	55%
Seventh Grade - 12th Grade	3 hours	6 hours	50%

Source: LESC Files

Content and Delivery. [A review by the MIT Teaching Systems Lab](#) found one key point of divergence among state guidance documents was whether to focus on reviewing previously-taught material or teach new material. PED did not explicitly acknowledge this distinction, but recommended instruction focus on critical grade-level standards, as identified by school districts and charter schools. PED suggested that teachers focus on no more than one or two essential learning targets per week, align their instructional planning across grade bands within school districts, and create cross-curricular lessons to maximize efficient use of time. A joint LESC and LFC analysis of all 89 New Mexico school districts' CLPs found only one school district explicitly indicated it would not introduce new content, suggesting most school districts continued to teach new standards-based content. No school district reported aligning instructional planning by grade band across its school sites. Several school districts, including Albuquerque Public Schools, developed plans for cross-curricular lessons, such as having students read a science article and use language arts-based questions to respond in writing.

Attendance and Engagement. PED did not initially provide clear guidance on attendance, but encouraged schools to remain in contact with students and families through texts, phone calls, or emails. In mid-April, PED issued a [memo](#) to school leaders stating the department had waived attendance requirements for the remainder of the school year, including statutory requirements outlined in the Attendance for Success act. This act requires attendance to be taken for every instructional class, as well as for school days, and to document attempts to improve attendance by discussing interventions regarding the student's attendance with stakeholders. The Attendance for Success act further requires school districts to report attendance improvement plans to PED and create an early warning system to identify students who are chronically absent.

Schools report attendance on [reporting dates](#) in October, December, February and at the end of the year in accordance with the public education finance code.

Statute does not appear to give PED the authority to waive attendance requirements, even in the event of state-mandated school closures. PED also directed school districts not to consider attendance for determining chronic or excessive absences, but encouraged schools to monitor students needing additional supports and reach out to students not participating in continuous learning.

APS partnered with local public television station KNME to offer students televised video lessons. However, such lessons may have been underutilized, as feedback indicated parents thought the lessons were "boring," "difficult to sit through," and "below level" for their children.

Although 37 percent of school districts developed plans to gauge student attendance, only 8 percent required attendance during school closures. Results from LFC's teacher survey indicated that schools requiring attendance had higher levels of student engagement, and that an attendance requirement was a stronger factor in predicting

student engagement than socioeconomic status. The survey also found, however, that attendance requirements produced no appreciable difference in the percentage of students who failed to participate in continuous learning at all, suggesting that additional strategies will be necessary to engage these students.

In an effort to address student disengagement, PED partnered with Graduation Alliance to launch ENGAGE New Mexico to provide students with one-on-one academic coaching. Forty-three percent of school districts and charter schools opted to participate, referring 7,422 students for either failing to participate or engaging fully in continuous learning. ENGAGE New Mexico's academic coaches re-established contact with students and offered a variety of supports to re-engage them in learning. Although available data is insufficient to fully gauge the program's impact, PED indicated the program improved student outcomes, such as completion of course requirements and high school graduation.

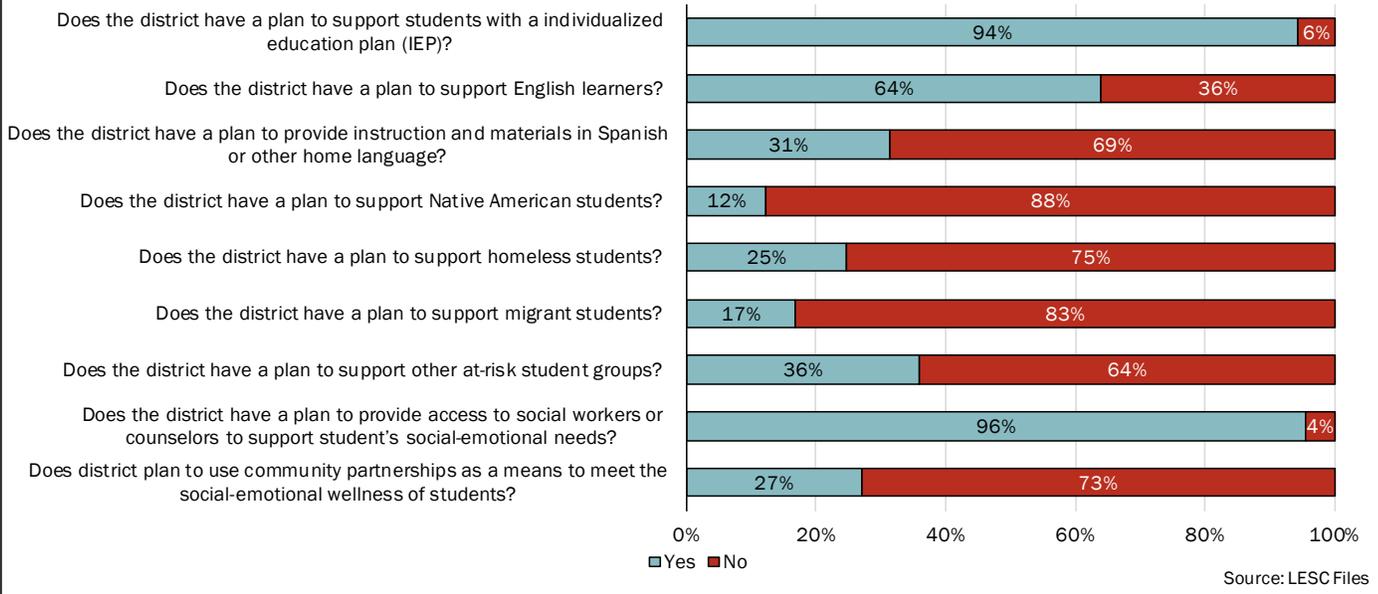
Formative and Summative Assessments. In an effort to avoid penalizing students, PED encouraged school districts and charter schools to focus on student progress rather than assignment completion. The department recommended the use of weekly assignments, projects, and video check-ins as ongoing formative assessments for teachers to gauge student learning. PED also suggested that school districts move to a pass or fail grading system and allow students, particularly high school seniors, to earn credit through locally-developed, competency-based assessments. It is unclear to what extent school districts and charter schools used online platforms to assess students' content mastery. Only 29 percent of school districts developed plans to address students who were not making academic progress, and 12 percent intended to hold back students who did not complete assignments or participate in classes. These findings are consistent with the results of an LFC survey of New Mexico teachers, in which 68.5 percent reported that their school districts had no consequences for students who did not participate in instruction or complete their assignments.

State law requires students to take reading and math assessments in third grade through eighth grade, and again in 11th grade. Science tests are administered in fourth grade, seventh grade, and 11th grade.

