

# **CHECKLIST FOR SAFER REOPENING OF NEW MEXICO'S PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM**

Goals for face to face instruction in  
our schools, colleges, and universities  
in the time of the coronavirus



**AFT New Mexico**  
*A Union of Professionals*

Updated August 14, 2020

# **CHECKLIST FOR SAFER REOPENING OF NEW MEXICO'S PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM**

Key Goals for Physically Opening and Returning to  
Our Schools and Places of Learning

## **OVERVIEW**

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Since the mid-March school closures, the American Federation of Teachers New Mexico has consistently advocated for a safe school re-opening and on-going collaboration with local school and higher education administrations.

Re-opening means implementing safeguards for educational staff, students, families, and the surrounding community which are reasoned and based on the best scientific data available. This effort also includes the need for providing the highest level of educational continuity, with a focus on educational equity, including access to technology.

This guide is an expansion of our union's efforts to achieve a safe, healthy, and educationally sound '20-'21 academic year. It contains an elaboration of our goals for eventual re-entry into our places of learning also selected statements which guide our work towards re-entry.

While not an exhaustive list of every consideration for a safe re-entry to in-person academic learning, it represents a set of minimum expectations for educators, students, and families. We believe that through a consistent and collaborative approach, unions and local educational agencies can accomplish these goals, with support from our State and federal governments.

AFT New Mexico does not support the physical return to classrooms until it is safe to do so. Educators want to return to their classrooms and places of work as soon as it is safe to do so, and we are committed to the safety and well-being of our students. On-line instruction is not a replacement for in-person learning, and is not a pathway towards academic equity.

There is a right way and a wrong way for re-entry, and we owe it to our students and professional educators to do it right, with proper safety protocols, practices, and procedures which prioritize the best possible public health strategies, guided by the New Mexico Department of Health and national experts. This will require robust measures detailing protocols on physical distancing, face coverings, cleaning and sanitizing of surfaces, hand washing and ventilation in addition to screening and testing, contact tracing, and isolation and quarantine measures.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

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For Release:  
Friday, July 10, 2020

Washington, DC—The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Education Association (NEA) and AASA, The School Superintendents Association, join together today in the following statement on the safe return of students, teachers, and staff to schools:

“Educators and pediatricians share the goal of children returning safely to school this fall. Our organizations are committed to doing everything we can so that all students have the opportunity to safely resume in-person learning.

“We recognize that children learn best when physically present in the classroom. But children get much more than academics at school. They also learn social and emotional skills at school, get healthy meals and exercise, mental health support and other services that cannot be easily replicated online. Schools also play a critical role in addressing racial and social inequity. Our nation’s response to COVID-19 has laid bare inequities and consequences for children that must be addressed. This pandemic is especially hard on families who rely on school lunches, have children with disabilities, or lack access to Internet or health care.

“Returning to school is important for the healthy development and well-being of children, but we must pursue re-opening in a way that is safe for all students, teachers and staff. Science should drive decision-making on safely reopening schools. Public health agencies must make recommendations based on evidence, not politics. We should leave it to health experts to tell us when the time is best to open up school buildings, and listen to educators and administrators to shape how we do it.

“Local school leaders, public health experts, educators and parents must be at the center of decisions about how and when to reopen schools, taking into account the spread of COVID-19 in their communities and the capacities of school districts to adapt safety protocols to make in-person learning safe and feasible. For instance, schools in areas with high levels of COVID-19 community spread should not be compelled to reopen against the judgment of local experts. A one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate for return to school decisions.

“Reopening schools in a way that maximizes safety, learning, and the well-being of children, teachers, and staff will clearly require substantial new investments in our schools and campuses. We call on Congress and the administration to provide the federal resources needed to ensure that inadequate funding does not stand in the way of safely educating and caring for children in our schools. Withholding funding from schools that do not open in person full time would be a misguided approach, putting already financially strapped schools in an impossible position that would threaten the health of students and teachers.

