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RYAN STEWART, ED.L.D.
SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM
GOVERNOR

October 16, 2020

MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents, Charter Leaders, School Board Members
FROM: Ryan Stewart, Cabinet Secretary, Public Education Department
RE: **Impact of the new Public Health Order on New Mexico's Public Schools**

Dear Superintendents and Charter School Leaders:

On Thursday October 15, 2020, Governor Lujan Grisham announced updates to the public health order for New Mexico. Included in the new restrictions was an announcement that mass gatherings are now limited to five people (a decrease from the previously allowed 10-person gathering).

This memo serves to inform you that public schools are exempt from the current Public Health Order in the following manner:

- Schools currently operating in hybrid are exempt and may continue to operate at 50%;
- Micro-districts currently operating at full capacity are exempt and not impacted by the current public health order;
- Remote schools currently operating 5:1 small groups are exempt and may continue to conduct small group instruction according to that ratio;
- Schools/Districts currently in remote who have already articulated their reopening plans to the school community when they were in a green county and the state was meeting its gating criteria may begin hybrid, as scheduled.

As a state, we are no longer meeting the statewide gating criteria and our daily case numbers are increasing exponentially. New Mexico state health officials announced 672 new cases of COVID-19 yesterday, along with a total death toll of 922 people. The Public Education Department stands in solidarity with those mourning a loss to this horrible virus. In addition to placing an untenable burden on our healthcare systems and facilities, the rapid spread of COVID-19 across New Mexico limits our ability to open more schools and could potentially impact schools already open for hybrid instruction in the near future.

The Public Education Department, Department of Health, and the Governor's Office are reviewing data and considering the establishment of thresholds above which a preemptive return to remote learning in

high-impact counties may be necessary. The Department urges those schools and districts who are currently in remote but who have been previously authorized to move to hybrid to strongly consider the potential risks for spread in your local community, as well as the possibility that a closure in the upcoming weeks may be necessary if virus spread rates continue to climb when making local decisions about whether or not to shift into hybrid learning at this time.

The Public Education Department takes adherence to COVID-Safe practices during the pandemic very seriously. For example, mask wearing has been consistently documented as one of the most important actions that can be taken to prevent the spread of the virus. It is critical that all of us as educators work together to ensure 100% adherence to this mandate not just within our hallways and classrooms, but also as our educators and families go about their day-to-day lives within our communities.

The Governor has restricted mass gatherings to a total of five people. This will necessarily impact plans for school fundraisers, parent-teacher conferences, and more. We urge you to take these guidelines seriously and to maintain fidelity to the public health order outside of school hours and buildings.

The Public Education Department and our sister agencies will continue to closely monitor reports of violations of COVID-Safe practices in schools and follow up with appropriate enforcement actions as necessary.

Should you have any questions about this information, please do not hesitate to contact your PED point of contact.

Sincerely,

Ryan Stewart, Ed.L.D.
Secretary of Education
State of New Mexico