Standardized Testing. Following school closures, New Mexico, as did all 50 states, received a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education for standardized testing in the 2019-2020 school year. State law, however, still requires all students to participate in the statewide assessment program. There is no formal process by which PED could request a waiver for state standardized testing requirements. It remains unclear if the department has the legal authority to waive standardized tests.

High School Graduation Requirements. High school graduation quickly became a topic of national concern when the COVID-19 outbreak forced schools to close. PED's guidance emphasized flexibility for high school seniors. Section 22-13-1.1 NMSA 1978 establishes credit requirements for graduation and grants PED authority to establish alternate means for students to demonstrate competency by rule. Section 6.19.7 NMAC outlines alternative demonstrations of competency and authorizes local education agencies to develop standards-based portfolio projects. PED did not waive statutory credit requirements for graduation, but offered seniors an extended deadline of June 19 to fulfill graduation requirements. The department also encouraged school districts and charter schools to develop local alternative options for demonstrating competency. Most school districts described additional support for high school seniors in their CLPs, such as local demonstrations of competency and targeted support for seniors at risk of not graduating.

School District Continuous Learning Plans: Did School Districts Prioritize Student Supports?



Supports for Students with Disabilities and At-Risk Students. PED notified school districts that the federal government did not issue waivers for requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and individualized education plans (IEPs) could not be universally modified. The department directed special education teachers and related service providers to continue to work with students and to complete all necessary IEP and evaluation paperwork within required timelines.

New Mexico schools completed the federally-mandated English language proficiency ACCESS assessment on March 6. PED directed school districts not to administer the W-APT or WIDA English language proficiency screening tool, but stated English learners would be screened at the earliest opportunity during the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year.

PED directed school districts and charter schools to address the needs of English learners (ELs) through the use of appropriate grade-level instructional resources and language supports based on a student's English language proficiency level, and provided recommended times for English language development by grade level:

- Kindergarten through first grade: 30 minutes/week
- Second through third grade: 45 minutes/week
- Fourth through fifth grade: 15 minutes/day or 30 minutes every other day
- Sixth through 12th grade: 30 minutes/day

Plans to support students with IEPs appeared in 95 percent of school district CLPs, but only 58 percent included plans for the provision of EL supports. Moreover, rates of school districts with plans to support other sub-groups dropped precipitously for homeless students (26 percent), migrant students (18 percent), other at-risk students (14.6 percent), and Native American students (13.5 percent). Such low figures may not signal an omission or lapse in services, but could be based on the demographics of enrolled students.

Early Childhood Education. PED offered recommendations for early childhood programs including weekly virtual connections, educational resources for caretakers,

emphasizing daily reading, and creating a predictable daily schedule for all students to follow. CLPs from Los Alamos, Las Cruces, and Albuquerque school districts provide precise guidance to educators in terms of frequency of parent interactions, multiple tools for contact, and multiple online resources. Most CLPs, however, did not include specific guidance around early childhood instruction.

Dual-Credit Courses. Recognizing that the COVID-19 public health emergency also disrupted the operations of institutions of higher education, including dual-credit courses, PED offered students the option to withdraw from dual-credit courses or take an incomplete grade. The department directed school districts to prioritize the needs of high school seniors who required dual-credit courses to fulfill graduation requirements. In their CLPs, most school districts reported working with partner institutions of higher education to ensure students completed dual-credit coursework.

Career and Technical Education. Adapting career and technical education (CTE) instruction to virtual platforms posed a significant challenge for educators nationwide, as CTE courses emphasize practical, hands-on elements. Although PED did not issue specific guidance on CTE instruction, the department required school districts to identify their plan for CTE in their continuous learning plans and offered a two-for-one credit policy for CTE courses, allowing students to earn both CTE elective credit and credit in a related core subject. The Association for Career and Technical Education also offered a suite of free courses to help CTE instructors transition to distance learning. The organization published a variety of other resources, including curriculum materials and soft skill development tools, on their website.

School district plans for CTE courses, as indicated in their CLPs, varied widely and few provided detailed information. Many school districts continued providing CTE instruction through virtual platforms, while others partnered with institutions of higher education to deliver CTE instruction. Some school districts endeavored to design hands-on projects students could complete at home, and several school districts shifted the focus of CTE courses to career exploration and soft-skills development.

Learning Loss Due to COVID-19

Data suggest that the vast majority of students across the country experienced learning loss during the period of remote learning in spring 2020, and those students most at-risk suffered the greatest losses. A recent LFC report found New Mexico children may have lost the equivalent of three months to an entire year of learning. Absences and decreased student engagement lead to learning loss not only in terms of instructional time, but also in diminished rigor and richness of the learning experience. This loss is exacerbated by the deep digital divide that stunts student access to Internet-dependent forms of virtual learning and disproportionately impacts at-risk and low-income students. When face-to-face interaction between teacher and students is replaced by various forms of remote learning, the nature of learning is fundamentally altered. The lack of in-person interaction in remote learning can have detrimental effects for students' academic, social, and emotional development. A Teach Plus New Mexico survey indicated that only 34 percent of

teachers had students interacting with peers through virtual learning, a necessary ingredient for student learning at its fullest.

Measuring COVID-19 Related Learning Loss. A [recent study from the Northwest Evaluation Association](#) (NWEA) anticipated COVID-19-related learning loss projected that most students will return in the fall having experienced 30 percent learning loss in reading and more than 50 percent in math, with students in the upper grades nearly a full year behind expected learning gains. A [report from Brown University's Annenberg Institute](#) similarly predicted students would return in fall 2020 with approximately 32 percent to 37 percent learning loss in reading relative to a typical school year, and with 50 percent to 73 percent learning loss in math. If in-person instruction becomes delayed until January 2021, according to a [McKinsey and Company analysis](#), students would experience an average of seven months of learning loss, with greater losses for at-risk students, expanding the existing achievement gap potentially by 15 percent to 20 percent. Limited or no access to technology amplifies learning loss and disproportionately affects the most vulnerable students.

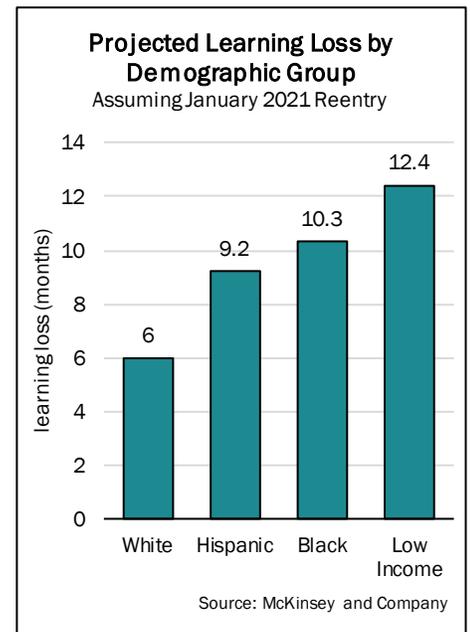
Based on this cumulative body of research and assuming schools reopen in fall 2020, it is reasonable to project that most New Mexico students will have lost 30 percent to 65 percent (or four to eight months) of their learning gains from the 2019-2020 school year. Learning losses can be expected to increase through the grade levels, appear most acutely in math, and affect economically-disadvantaged students most profoundly. In addition, if schools are unable to conduct in-person instruction before the end of the calendar year, learning loss will likely increase.

