



Public Education Department

MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM, GOVERNOR

Ryan Stewart, Cabinet Secretary

March 27, 2020

Frequently Asked Questions About the Extended Public School Closure

On Friday, March 27, 2020 Governor Lujan Grisham announced that New Mexico public education will shift to a learn-at-home model as schools remain closed for the rest of the academic year. This decision, which was made in consultation with the New Mexico Public Education Department and the New Mexico Department of Health, is part of a two-pronged plan to protect New Mexicans from COVID-19 and ensure that children are protected, fed and educated and that families are supported through this crisis.

The Public Education Department has put together this document with support from the Early Childhood Education and Care Department and the Children, Youth and Families Department to answer some of your most frequently asked questions.

Q: What is the plan to continue education during the school closure period?

Each School District and public charter school will develop a Continuous Learning Plan that meets the needs of their community.

Q: What does “Continuous Learning” mean?

Following our colleagues in Kansas, the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) has adopted the term “continuous learning,” recognizing that instructional modalities will vary by community and, importantly, should be student centered. Purposefully, terms such as “virtual learning,” “e-learning,” or “distance learning,” are avoided in an attempt to support the individualized learning needs of all students. New Mexico is a state that is grounded in diversity, and this strength should allow us to demonstrate equity, inclusivity, and creativity in supporting the needs of all students.

Q. How will the PED support students who do not have smart devices or Internet connections?

Internet access will be an issue for many families in New Mexico. Staff and students may lack the resources to connect remotely. PED encourages districts and charter schools to reach out to local internet service providers to see what options are available for community members. PED also encourages districts and charter schools to think about learning kits and other hands-on educational materials that meet the educational needs of students as well as family engagement needs.

PED is also looking at potential federal and state funding streams to help districts purchase things like laptops, tablets and mobile hotspots.

Q. How many hours of instruction should we expect each day?

Continuous learning focuses on critical standards and the skills needed for grade advancement. Our recommended guidelines for maximum student commitment in terms of direct instruction *each day* are as follows. Additional reading time or storytelling is always encouraged.

- Pre-K : 30 minutes
- Grades K-1: 45 minutes
- Grades 2-3: 60 minutes
- Grades 4-5: 90 minutes
- Grades 6-12: 30 minutes per teacher (3 hours max in a day)

Q. How will this work for students who receive special education services?

Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) may NOT be universally modified. There is no waiver from IDEA requirements, including IEP and eligibility timelines. Schools should take into consideration alternate methods for providing educational services to children with disabilities age 3-21 who are receiving IEP services, such as, teleservices, learning packets, or virtual/online lessons.

Special education teachers and related service providers will continue to work on IEP and evaluation paperwork within required timelines. IEP meetings may be held via phone or in another video conferencing format such as Zoom or Google Hangouts as appropriate. LEAs must ensure that, to the greatest extent possible, each student with a disability can be provided the special education and related services identified in the student's IEP.

PED recognizes there are students with complex needs for whom the virtual/on-line program may not be a feasible option, even with additional accommodations or modifications. The IEP team will need to discuss and document within the IEP or an addendum the agreed upon alternative plan for providing the requisite special education and related services to those students through Prior Written Notice (PWN).

Q. Will students be required to complete state assessments?

No. A waiver for federally required assessments was submitted and approved by the US Department of Education. The federally required, state-wide, English Language Proficiency assessment (ACCESS for ELLs and Alternate ACCESS for ELLs) was completed on March 6, 2020 before the school closures.

The PED is working to provide online remote proctoring options for those high school seniors still needing to test for the State Seal of Bilingualism-Biliteracy. More information will be forthcoming.

Q. What does this mean for high school seniors?

High school seniors will earn credits and achieve eligibility for graduation by completing a locally designed demonstration of competency, which may include:

- Passing a locally designed test,
- Completing a locally designed series of assignments,
- Achieving a set cut score on a college entrance exam,
- Demonstrating applied work experience.

