



Schools in 25 counties may launch hybrid model Sept. 8

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Others must wait for improved public health conditions

SANTA FE — School districts and charter schools in 25 New Mexico counties have been cleared to begin a hybrid mode of learning that allows students from pre-K through fifth grade to come to school two days a week wearing face masks and staying at least 6 feet away from others.

A complete list of districts and charters that have cleared strict safety reopening criteria from the state Public Education Department and may choose to reopen as soon as Tuesday, Sept. 8, in the hybrid mode will be posted on the PED website Friday.

Public Education Secretary Ryan Stewart made the announcement at a virtual news conference Thursday afternoon, based on local public health conditions and school readiness to protect students and staff from the virus and to respond rapidly if a case emerges.

“New Mexico educators from the Public Education Department to the classroom remain committed to two overarching goals: Protecting the health and safety of children and staff and

maximizing the number of in-person learning opportunities,” Stewart said. “We have been preparing for this extensively, and I’m confident we will execute a safe in-person return for all communities that choose to do so.”

The hybrid model means cohorts of students rotate between remote and in-person learning, significantly reducing the number of students together in a classroom at the same time in order to maintain social distancing and allow schools time to thoroughly clean between groups.

The hybrid model is being phased in beginning Tuesday for children in grades pre-K through five in approved districts and charters. (Sixth-graders may also return if that’s the highest grade in a school.) Older students will remain in remote learning for at least the near-term future no matter the status of their district or charter.

School districts and charters that opened in August were required to use a remote-only instructional model. To move from remote to hybrid learning beginning next week, districts and charters had to meet specific safety criteria, including:

- They must be in counties with test positivity rates and new daily case rates that follow below the thresholds established by the state Department of Health. This map shows those counties in green.
- They must have a PED-approved plan demonstrating that their instructional, social-emotional and family engagement processes are documented and established; and,
- They must provide assurances that they’ve established comprehensive safety and response protocols, including COVID-Safe Practices for students and educators, provision of personal protective equipment, cleaning procedures and rapid response procedures in the event of a positive COVID-19 case.

Districts and charters can be in green counties but still not be ready to move to the hybrid mode if they are still finalizing their reentry plan or if their local school board or charter leaders deem a

return to be unsafe. Schools and charters located in counties that are colored red, orange or yellow must remain closed for now to in-person learning even if they have an approved reentry plan. The Public Education Department will continue working with those districts to ensure successful delivery of remote learning in the interim.

Once granted official eligibility to return to in-person instruction by the state Public Education Department, local districts and charters decide whether to move to the hybrid mode or remain in an exclusively remote-learning model for now.

“In short, PED is not requiring any district or charter school to open for in-person learning. PED stands ready to assist every district, charter and school in the state in meeting the strict safety requirements and preparation efforts if those local entities decide they want to move into the hybrid model,” Stewart said. “In addition to having an approved reentry plan, each school district and charter school needs to provide assurance that they can effectively implement COVID Safe Practices. To that end, PED along with the State Fire Marshal’s Office, National Guard and local fire are available to provide on-site guidance and support to ensure that schools are implementing COVID Safe Practices properly so that educators and students are as safe as possible.”

New Mexico’s school reentry planning process has been months in the making and involved close coordination with school districts and local leaders at every step. A school reentry task force provided detailed guidance later finalized by Stewart and his executive team.

Each district or charter was required to submit a reentry plan showing protocols in place to protect students and staff from the virus and to respond rapidly if a case emerges. PED officials continue reviewing plans based on this rubric and working closely with districts to address deficiencies and get their plans approved.

School districts and charters across the state have already purchased more than 3.5 million masks, and PED has worked closely with the state Department of Homeland Security & Emergency Management to distribute another 700,000 in the next two weeks.

PED has also:

- Offered additional training to administrators and their designees to ensure all schools are fully prepared to engage in rapid responses where positive COVID-19 cases occur;
- Established enforcement and inspection protocols to be sure schools follow their reentry plans;
- Created this portal where anyone concerned that a school is not following COVID-Safe Practices may report the incident anonymously.

“New Mexico owes a debt of gratitude to the outstanding educators who were forced to adapt quickly to remote learning in the spring and who must now adapt again to a hybrid mode. Their commitment and hard work throughout this project is nothing short of heroic. With their help, our focus will continue to be the effective delivery of high-quality education to our children during this pandemic,” Stewart said.

“We are also grateful to all New Mexicans who, by wearing masks and practicing social distancing, have reversed the dangerous upward trend in virus cases we saw this summer. In doing so, they made it possible for our youngest learners to return to school. We must keep up that effort on their behalf and on behalf of the older students still waiting for their turn,” Stewart said.

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Please use the number above if you have HEALTH related questions about the Coronavirus.

Coronavirus Information Hotline

1-833-551-0518

Please use the number above if you have questions about school closures, job issues etc.

NMDOH Coronavirus Microsite

cv.nmhealth.org

This microsite has been established to be a resource for the public for all things COVID-19

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