Measures of College and Career Readiness

Many school districts use 11th grade standardized tests as their primary demonstration of competency, and the cancellation of these exams in spring 2020 may have consequences for the graduating class of 2021. PED acknowledged this concern in a newsletter dated June 18, 2020, and announced the department is working to develop a revised menu of options for the graduating class of 2021. The lack of standardized test scores in 2020 will also impact the state's ability to monitor school performance and the impact of policies, such as extended learning time programs and K-5 Plus.

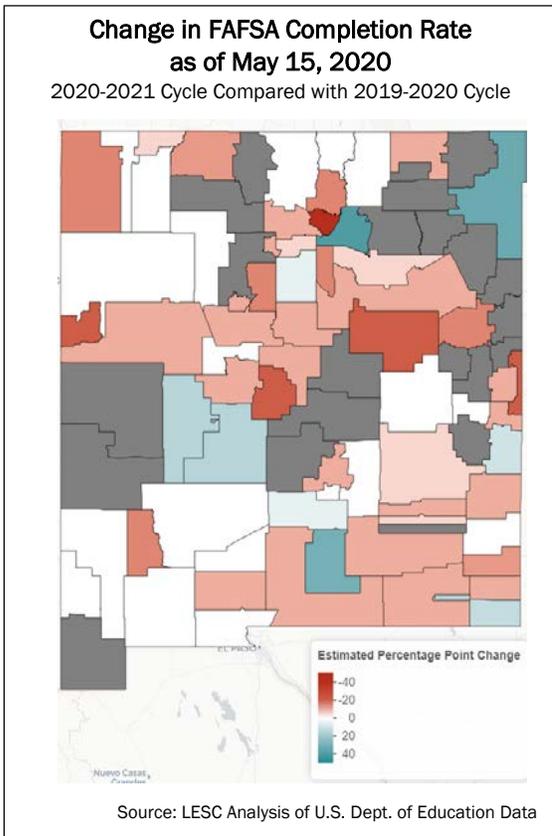
At this time, it is unclear what impact COVID-19 responses had on the administration of dual-credit courses and how many students withdrew or took incompletes for dual-credit courses during the spring 2020 semester. According to Higher Education Department staff, dual-credit data for the spring 2020 semester will be available sometime in July.

Preliminary figures from the College Board show the COVID-19 public health emergency had a significant disruptive effect on exam participation. A combined 43 thousand New Mexico students were registered to take the SAT and PSAT 10 in spring 2020. The College Board cancelled these administrations, and only 29 students took



While the exact degree of learning loss is difficult to predict, research on student learning loss during summer months (commonly referred to as “summer slide”) can be instructive. NWEA found that summer learning loss increases with age through elementary and middle school, and is more pronounced in math than in reading. Other research has also shown that learning losses increase for students from low-income households.

Studies on the impact of other school closures indicated that, after year-long closures caused by Hurricane Katrina, students took at least two years to fully recover their lost learning, and over the subsequent five years 34 percent were held back a grade level.



the SAT in March 2020. In October 2019, New Mexico students registered for 21.3 thousand Advanced Placement (AP) exams. In May and June of 2020, students took around 16.5 thousand exams, 78 percent of the exams students registered for during the fall. Many AP students nationwide reported experiencing technical difficulties, such as being unable to upload photos of their work within the allotted timeframe. The College Board expects to release performance data in late July.

Data published by the U.S. Department of Education reveals Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion rates in many New Mexico school districts are lower this year compared with the same period last year. Many school districts experienced declines between 20 percent and 40 percent, with a pronounced trend emerging in the southeast region of the state. Uncertainty about attending college may partly explain the decline. In a national survey conducted by McKinsey and Company, many high school students reported that COVID-19 has significantly impacted their preparedness for college and ability to afford postsecondary education opportunities.

Prioritizing Student Achievement During School Reentry

Initially, PED’s school reentry guidelines included few recommendations specific to curriculum and instruction. In recent weeks, [a set of one- to two-page guidance documents](#) have been released to address curriculum, the use of assessments, grading, and graduation requirements. PED announced the launch of the New Mexico Instructional Scope (NMIS) on July 16, a tool designed to adjust curricula to meet the Common Core State Standards for math and the English Language Arts (ELA) standards at grade level. PED released complimentary guidance to NMIS, focused on instructional acceleration strategies to address lost learning and getting students on track to grade level.

PED’s guidance for grading during reentry emphasizes using competency-based approaches, student portfolios, and standards-based assessment practices, but leaves it up to the school district to work with parents and students to establish grading policies moving forward.

For graduation requirements, PED’s recently released guidance specifies high school students will be able to continue to earn credits even in a virtual environment through school district virtual curriculum, state charter virtual curriculum, or using a virtual provider as an enrolled home school student. In various communications sent to school leaders in the weeks following school closure, PED encouraged school districts to waive graduation requirements that exceed statutory minimums and consider a two-for-one credit policy for CTE courses. Similar to the CLP submission, school leaders are asked to submit plans on how they will implement flexible graduation requirements, provide support for dual-credit completion, grading policies, attendance practices and use of high-quality instructional materials in a remote learning environment.

For the upcoming school year, PED will provide all public schools formative and interim assessments aligned to state adopted content standards and state summative assessments to provide consistent information to educators on student progress. PED guidance directs school districts and charter schools to establish an academic baseline, using appropriate formative assessments, to gauge where students are and inform instructional choices.

In a hearing before Congress regarding school reentry strategies, former U.S. Secretary of Education, Dr. John King Jr., noted teachers' first step on day one of school should be to assess the COVID-19 learning gap and understand exactly how behind each student has fallen.

The Attendance for Success Act is also addressed in additional guidance PED recently released requiring attendance recorded and reported to PED for in-person participation, but only collected by the school for remote learning participation. PED encourages school districts and schools to develop their own data collection tools and policies around how engagement should be tracked during remote participation and be prepared to report non-engaged students for statewide interventions and support. PED suggests other elements in the act, such as tiered interventions based on absences, are not applicable during distance learning, but teachers should work to provide interventions and supports to ensure student participation. As New Mexico prepares for successful school reentry, lessons can be learned from other state reentry plans centered on student reengagement and achievement, especially related to topics of instructional time, attendance, assessments, credit, and graduation.