Q. Will high school graduation requirements be waived?

The PED waiver will remove the requirements for seniors to attend a minimum of 1,080 hours of instruction. All students are still required to complete at least 24 credits of required and elective coursework. End of semester final grades should be calculated, reported and transcribed. PED is encouraging schools and districts to adopt a pass/no credit grading system for the last grading period.

Q. What do I tell my senior who is concerned about meeting graduation requirements?

Schools must identify students in danger of not being able to demonstrate course completion and focus support on them. Students will have an extension until June 19 to demonstrate competency. Those who fail to do so will be offered credit recovery in the summer and will have the ability to appeal to the local school board and to the Secretary. No student can be denied graduation due to lack of access to demonstrate competency.

Q. What about Prom and Graduation? Are those milestone events cancelled?

Proms will be postponed or canceled pending the prevailing public health order at the time.

Graduation ceremonies will likely be postponed until it is safe to resume mass gatherings. Many districts have already committed to hosting an event, even if the ceremony needs to be postponed for a few months.

Q. How will my student take college entrance exams?

Some of our high school seniors have already taken some college entrance exams and we anticipate that higher education institutions will likely waive entrance exam requirements for this year. Both ACT and College Board are looking at offering exams in the summer.

AP exams will be offered online for all students to access from home. Exams will last only 45 minutes and cover material that students should have covered up to March. If students need support for access or technology, we will work with districts and schools to ensure they are supported. AP exam dates will be announced by the College Board.

Q. Will school employees continue to be paid?

Employees will continue to be paid. Districts should continue to have them perform the activities listed in the [Business Operations During School Closure Memo that PED previously issued on March 17th](#).

Q. What about contractors? Will they continue to be paid?

With an extended school closure, the language in bus drivers' contracts will govern compensation. Bus contractors will be encouraged to continue to operate bus routes in order to deliver food, deliver hardcopy lessons, pick up completed work to bring back to the school, and perform any other necessary functions as requested by schools and districts.

With an extended school closure, contract language will govern contractors' compensation. Special education and other related service contractors will be encouraged to provide virtual services, collaborate with general education teachers, maintain and update documentation, and complete other activities at the direction of their schools and districts.

Q. Will schools continue to offer meal service for students?

PED will continue working with districts, tribal schools, shelters, and CYFD to operate meal programs just as we have done since March 16. PED is making every effort to provide workers with personal protective equipment (PPE) to ensure their safety over an extended closure, and PED is mobilizing to deliver masks and gloves to all of our districts.

Additionally, PED is applying to be able to distribute EBT cards to qualifying families to purchase meals with their free breakfast/lunch allotment.

Q. How will PED continue to address the educational needs of at-risk students during this time?

The maintenance of focused attention on at-risk students will continue even as we transition from brick-and-mortar sited learning to continuous learning outside of the classroom. In addition, the work of Equity Councils must continue and the content of the Readiness Assessment provides an opportunity to revisit the steps that can be taken to ensure that student groups identified in the Martinez and Yazzie Consolidated Lawsuit are included in our current processes and systems. Family and community engagement should continue. This is a great time for school and district staff to reach out to families through videoconferencing and telephone calls. Educators are presented with a tremendous opportunity to make individualized connections with students and families and to transform education.

The PED Language and Culture Division will work directly with school districts and charter schools to provide guidance and technical assistance during the extended closure period.

The PED is committed to working with districts and charter schools to ensure students return to an education system that ensures ALL students are healthy, secure in their identity, and holistically prepared for college, career, and life.

Q: How can the needs of the whole child be met during this time? (i.e. language development, music, physical health)

The PED has developed an Educator's Toolkit that can provide practice for students as well as educational support to families to help keep students academically engaged. The resource was developed by members of the PED team to provide guidance around how to support student learning during these unique circumstances. Importantly, this toolkit is designed for temporary school closure. PED will provide further, comprehensive guidance due to extended closure.

PED's Safe & Healthy Schools Bureau has also produced a list of [Physical and Health Education Resources](#) to compliment our [Academic Enrichment Guide for Families](#).

