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September 11, 2020

MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents; Charter Leaders

FROM: Ryan Stewart, Cabinet Secretary, Public Education Department

RE: Air Filtration Requirements During COVID-19

The State of New Mexico is committed to ensuring a safe and healthy return to in-person learning for all students and educators. Along with COVID-safe practices, high-quality air filtration is one aspect of a multi-pronged strategy for ensuring healthy school environments. To address issues and concerns surrounding air quality, the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) will work with each district and school to ensure installation of high-quality air filters. In addition, each district shall have an established and written protocol on inspecting, repairing and providing maintenance on ventilation systems within all school facilities.

Ventilation system upgrades and improvements will increase the delivery of clean air and dilute potential contaminants within each classroom and school facility. The NMPED will be deploying the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) [recommendation](#) which states the target level for filtration in schools is minimum efficiency reporting value (MERV) 13 or higher. On average, this will remove 75 percent of particle size of 0.3 to 1.0 μm . This higher standard of filtration is more effective at removing viral particles from the air. The ASHRAE document linked above provides additional guidance on determining compatibility of various types of HVAC systems with a MERV 13 filter.

In instances where MERV 13 filters are not available or not compatible with existing HVAC systems, the NMPED will work with those districts and schools to identify the highest quality compatible filters. Elementary schools that have started class instruction in a hybrid model are currently working with the NMPED to assess their current filters and upgrade them where possible. These upgrades will be assessed and completed by September 28, 2020.

Additionally, districts and schools unable to immediately install MERV 13 or its equivalent must work with their operations staff to take the following actions in accordance with the [guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#):

1. run the central air fan continuously;
2. open dampers to increase air flow;
3. open windows and doors (be mindful of possible safety considerations); and
4. deploy box fans or other portable fans and air purifiers with high air circulation capacity in addition to prioritizing the use of these items in classrooms with higher ventilation needs.

The NMPED will contact all districts and charter schools within the coming week to assess the current types of filters utilized and installed in schools. Please note, in order for any school to begin classes in the hybrid model per NMPED guidance, schools and districts will need to take immediate actions to assess their systems, to procure filters with the highest MERV rating compatible with existing school systems, and to install the recommended filters as soon as they are delivered to the school, as well as take the all necessary measures to optimize filtration systems and augment air flow according to the CDC guidance.