School districts and charter schools should take immediate steps upon school reentry to identify and address learning loss. Utilizing standards-based, short-cycle assessments will help school leaders identify gaps in learning and tailor instruction to filling those gaps. Guidance from the [Tennessee Department of Education](#) recommends school districts use benchmarking assessments, diagnostic assessments, and analyses of coursework to determine the current learning needs of all students. The document also suggests school leaders consider formal remediation courses and daily in-school remediation. [Maryland's](#) school reentry guidance document and recommendations from South Carolina's [AcceleratED Task Force](#) encourage school districts to use extended school days, summer school, Saturday learning, and other forms of extended learning time programs to offer credit recovery. The report by MIT recommends school districts continue teaching new material, as maintaining student progress to the greatest extent possible this year will mitigate remediation next year. School districts and charter schools may also consider implementing a “spiraling” approach to instruction, in which educators re-teach prerequisite material and give students repeated exposure to foundational concepts before presenting new course material.

School districts and charter schools should prioritize in-person instruction for at-risk students, young learners, and students in courses that require hands-on learning. In-person instruction is crucial for vulnerable student groups and, according to the [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#), technology-based instruction does not meet the standards of high-quality learning. School districts and charter schools should prioritize in-person instruction for these students while abiding by DOH and state requirements for instructional hours. School districts and charter schools may consider using an alternate model for CTE and other hands-on courses in which

The model of providing virtual instruction and reserving class time for students to complete assignments, sometimes called a “flipped” classroom model, is [recommended by national organizations such as SkillsUSA](#) and already implemented in several CTE schools in other states.

PED’s instructional time recommendations, while significantly shorter than what students would typically receive during a school day, reflected national trends and research-backed approaches.

[Kentucky](#) offered waivers for the seven elective credits required in statute and removed standardized tests and end of course exams from graduation requirements. [Maryland](#) offered waivers to exempt seniors from graduation requirements including assessments, community service, and practical application hours for several CTE programs of study.

students receive instruction virtually and complete projects and other assignments in the classroom. Given that New Mexico schools will begin the 2020-2021 school year using a blended instruction model, it will be important to make effective use of limited classroom time. Many states, [including Kansas](#), recommended shortened blocks of instructional time that increase with grade level. MIT’s study concluded widespread obstacles to online access and other constraints of living in a pandemic will make it impossible for many students, especially in the lower grades, to participate in remote instruction for as long as they would in a typical school day. The study did not find any states urging schools to maintain typical, full-day schedules.

PED should require school districts and schools to report and track attendance, even during periods of remote learning. Most states, responding to the severe burdens created by the transition to remote learning, passed laws or changed state policies allowing waivers for attendance, assessment, and grade promotion. Section 5 of Article XII of the New Mexico constitution requires every child of school age to attend school and the School Attendance for Success Act provides for the prevention of absences through early warning systems. Instead of only requiring official attendance tracking and reporting for in-person participation, PED should require school districts to incorporate in-person, hybrid, and remote attendance tracking and interventions in accordance to the School Attendance for Success Act into their reentry plans to improve student engagement. By enforcing the law, PED will cultivate stronger student engagement.

School districts should assemble working groups to reengage students with in-person and virtual attendance lower than 80 percent. PED can capitalize on experience with turnaround school programs like Principals Pursuing Excellence to create cohorts of schools or school districts struggling with attendance challenges so that leaders can problem solve attendance solutions through collaboration.

PED should continue to encourage school districts and charter schools to modify local graduation requirements for the 2020-2021 school year so as not to exceed statutory requirements. Given the significant learning loss the COVID-19 pandemic has caused, it is prudent to focus instruction on essential learning and benchmarks before offering enrichment. Many other states took this measure in spring 2020 and some offered school districts waivers for certain statutory credit requirements, typically elective credits. PED should consider developing official guidance on graduation requirements for the graduating class of 2021. A [policy update](#) by the National Association of State Boards of Education highlights several changes to graduation policies enacted by other states. For instance, many states allowed school districts to waive graduation requirements that exceed state minimums, while other states required this action. Some states went as far as waiving required credit hours or the requirement that a certain number of instructional hours accompany each credit.

School districts and charter schools should consider increasing instructional time and leveraging extended school time programs to provide credit recovery opportunities. During special session, the Legislature directed PED to work with school districts and charter

schools to prioritize additional instructional time in the upcoming school year to recover time that was lost due to the public health emergency. School districts and charter schools that add 10 instructional days to the FY21 calendar will receive additional funding, and any school district or charter schools that does not apply for an extended learning time program will need to provide written notification to LESC, LFC, and PED detailing how the school district or charter school will recover lost instructional time. Increasing instructional time, either by eliminating extended breaks or increasing the number of instructional days or hours, can mitigate effects of learning loss. Guidance documents from other states encourage schools to offer credit recovery and remediation before and after school, during the summer, and on weekends. To simultaneously make up learning lost in the spring 2020 semester and progress academically, some extended learning time will likely be necessary.

Student and Staff Health and Wellness as Priorities

School closures, despite being an evidence-based strategy to combat the spread of COVID-19, can cause a range of unintended hardships for students who rely daily on school systems for a host of health and wellness services such as: free or reduced-fee meals, physical and mental health care, or environments for student's emotional and physical safety. Safely reopening public schools will require school administrators to venture into uncharted territory, which comes with additional expenses.

Impact of Distance Learning on Student Mental Health

Research shows peer interactions are critical for a student's academic and social emotional development. In a national survey of teenage students, one-quarter of respondents reported feeling disconnected from their classmates and entire school communities. A recent medical journal article concluded that prolonged lack of in-person contact with classmates, friends, and teachers has problematic and enduring effects on the mental health of students. These effects were found to be greater for children and adolescents who had pre-existing mental health issues, with approximately 83 percent of these students indicating that their conditions worsened since the COVID-19 physical school closures. A May 2020 United Nations policy brief conveyed similar findings for school-age children in Italy, Spain, and Great Britain, citing lack of social connections as a key factor in these students' declining states of mental and emotional health.

In May, the U.S. Census Bureau reported 47 percent of the nation's households experienced a loss in employment income, 42 percent expressed concerns over food security, and nearly 39 percent deferred needed health care services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, a recent national survey of 3,300 teenage students found increasing levels of depression and feelings of disconnection during the physical school closures.

According to the MIT Teaching Systems Lab report, attention to a multiplicity of student needs, such as social-emotional care and mental health support was a primary area of consensus among the continuous learning guidance issued by states' education departments. The Education Commission of the States (ECS) indicated a series of common practices among states related to student health and wellness, including the provision of health hotlines, access to telehealth, and mobile apps to help families find behavioral health assistance.