Q: What does this mean for school athletics?

School athletics are expected to resume in the summer with practices, camps, etc. The decision about Varsity Letters will be made locally. The New Mexico Athletic Association (NMAA) rule says that if the child participates in varsity athletics or activities, they are eligible to letter. For high school students, college recruiters are leveraging game film and speaking with students and families on the phone.

Q: Will parents and other New Mexicans be staying at home for the remainder of the school year? If not, what provisions have been made for safe, healthy child care?

Child care (both home- and center-based) remains available to serve our essential workers across the state.

The Governor's Office and ECECD are also incentivizing child care facilities to stay open and matching parents in need of child care with providers who have vacancies.

In addition, we are allowing friends, families, and neighbors (FFN) to register as temporary emergency child care providers (provided they pass appropriate background checks and complete health and safety training).

Q: How has the state worked with Tribal leaders on this plan? How does this affect BIE schools and students from tribal communities that are already under great stress?

The PED continues to collaborate with Tribal Education Directors, the BIE and Indian Education Directors within districts and charter schools to ensure we are provided services to our Native American students and communities. The PED will provide guidance to school districts and charter schools regarding requirements for Tribal Consultation for Spring Budget planning purposes. The NMPED Government to Government meeting will be postponed and rescheduled in alignment with the Health Order. Tribes are strongly encouraged to reach out to the PED as needed during the extended closure period. PED will continue to hold regular calls with Tribal Education Directors and Indian Education Directors and collaborate across agencies to meet the needs of Tribal communities and their students.

Q: Child abuse reports have dropped since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, possibly because children are not in school for teachers to file reports. What is the state doing to ensure that children won't be more vulnerable to abuse, and will you have the resources to continue that work for the next two months?

Teachers and other mandatory reporters are the eyes and ears of the Children, Youth & Families Department (CYFD). The Department has seen a drop in calls since schools closed. Just as during summer months, we rely on the community to report any suspected child abuse or neglect by calling #SAFE from your cell phone or 855-333-SAFE from a landline. CYFD's Statewide Central Intake remains around-the-clock operations to take reports and provide resources and information.

The Protective Services Division is still investigating reported abuse and neglect 24/7 using special COVID screening protocols. Case workers are still performing scheduled monthly visits using videoconferencing whenever it is safe to do so. CYFD continues to work with the Department of Health and the courts to ensure an appropriate balance of families' rights and connections, the requirements of court-ordered visitations, and the health and safety of the children in our care.

What services are available for victims of domestic violence in light of the stay-at-home order? What are domestic violence shelters and agencies doing to continue providing services?

Domestic violence agencies provide immediate shelter and a wide range of supportive services for victims/survivors of family violence, domestic violence, and dating violence and their dependents. Services involving face-to-face contact may be curtailed while social distancing guidance is in effect from health officials. However, providers will work to respond to people in crisis and provide alternate forms of contact (like dedicated cell phones for people needing help and provision of hotel rooms). The goal is to help families in crisis and to recover from the trauma that arises from surviving unsafe or violent situations.

With the stay-at-home order, what is being done for those that need mental health services in this time of crisis?

CYFD Behavioral Health Services (BHS) leadership collaborated with the Human Services Department to provide a Letter of Direction to Medicaid funded providers for Medicaid services to provide adaptations to allow for telehealth adaptations. Telehealth adaptations can be telephone or video-based visits and any Behavioral Health Provider may provide these services during the crisis with emergency rules in place. BHS is also working with community partners such as the New Mexico Crisis Access Line (NMCAL, 1-855-NMCRISIS) on other technological solutions to provide emergency mental health services across the state.

Q: Does this order apply to colleges and universities?

No. Public colleges and universities are not included in the order. However, the governor strongly urged regents and governing boards to move to online models to the greatest extent possible. Nearly all public higher education institutions in New Mexico are shifting to an online learning model at this time. Students should connect directly with their college or university regarding each institution's operating plan for the remainder of the semester. You can find contact information for your college or university [here](#).