“The pandemic has reminded so many what we have long understood: that educators are invaluable in children’s lives and that attending school in person offers children a wide array of health and educational benefits. For our country to truly value children, elected leaders must come together to appropriately support schools in safely returning students to the classroom and reopening schools.”

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
July 23, 2020

Albuquerque – American Federation of Teachers New Mexico President Stephanie Ly released the following statement:

“This afternoon’s announcement by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham delaying the start of in-person instruction for students and prioritizing professional development for educators is a prudent decision based on the still-rising transmission rates of COVID-19, and the advice of educational leaders and stakeholders, including this union.

“Our union has led calls for this delay to in-person instruction and professional development through local bargaining, public media campaigns, and statewide surveys, and we are thankful to the countless families and community members who have echoed these calls. We are thankful our Governor has thoughtfully heard our advice to approach any beginning of the academic year with extreme caution, prioritizing health and safety above all else, avoiding the tragic mistakes seen in other states and countries. The Governor’s phased-in approach to school re-entry outlined in today’s press conference seeks to balance safety with educational needs of our students, educators, and larger community.

“With rising rates of COVID-19 infections, we appreciate Governor Lujan Grisham’s science-based approach to the coming school year, and we stand ready to continue with our partnership with the Office of the Governor and the New Mexico Public Education Department to leverage the American Federation of Teachers’ vast national catalogue of educator-created professional development resources, curricula, and best practices to assist educators both during the current health crisis and afterwards.

“We echo the call of the Governor asking New Mexicans to wear a face mask and to be cognizant of their actions. Simply put, our students’ education depends on all New Mexico citizens doing their part and putting our students first. New Mexico’s public educators want to return to our classrooms and places of learning; however, we won’t be able to do so until it is fully safe for our students, families, and all educators.”



## OVERVIEW OF GOALS & COVID-19 FACTS



### ENHANCED SAFETY PROTOCOLS



Enhanced cleaning & disinfecting of buildings and classrooms.

Increased hand washing stations.

Improved ventilation systems.

### ADHERENCE TO BEST HEALTH PRACTICES



Compliance with NM PED & CDC guidance.

Physical distance for in-person learning.

Adequate PPE for all students and staff.

Proactive school closures & compliance with New Mexico health orders.

### EQUITABLE STUDENT LEARNING



Ensure technological access & equity.

Technological support for students, families, & staff.

Support plans for students with additional educational needs.

### CONTINUOUS EDUCATOR SUPPORT



Work options that respect employee & family health.

Professional development for implementing on-line/hybrid education.

Continued employment for all educational employees & staff.

On-going partnership with local unions on re-entry planning & implementation.

### STRONG COMMUNITY SUPPORT



Comprehensive school community supports, including social & emotional health.

Clear & consistent communication with stakeholders.

**KEEP THE SAFETY OF OUR STUDENTS & EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS AT THE FOREFRONT**  
**TAKE ACTION TODAY AT [NM.AFT.ORG](http://NM.AFT.ORG)**

As of August 3rd, 2020, there have been 21,130 reported cases of COVID-19 and 655 deaths, touching every community in New Mexico.

With nearly 25% of New Mexico teachers and school staff over 55 years of age, there are valid health concerns of a premature return to classrooms. Many educators also care for medically fragile family members.

Additionally, educator ranks in New Mexico are still experiencing historic levels of vacancies across categories of educators for both certified and classified employees. COVID-19 has intensified this on-going crisis of confidence in our public education system.

Dilapidated buildings, poor technological infrastructure, inadequate funding, and already crowded classrooms compound challenges faced by educational professionals at all levels of public education in New Mexico.

## **GENERAL CONDITIONS FOR REENTRY**

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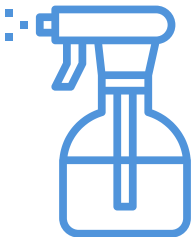
There are three general areas which must be met before reentry should be considered for students and educational staff:

- 1.** Decreased or stabilized infection rates for a minimum of 14 consecutive days in any area or region where face-to-face instruction is being considered.
- 2.** Health protocols based on best practices to help prevent and minimize the spread of the virus in the school community.
- 3.** Adequate resources to fully implement health protocols in addition to providing supports for students' academic, social, and emotional needs.