Limited access to peers marks a significant deviation from normal school life and may affect students' mental health. In the Teach Plus New Mexico survey, only 34 percent of teachers indicated their schools were providing opportunities for students to

engage with each other virtually in their learning. As plans for the reopening of schools unfold and some form of remote learning appears likely, policymakers, educators, and parents should bear in mind the harmful impact that this form of instruction can have on students' social-emotional development and mental health, and should come up with ways to increase peer interaction during extended periods of remote learning.

Focus on Student Mental Health. PED's guidance urged schools to prioritize physical and emotional well-being by ensuring continued access for students and families to school counselors and other mental health professionals. The department also recommended that school staff provide parents with lists of outside mental health resources and conduct regular check-ins with students through various forms such as Google Form, phone calls, or a virtual platform. PED released a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) sheet, indicating the existence of community partnerships offering resources such as a statewide mental health crisis hotline and a collaboration between Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD) and the Human Services Department (HSD) to ensure students and families have access to telehealth from Medicaid-funded providers.

All but one school districts CLP included specific school-based practices to provide students and families access to social workers or counselors to support social-emotional needs, representing the highest positive response rate for any single element in school district CLPs. The most common practice was maintaining direct

PED's guidance maintains a heavy focus on rebuilding students' social and emotional health through school-based care and behavioral health providers. The National Association of School Psychologists recommends schools and school districts implement a [social and emotional well-being screening](#) upon students return to school. These screenings should include concrete goals like identifying students that may need follow-up, identifying the capacity needs of a school or school district, and developing a system to provide tiered interventions. In lieu of formal screening, school employed-mental health professionals should establish informal check-ins with all students especially in times of virtual learning. Additionally, recommendations include establishing a process to help identify and provide support for students and staff that have a higher risk for significant stress or trauma from COVID-19.

The University of Washington's Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences provided school district wide preparation recommendations for the schools in their state. The accompanied [checklist](#) included steps that relied heavily on a multi-tiered system of support. Within the first tier of this model, universal screening and the promotion of mental health and wellness are heavily emphasized.

contact with individual students through various remote means of daily, or most commonly, weekly "check-ins" with a school counselor or other mental health professionals. Strategies ranged from texting and phone calls to coordinated modes of telehealth. In addition, 24 percent of school districts intended to use community partnerships as a means to expand student and family access to mental health services in support of students' social-emotional needs. The most common practice school districts implemented was contracting with local health clinics for referrals to appropriate providers, while a handful of school districts provided students and families with online teletherapy through platforms such as TheraNest.

With New Mexico already among states with the highest incidences of adverse childhood experiences, there is a need for schools to enhance their resources in the area of student and family support. Yet, critical support staff related to student behavioral health is lacking. While adding positions may not be a fiscally-viable option, school systems should find ways to provide these supports via staffing adjustments, shifting existing funds to pay for more counselors, or identifying alternative resources. With some form of distance learning likely to remain in place for the next school year, schools must also consider additional methods to detect instances of child maltreatment, such as consistent virtual check-ins with staff for periods when school staff and students remain remote.

Student Nutrition During Physical School Closures

During the COVID-19 pandemic, while learning and all forms of student supports shifted to remote delivery, the nation's schools became emergency feeding systems for their local communities. On March 20, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced a series of flexibilities, allowing states to modify their school nutrition programs' normal procedures by waiving the requirements that meals must be served in group settings and permitting school program operators to modify service times. These federal waivers enabled states to implement a number of different models to feed students during school closures such as:

- Implementing “grab-and-go” sites where families pick up meals at schools or community hubs through curbside pickup;
- Adapting bus routes to deliver food to student households; and
- Using partnerships with nonprofits or private sector entities to supply home-delivered meals.

Guidance from PED indicated schools were expected to distribute meals to students during the period of physical school closures. All public school districts and charter schools were required to submit feeding plans that included days, dates, locations, and hours during which they planned to distribute meals. Though food distribution was not directly addressed in school district CLPs, many school districts in more populated areas of the state utilized grab-and-go models as their method of distributing daily meals and instructional packets to students. In addition, PED provided flexibilities to permit local educational agencies to distribute daily meals to all children under the age of 18 in the household (or over 18 if still enrolled in a public school) and to allow small, rural school districts to distribute meals for more than one day at a time.

An LESC survey of superintendents indicated that many small, rural school districts did not incur any substantial additional costs due to their school-closure food distribution programs, citing their ability to rely on food already on hand before purchasing additional supplies for continued meal preparation. However, many school districts (urban, rural, large, and small alike) experienced increased expenses, primarily related to added costs of pre-packaged meals, the need to purchase disposable food containers, and, in a few cases, paying salaries and benefits for food service staff to prepare meals during spring break.

However, school districts do not know if they will be able to recoup all of these additional expenses because under typical program rules, schools are reimbursed for each student meal. According to PED's guidance, school districts with at least 50 percent of students eligible for the free and reduced-fee lunch (FRL) program would be reimbursed by the federal government for 100 percent of the cost of meals served to students during the closures. Subsequently, PED received a waiver from USDA for the 50 percent FRL

PED and HSD jointly administered the Pandemic-EBT program, a USDA initiative to provide eligible families with monthly supplemental food assistance and daily school-based meals. In New Mexico, families of the 244,868 eligible students would receive \$5.70 per child, per day for the 70-day school closure period from March 16 through June 19, 2020. As of May 18, 36 percent of eligible children in New Mexico received payments, a lower-than-ideal rate, but more than twice as high as the national average of 15 percent. HSD indicated the primary challenge has been getting accurate student home addresses from PED's STARS database.

A recent [study](#) estimated that 200 thousand allegations of child maltreatment went unreported nationally this past March and April. This estimate reflects similar findings on declines in reports historically during summer months, illustrating the critical role school personnel play in reporting cases of child abuse and neglect. These trends have appeared in New Mexico as well, with CYFD, confirming a 49 percent drop in reports in April 2020 (compared with April 2019) and a 39 percent decline in May 2020 (compared with May 2019), outpacing the state's usual 30 percent decline for a typical summer.

reimbursement threshold, allowing all school districts in the state to receive federal reimbursements for these costs regardless of their FRL rate. Nevertheless, given PED's expectation for schools to report daily meal counts to the department, when schools are serving meals in bulk to households with several children, it can be challenging to accurately track how many meal equivalents they are providing.

Although grab and go was the most common model of meal distribution, it raises concerns about accessibility for all families and the need for schools to balance both location and storage capacity when choosing distribution sites. States and school districts might also need to consider how to provide meal service into the summer or on weekends and whether to include other supplies, such as toilet paper and toiletries, in their distributions. As the pandemic continues and the likelihood of future school closures looms, policymakers should be thinking about other methods of supporting children and families, such as continuing participation in the Pandemic-EBT program (if funding is renewed by Congress), increasing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, and utilizing other existing support programs.

Meals Following School Reentry. PED's mealtime guidance expects schools to continue adhering to social distancing guidelines, but offers only limited guidance for how this service can be accomplished. According to the Learning Policy Institute (LPI), other countries have already tackled these questions using a few simple policies. School districts and schools should consider using students' desks as a preferred lunch setting. While this may necessitate serving pre-packaged lunches, classrooms will already be set up to maintain social distance, and teachers can monitor students to ensure food and utensils are not shared, per PED recommendations. In cafeterias, seating should be spread to maximize social distance. Moreover, schools should consider assigned seating, or sending students to eat with the same homeroom group each day.

Health Screening as a Tool for COVID-19 Mitigation

A primary danger of COVID-19 is the virus' incubation period, where an infected person may carry the disease while only displaying limited-to-no symptoms. For this reason, the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) recommends that schools engage in symptom screening, temperature checks, and planning protocols for when a student or school staff member becomes sick with COVID-19. PED guidance provides a clear requirement that "all staff must be screened on a daily basis, including a temperature check and a review of potential symptoms." Additionally, the guidance recommends that students be screened "to the greatest extent feasible," and offers a list of protocols that should be followed when students or staff at schools become sick.

PED's guidance does not recommend strategies that balance the need for testing with the limited resources available to schools and school districts. Conversely, other countries and states have implemented strong, detailed screening practices. In [California](#) and [Maryland](#), schools are instructed to identify specific individuals who will be trained to conduct screenings, generally relying on school nurses when possible. Other states and countries have provided their schools with supplies to conduct screenings, like the [Tennessee Emergency Management Agency](#) which announced they will provide one thermometer per 40 students to each school in the

state. According to the LPI, other countries have even trained students and parents to conduct daily screenings from home and report the results to school officials. Colorado’s Department of Education provides [a self-screener checklist](#) to help determine if in-person instruction should occur that day, but it does not take the place of the required on-site screener. PED recommends educating parents to be on the alert for signs of illness in their children and to keep the children home when they are sick.

Cleaning and Sanitization for School Reentry

As the body of research on COVID-19 grows, guidance continues to emerge on how schools can effectively combat the spread of the virus with routine cleaning and sanitization. The [CDC states](#) that individual particles of the virus can exist on surfaces and objects, but can die naturally within hours to days. There is also some evidence to suggest particles of the virus exposed to sunlight or warm temperatures die more quickly. However, routine cleaning with soap, water, and [disinfectants approved by the Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA) dramatically reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19. In addition, the American Academy of Pediatrics [recommends that critical staff model behaviors](#) to promote hand hygiene, particularly among younger children.

PED’s guidance for school reentry thoroughly covers best practices for cleaning and disinfecting surfaces, but does not mandate schools to engage in any particular practice to limit the spread of the virus. Recommendations to schools and school districts include statements like “teach and reinforce good hygiene measures” and “provide hand soap and hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol,” but do not contain any mechanism to ensure school districts will follow through with best practices.

Many other states and countries have established cleaning standards as they prepare to reopen schools, with requirements that range in strictness from mandated standards to recommended best practices. For example, [New Jersey](#) will require schools to establish a set of standards that meet a minimum benchmark, including opening windows to allow for greater air circulation, designating time on a daily schedule reserved for handwashing, and installing hand sanitizer dispensers in bathrooms, classrooms, and near building entrances and exits. Some countries have incorporated the importance of handwashing into children’s daily lessons, with Singapore going as far as to introduce [“cartoon heroes”](#) to reinforce the lessons.

School districts and schools should establish designated personnel to conduct daily health screenings for all students and staff. Screeners should be trained on how to assess symptoms. Additionally, information should be shared with parents and students on how to conduct screenings at home. School districts and schools should conduct additional social and emotional health screenings as students reenter schools to identify major traumas that may have occurred during the public health emergency, including lost loved ones, significant disruptions to lifestyle, family-based trauma, or any other mental health challenges.

PED, school districts, and charter schools should use federal CARES Act funding to purchase soap, disinfectants, and personal protective equipment. CARES Act funding is specifically designed to deal with the increased cost of operating a school during the COVID-19 pandemic, making it an appropriate source of funding for nonrecurring cleaning supply expenses due to the virus.

Family Communication and Tribal Collaboration

Family and community communication are vital tools during a public health emergency to set expectations and make students and families aware of available support. During COVID-19 school closures, families became a large gating factor in determining whether students were able to attend and stay engaged in lessons. Moreover, building a school reentry plan responsive to the needs of the community is paramount given the regional differences in virus outbreaks. The state stands to learn several lessons about family and community engagement in the wake of the virus.

There is a strong correlation between student engagement and family communication. A [Harvard University Graduate School of Education study](#) showed the positive effect this has on teacher-student relationships, expanded parental involvement, and increased student motivation. [PED's online learning success guide](#) identifies self-motivation and self-discipline to be crucial to online learning success – factors of student success that greatly benefit from increased parental engagement. Since students will likely learn virtually at least half of the time, students in a hybrid model of learning will greatly benefit from a consistent family communication plan. Clear communication between schools and parents regarding expectations and guidelines will be essential in establishing a healthy learning environment as schools reopen in the fall. School leaders will need to ensure effective communication plans are developed for students, families, and other stakeholders which are a key component of reopening plans.

Connecting with Families During School Closures. PED recommended using multiple communication strategies to reach families during school closures, including text messages, automatic phone calls, radio announcements, press releases, press conferences, and emails. CLP guidance instructed schools to provide communication in languages representative of their student population. Thirty percent of CLPs planned to provide materials in Spanish or another home language. School district CLPs included sections on how to keep families informed and engaged. Albuquerque Public Schools, for example, offered teachers webinar training on “Family Engagement: Building Relationships with Families During Distancing,” required weekly office hours and required sample schedules be provided to families. To support school staff when reaching to families, PED provided a [wellness check-in framework](#).

Engaging with Families During Hybrid Learning. PED guidance for school reentry mirrors recommendations provided during spring school closures. Creating plans to communicate regularly with families in multiple languages is mentioned throughout the official guidance. Supporting documents continue to be published by PED and include reentry [family guidance FAQs](#), one-pagers on preventing COVID-19 spread, and CYFD resources, which all can be shared with families.