Below are additional, expanded rationales for the above goals which should be the benchmark for successful reentry into our schools, colleges, and universities. In all efforts to reenter our places of learning, stakeholder input must not be an afterthought, and we fully advocate for the voices of students, parents, community members, educational professionals, and their unions to be fully heard.

## **ENHANCED SAFETY PROTOCOLS**

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- Enhanced cleaning & disinfecting of buildings and classrooms
- Increased hand washing stations
- Improved ventilation systems

New Mexico's local education administrations must establish written protocols for routine enhanced cleaning and disinfecting for all high-traffic and high-touch areas and surfaces, such as door knobs, handrails, bathrooms, and desks with the least toxic EPA-approved disinfectant which meets the requirements for SARS-CoV-2, such as alcohol and hydrogen peroxide-based cleaners. All custodians and staff should receive proper training on use and protection while performing enhanced cleaning protocols.

Additionally, every common space and instructional area must be equipped with adequate hand sanitizer, appropriate cleaning equipment, and secure receptacles for potentially hazardous materials. A daily record of school cleaning schedules and cleaning protocols should be made publicly available.

## **ENHANCED SAFETY PROTOCOLS**

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All entrants to New Mexico's public schools, colleges, and universities must have access to hand washing facilities. Where such facilities are not consistently available, access to hand sanitizer should be made available. Protocols and allowances should be made for access to hand washing or sanitizing when students or staff:

- enter the school bus,
- entering and exiting the school,
- before and after eating,
- after using the bathroom,
- blowing nose, or touching something that has been handled by someone else.

It is critical New Mexico schools, colleges, and universities do not have sub-standard ventilation systems, which could exacerbate the spread of airborne particulates. AFT New Mexico supports the inspection, repair, and maintenance of ventilation systems according to standards set forth by the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) and other industry-consensus standards in the publication "Reopening of Schools and Universities."

We support the use of high-efficiency filters which maximize outside air intake and the use of high-efficiency filters where possible, with regular replacement and maintenance.

Such maintenance operations and retro-fitting must be done before buildings are re-opened for face-to-face education for staff and students.

Similar efforts should be undertaken for all bathrooms, sinks, soap dispensers to ensure proper operation and function. Workplaces and classrooms should have adequate supplies of soap for proper hand washing

## ADHERENCE TO BEST HEALTH PRACTICES

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- Compliance with NM PED & CDC guidance
- Physical distance for in-person learning
- Adequate PPE for all students and staff
- Proactive school closures & compliance with New Mexico health orders

New Mexico public education buildings and classrooms should adhere to CDC guidelines wherever possible, with exceptions being jointly approved by the New Mexico Public Education Department, the local educational union, and the local education authority.

The CDC currently recommends a minimum physical distance of six feet at all times by students and staff.

This listing includes, but should not be limited to school transportation, entrance and exit procedures from transportation and school buildings, meals, recess, physical activities in and out of the classroom, and instruction.

Student and staff scheduling should be adjusted in order to meet these demands.

Additionally, there must be clear and publicly available protocols published for facial coverings which include trainings for proper use and disposal procedures and also policies for students and staff who cannot or will not wear a mask or facial covering. These protocols should, at minimum, include:

- Requirements for student, staff and faculty masking and the protocol if the policy is not adhered to;
- Who is responsible for providing PPE and masks;
- Methods to support students and staff who must remove their masks for specific health reasons – sneezing, coughing, dermal irritation etc.;
- Cleaning and maintenance methods for reusable masks;
- Staff and students should be trained on, at a minimum, how to properly wear face coverings and the role hand hygiene plays in preventing the spread of disease; and
- Those staff who, by the nature of their job cannot be 6 feet from their students, or their students cannot wear face-coverings in the classroom must be provided the same personal protective equipment (PPE) a healthcare worker would be provided, such as N95s, surgical masks, face shields, gloves, etc.