Maryland and Virginia encourage schools to implement communication plans prior to the start of the school year. [Maryland's Together Recovery Plan](#) provides schools with clarity on communication methods, frequency of stakeholder engagement, an implementation timeline and coordination to encourage school districts to establish regular channels of communication. [Virginia's Recover. Redesign. Restart. Plan](#) includes family outreach as a key reopening equity strategy and provides guidance for school administrators to create clear communication protocols. While PED school reentry guidance provides communication resources, the department may want to consider constructing a comprehensive toolkit for parent engagement.

Tribal Consultation and Collaboration

New Mexico's tribes, pueblos, and nations retain a unique political and legal status as set forth in constitutional law, treaties, executive orders, and court decisions. The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires school districts with an enrollment of at least 50 percent Native American students to ensure meaningful consultation with tribes as a way to gather input from tribal organizations. In addition, many states, including New Mexico, have their own laws that require state-level agencies to consult with tribal governments regarding programs that directly affect tribal members, primarily by soliciting tribal input and feedback. New Mexico's [State-Tribal Collaboration Act](#) calls for the promotion of effective communication and collaboration between state agencies and Indian nations, tribes, and pueblos, as well as positive government-to-government relations between tribal nations and the state. However, it remains an open question to what degree such consultation actually represents a two-way street that allows for substantive contributions from tribes on important decisions that affect their communities.

During school closures, only eight of the 23 school districts that PED has previously identified as serving a significant population of Native American students or have tribal lands located within their school boundaries, discussed a plan to support Native American students in their CLPs. PED's 31-member [school reentry task force](#) included only two members representing the state's tribal communities. PED's reentry recommendations focus on communication, including working with tribal and pueblo leaders on unique issues they are faced with in their schools and communities. However, it remains an open question to what degree such consultation actually honors the autonomy of tribal nations to determine their own affairs and make important decisions that affect their communities.

For school reentry, consultation between tribes and states with the highest percentages of Native American residents varied from no consultation in Idaho and Oklahoma, to very minimal in Montana, North Dakota, Arizona, Wyoming, and Washington, to extensive directives from state education agencies in [Alaska](#) and [South Dakota](#) requiring school districts to communicate and collaborate with tribal nations accompanied by details on how such consultation could proceed.

Special Considerations for Reentry Collaboration

On April 29, 2020, later revised on June 25, 2020, PED published [guidance](#) to school districts on improving internet connectivity on tribal lands. Providing devices and Internet hotspots for students and training teachers to facilitate online instruction, as well as middle- and long-term solutions, building partnerships with local Internet service providers and building systematic approaches to the digital divide are short-term solutions the guidance offers. The document notes that since April, PED's Indian Education Division has purchased 700 residential hotspots for residences on the Navajo nation, 101 mobile hotspots to be placed statewide in teacherages, chapter houses, and other public spaces, and nearly 6,300 Chromebooks for Native American students statewide.

During the COVID-19 health emergency many federal and state government agencies have failed to consult with tribes on priorities to ensure the well-being of Native Americans whose communities have been among the hardest hit by the pandemic. Across the nation, some federal and state health agencies [refused to give Native American tribes](#) and organizations representing them access to data showing how COVID-19 is spreading around their lands. The CDC, as well as states such as Michigan and Massachusetts, have turned down tribal epidemiologists' requests for data related to rates of infection and testing—critical baseline information that is readily made available to every state.

PED is currently working with tribal communities statewide to install equipment and train students and staff to use it.

PED's school reentry guidance offers special considerations for collaboration with tribal communities, asking school districts to "consult with local tribal and pueblo leaders...on how to best communicate and collaborate with their communities," and "identify a point of contact for each Native American tribe, pueblo, nation and urban Native American organization to share school information." However, without a mechanism to hold school districts accountable for creating meaningful tribal collaboration, PED's school reentry guidance provides little assurance that Native American communities will be engaged in the construction of effective school reentry plans.

PED should offer school districts clear guidance to help them create predictable and effective communication plans. PED has an opportunity to help schools strengthen relationships with families and other community stakeholders by elaborating on the points offered in the released reentry guidance. Examples of this include checklists for family communication or resources community engagement around best practices.

School districts should capitalize on already existing structures to expand communication on a biweekly or monthly basis. Across New Mexico, school boards meet on a monthly basis, offering a built-in mechanism to communicate school updates to parents and community members. PED can partner with school districts to provide state wide COVID-19 updates. School boards can allow for a set time every meeting to provide updates and relevant COVID-19 information to parents and community members. Seventy-seven percent of schools in New Mexico receive Title 1 funding and are required to have parent action committees, which can be leveraged to provide feedback on current parent communication structures.

PED, school districts, and charter schools must engage in regular, timely, and meaningful consultation with tribes, pueblos, and nations on decisions that directly affect their communities. Consultation will be critical in the effort to forge and implement a functional school reopening plan that is in the best interest of tribal communities. Such efforts must be regular, timely, and must consider and incorporate tribal views. Any consultation between tribes and the state must be a mutual endeavor to cooperate and collaborate in good faith, and should adhere to social distancing protocols while in the midst of the on-going pandemic.

NMPED guidance to school leaders during physical school closures

Governor Lujan Grisham declares a state-wide public health emergency due to COVID-19.

Governor Lujan Grisham directs the closure of all public schools until April 6th, 2020.



March 11

March 17



PED offers testing extensions for alternative licensed teachers and level 1CS licenses for educators to complete tests while working in the classroom next year.

PED directs educator preparation programs to waive three weeks of student teaching and suggests alternative methods to earn observation hours.



March 13

PED encourages superintendents to send weekly packets with licensure renewal forms to the Licensure Bureau to mitigate challenges of form submission during the public health emergency.

PED shares links to distance learning toolkits for educators and families, as well as other resources.



March 19

March 20

PED shares a one-pager on taking care of mental health during isolation, talking to children about COVID-19, and countering virus-related stigma.

Governor Lujan Grisham orders nonessential entities to close beginning March 24, restricts mass gatherings, and advises New Mexico citizens to stay at home and undertake only those outings absolutely necessary for their health, safety, or welfare.



March 23

March 23



PED announces its application to the U.S. Department of Education for waivers from federal testing and accountability requirements for the 2019-2020 school year.

PED provides guidance documents on continued meal service, flexibility on food distribution, reimbursement opportunities for staff working over spring break, and worker PPE availability.



March 24

March 24



PED shares guidance documents from the Human Services Department on Medicaid school based services including allowable activities for school district staff and contractors in relation to individual education plans (IEP) and Medicaid billable services.

PED provides guidance on dual-credit courses, offering students the option to withdraw or take an incomplete and encouraging school districts to prioritize seniors who need a dual-credit course to graduate.



March 24

March 24



PED shares links to continuous learning plan implementation guide and school district assurances document, and announces Zoom calls for school leaders to learn more about CLPs.