## **ADHERENCE TO BEST HEALTH PRACTICES**

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At a minimum, public education employees who enter any work/job site must have the following PPE available for use:

- Face coverings or face shields, including an extra supply available for staff and students who forget to bring their own. For educational staff working with vulnerable or medically fragile populations, N-95 masks should be provided.
- Liquid soap.
- Running water.
- Paper towels.
- Tissues.
- If soap, water, and paper towels are not readily available, provide alcohol-based hand rubs (ABHR) for use if hands are not visibly dirty. Only ABHRs with 60% alcohol or more are recommended in relationship to COVID-19.

For educational staff working in nurses' or medical office settings, the following additional supplies should be provided:

- Non-latex disposable gloves.
- Eye protection (face shield or goggles).
- Surgical masks for health service staff when providing care to ill students, aerosolization treatment like a nebulization or use of a peak flow meter.
- Face coverings and/or surgical masks (to be provided to ill students with fever and cough).
- Thermometers (forehead/strip or digital thermometers with a disposable sleeve).
- Disinfecting wipes.

For custodial staff, the following additional supplies should be provided:

- Non-latex disposable gloves or work gloves.
- Paper towels.
- Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19)

Educational staff, regardless of responsibility, should be provided adequate professional development for the use of all protective gear, products, and cleaning routines before a return to in-person or face-to-face instruction.

Local school districts or institutions should provide and prominently display NM PED and/or CDC-created posters, displays, or other printed materials for proper COVID-19 safety routines where all building entrants will view such materials. Printed materials should be provided in multiple languages, depending on local community needs.

## EQUITABLE STUDENT LEARNING

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- Ensure technological access & equity
- Technological support for students, families, & staff
- Support plans for students with additional educational needs
- Well designed diagnostic assessments

The spring closures of public education in New Mexico further exposed a well-known reality for New Mexico students. Our state's infrastructure is not equipped to provide for equitable access to on-line education, and many educational stakeholders - students and educators, alike - do not have access to reliable internet.

Many educators also reported the lack of technological devices for themselves and students, and even when devices were provided, there were significant gaps in the knowledge required to effectively use these devices.

New Mexico schools, colleges, and universities must provide training and on-going professional development for educational employees to ensure the ability for educators to deliver services to families and students. Similarly, trainings should be made available to parents and students on the platforms and devices to be used during on-line learning.

Schools and places of learning should be staffed with adequate nursing and healthcare staff, counselors, and other professionals who can assist and lead with the implementation of health care protocols, with a special focus on trauma-informed practices.

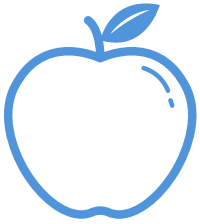
The need for social and emotional support is important for all students and staff, however, the need for these services are heightened due to the on-going health crisis.

Well-designed diagnostic assessments can help teachers understand where each student is starting the school year and guide the introduction of project-based learning and performance-based assessments. This student-centered approach to learning is particularly conducive to teaching in the time of COVID-19, where it may not be known with certainty whether learning will be in-person, remote or a hybrid.



## CONTINUOUS EDUCATOR SUPPORT

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- Work options that respect employee & family health
- Professional development for implementing on-line/hybrid education
- Continued employment for all educational employees & staff
- On-going partnership with local unions on re-entry planning & implementation

It is critical that educational re-entry plans are living documents with on-going collaboration and consultation between local districts and local educational unions. Such plans will need to be evaluated regularly and revised as needed.

While local educational unions have the right to negotiate these agreements and plans, community stakeholders should also be consulted and heard. Educators at every level have the health and safety of students and community at the forefront, and their voices and experiences should be prioritized in these on-going discussions.

School districts, colleges, and universities should provide community members with clearly written, widely publicized, and consistent written communications on all aspects of COVID and the local educational community's plans to keep students and community members safe. All such plans should be provided to every staff member as well, and should also be provided to the larger community in a linguistically and culturally appropriate way.