Governor Lujan Grisham directs the closure of all public schools for the remainder of the 2019-2020 academic year.

PED staff offer additional assistance to school districts to meet the needs of at-risk students including students with disabilities, English language learners, students who are economically disadvantaged and Native American students.



April 1

April 1



PED shares links to additional CLP documents, including an FAQ on special education, guidance for family check-ins and social-emotional wellness, and tips for learning in Spanish.

PED's Licensure Bureau announces a new online licensure application and payment system.

PED shares that recent guidelines from the Department of Health allows families to pick up school meals without the presence of the student.

PED states driver's education courses must be fully completed and provides a contact for questions related to driver's education.

NMPED guidance to school leaders during physical school closures

Governor Lujan Grisham extends the emergency health order to April 30, limiting occupancy at essential entities and encouraging New Mexicans to wear face coverings.

PED responds to questions from the April 2 superintendent's call, touching on topics such as technology access, budgetary concerns, and extended learning.



April 2

PED shares additional resources for CLPs related to at-risk students.

April 6



PED directs school districts to provide meals until the last day of the instructional calendar.

PED provides updates and deadlines for the ELTP, Community Schools, and 21st Century Sites grant programs.

PED shares guidance regarding continued pay, services and training for transportation staff and contractors.



April 7

PED announces a live Q&A to discuss Advanced Placement exams.

April 9



The 2020 New Mexico Teacher of the Year starts sending Teacher to Teacher emails to educators across the state to provide resources, encouragement, self-care, aimed to build community among educators.

Educational Testing Center (ETS) announces an option for teacher-candidates to complete licensure exams through "Praxis at Home."

PED's Professional Licensure Bureau launches an online licensure application and payment system.

PED issues a memo to school leaders regarding waiving the requirements for student attendance and reporting requirements tied to the Attendance for Success Act.

April 13

April 16



PED sends school leaders an "Educators Guide to Managing Stress and Emotional Health During COVID-19 Crisis."

PED provides school leaders an updated list of high-quality instructional materials for distance learning.

PED receives approval from the U.S. Department of Education for waiver requirements and flexibilities related to Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant awardees and funding during the 2019-2020 school year.



April 14

PED sends correspondence to Superintendents, Charter Leaders and Business Managers regarding the importance of cross-training staff for critical tasks in the event someone had to take a medical absence due to COVID-19.

April 17



PED highlights the new state resource NMConnect, a phone app that provides free 24-hour crisis and non-crisis support and access behavioral health professionals.

The U.S. Department of Education grants PED a waiver to bypass assessment and accountability requirements under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

April 21

PED announces several virtual College and Career Signing Days including a "STEM Signing Day" for graduating seniors pursuing higher education in STEM fields.

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards announces extensions for submissions without incurred costs to the applicant due to COVID-19.



April 20

New Mexico's Higher Education Department offers graduates blockchain-based digital diplomas for easy verification for employers, schools and governments.

PED shares Advanced Placement Exams will be given May 11th to 22nd and make-ups will be held June 1st to 5th.

April 23

PED announces ENGAGE NM. In partnership with the Graduation Alliance, this program aims to provide one-on-one support for students who failed to engage during continuous learning plan implementation.

ACT announces a flexible schedule for summer 2020 test dates and test-at-home options for fall/winter 2020.

PED works with school district's on ideas to celebrate graduating high school seniors.

CONTINUOUS LEARNING PLAN IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

Professional Learning to Prepare for a Continuous Learning Plan

Below is a sample five-day plan to prepare for implementation of a Continuous Learning Plan. The sample plan is a resource for districts to modify and use as appropriate and is not a requirement.

Prior to Five Day Plan

- Ensure you have worked with all stakeholders including: teacher leaders, special education departments, technology, and bilingual education departments, food service, local education leaders, etc., and involve them in discussions and decision making
- Send out surveys about the availability of technology
- Review survey results
- Identify teacher leaders in curriculum and technology integration
- Identify learning platforms or systems that are already in place that teachers will use

Five Day Plan

Day 1

- District/Charter administration meets
 - Review survey results
 - Establish continuous learning philosophy, expectations, and overview
 - Problem solve local issues such as Internet access and availability of materials
 - Upon approval from building administration, a small group of educators might come into district offices or schools to prepare and support special education students, students without Internet access, and specific content area needs.
- Develop a more detailed schedule for professional learning for the following days
- Plan with teacher leaders to lead their teams and provide technology training

Day 2

- School-wide staff meeting through a video conferencing platform such as Zoom, Go-To meeting, WebEx, or a conference call.
 - Establish philosophy, expectations, and broad overview
 - Share results of surveys or information you have gathered and plans for continued food service, IEP services, child care, and technology with whole staff
- Via virtual connection, meet in grade bands (PreK-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12) or, for high school, content areas and pathways (e.g. CTE tracks).
 - Establish norms for student and teacher time and workload expectations
 - Establish a singular communication platform, learning management systems, and content delivery methods (limit diversity of options to create coherence across all ages).
 - Determine essential outcomes to focus on while adhering to the continuous learning philosophy of workload expectations (establish the critical outcomes necessary for the remainder of year)
- Train staff on technology
- Administration communicates with school community

CONTINUOUS LEARNING PLAN IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

- Expectations, philosophy, and plan
- How and where to pick up breakfast and lunches during extended closure
- When to expect communication from teachers and who will receive the communication
- How students will get materials and technology if needed -- plans for delivery and pick up of paper learning packets (consider aligning with grab and go lunch pick-ups).

Day 3

- Small group virtual work time
 - Plan lessons
 - Create content and upload to devices when appropriate
 - Continue working on essential outcomes (focus on critical outcomes; prioritize quality over quantity)
- Share content with cross-functional teams or whole staff
 - Offer each other the ability to reflect on expectations
 - Ensure you are able to continue collaborating on best practice
 - Share how students will demonstrate their learning
- Virtual whole staff meeting
 - Answer new questions that have come up
 - Collaborate and problem solve
- Train staff on technology (could be done virtually, using links shared for app support)

Day 4

- Work time
 - Plan lessons
 - Create content and upload to devices when appropriate
- Meet in grade levels and content bands
 - Share content
 - Reflect on expectations
 - Continue collaborating on best practice
- Educators should begin to implement outreach; communicate with students and guardians
 - Establish expectations
 - Detail what students will need in order to be successful (materials and technology)
 - Administration should have a plan to begin to think about how they will track this

Day 5

- Virtual whole staff meeting
 - Answer final questions
 - Problem solve any new challenges
- Teacher prep time
 - Plan lessons
 - Create content and upload material as appropriate
 - Answer questions from teachers and students
- Virtually collaborate with grade level or content teachers as needed