Staff with serious health concerns or staff who reside with family members with serious health concerns should have access to special accommodations and workplace adjustments. Federal laws, like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) should offer guidance on these accommodations, however, given the nature of the on-going health crisis employers should look to expand these allowances.

Accommodations should be guided by the CDC's recommendations for reducing transmission in workplaces. Remote learning for students and flexible leave policies negotiated with local educational unions can help to avoid a large exodus of educational staff, along with their expansive knowledge and effective strategies for education.

All educational employees should have the option to perform duties remotely or have new duties assigned in consultation with the local educational union in order to prevent loss of employment, or other punitive actions.

Compliance strategies with clear enforcement mechanisms must be clearly defined so all students, families and staff understand how non-compliance with risk management strategies including PPE, testing and tracing and social distancing will be handled. Need for these services are heightened due to the on-going health crisis.

## **STRONG COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

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- Comprehensive school community supports, including social & emotional health
- Clear & consistent communication with stakeholders
- Wide publication of district/institution policies

A demonstrated decline in new cases and hospitalizations for at least 14 days, a positive test rate of less than five percent, a transmission rate of under 1.0, and testing, contact tracing and isolation capacity in a given public health jurisdiction is necessary to move from remote instruction to in-person.

Policies must be adopted that provides sick leave for educators and staff in order to protect the larger community and the students we serve. Such policies should take into account the need for educational staff to not only protect their own health, but that of family members with whom they may reside.

Clearly defined policies which outline school closure plans and implementation of remote learning should a sickness occur within the educational community or the community at large.

Widespread, accessible, and frequent screening of students and staff and appropriate, testing and identification, tracing, and isolation of new cases. Detailed procedures must include a transparent reporting process to school staff, students and families when positive cases have been identified or a member of the school community has come into contact with a confirmed case.

## RESOURCES

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- AFT: A Plan to Safely Reopen America's Schools and Communities
- AFT: Reopening School Buildings Safely
- AFT: A Time to Act, The Importance of Investment in Public Education and Other State and Local Services in the Time of COVID-19
- AFT Resolution: Safely Reopening Schools
- New Mexico Department of Health COVID-19 Guidelines
- New Mexico Public Education Department Reentry Guidance
- New Mexico Public Education Department Reentry Guidance Addendum A
- New Mexico Public Education Department: School Reentry Task Force
- Recommendations
- Albert Shanker Institute: The Corona Virus Pandemic and K-12 Education Funding
- American Academy of Pediatrics: Guidance for School Reentry
- ASHRAE: Reopening of Schools and Universities
- Congressional Research Service: Estimated State Grants Under a Proposed Education
- California Federation of Teachers: A Checklist for Safely Reopening California Schools and Colleges
- Fairfax County Federation of Teachers: Towards a Safe Reopening Plan for FCPS
- COVID-19 Resources: Information on guidance from the CDC and NIOSH on decontamination methods for N95s and other filtering face piece respirators from the CDC and NIOSH on decontamination methods for N95s and other filtering face piece respirators
- Stabilization Fund for a Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund and an Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, Assuming an Appropriations Level of \$30.750 Billion
- CDC Original Guidelines
- CDC Interim Guidance for Administrators of US K-12 Schools and Child Care Programs
- CDC School Reopening Decision Tree
- CDC Interim Guidance for Child Care Programs
- CDC Guidance on PPE Use
- CDC COVID-19 Print Resources
- Minnesota Department of Health: Supplies for Schools COVID-19
- EPA: List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19)
- American Chemistry Council: Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)—Fighting Products
- Governor Lujan Grisham's Conditions for Re-opening New Mexico
- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public School Teacher Data File," 2011-12.
- Learning Policy Institute: Report on Reopening Schools in the Context of COVID-19, Health and Safety Guidelines From Other Countries
- UNICEF, WHO, IFRC: Key Messages and Actions for COVID-19 Prevention and Control in Schools
- UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, the World Food Programme: Framework for Reopening Schools
- WHO: Considerations for School-Related Public Health Measures in the Context of COVID-19