



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**NEA-New Mexico Responds to Governor's Announcement on Local Control
in Expanding School Reopening**

(SANTA FE) --NEA-New Mexico applauds Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham and Public Education Department Secretary Ryan Stewart for their commitment to the safety of our students, families, educators, and communities throughout New Mexico since the pandemic hit our state last Spring. NEA-New Mexico President Mary Parr-Sanchez provided the following statement in reaction to the Governor's remarks.

“Since the beginning of the pandemic, educators have looked forward to returning to classrooms in-person once we can do so safely. In light of the Governor's announcement that local school districts will have the ability to expand in-person learning, our association calls on local school boards and district administrations throughout the state to step up and rigorously follow health guidelines in order to control the spread of COVID-19 and protect the lives of our students, educators, and communities. We also call on all local school districts, including Superintendents, to collaborate with local and state authorities to ensure that educators are prepared to safely welcome students back to our classrooms by providing them priority in the vaccination rollout across the state. And as we prepare to safely transition back to classrooms, our state and district leaders must remember that this pandemic is hurting our Latinx, Native and Black students disproportionately, and must ensure that all students — no matter where they're from or where they live — have the supports they need to thrive coming out of this national public health and economic crisis.

“Because of the hard work of the Governor and Public Education Department, New Mexico has ensured some of the highest air quality in schools in the country by requiring Merv-13 air filters or the equivalent in all schools prior to reopening. Governor Lujan Grisham and the Public Education Department should also be commended for immediately securing PPE and seeking new manufacturers for safety equipment, setting up systems for high-risk staff, and establishing

an anonymous violations portal to solicit statewide reporting of safety protocol breaches. The Governor issued a directive to retain school staff and shift to remote work, while allowing high-need subgroups of students to continue limited in-person instruction. The Governor and PED also made meeting basic needs through food distribution and safeguarding social-emotional wellness of students and families high priorities continually throughout the pandemic. Now, working with NEA-NM, the Governor and NMPED are working to issue retention compensation to employees who braved the health risks to meet the needs of our communities during the pandemic. In addition, the Governor has pledged from the beginning that no employee should have to use their own sick leave if they must quarantine or if they get sick from COVID. Any employees who have had to use their personal sick leave for such purposes will be reimbursed for that leave.

“Now, as districts make the decision of whether it is safe to expand in-person learning in their communities, our members demand adherence to reentry requirements. We ask that districts expand in-person learning *only* when they can do so safely and without jeopardizing the lives of our students, families, educators or communities. This means that districts must work collaboratively with stakeholders on in-person reentry plans that guarantee adequate PPE, social distancing, mask-wearing, regular surveillance testing, and air filtration. NEA-NM encourages districts to use collective bargaining as a way to cooperate in creating reentry plans that guarantee the safety of all involved.

“NEA-NM will remain vigilant, working with our members and local leaders, in monitoring COVID-safe practices as outlined in the PED Reentry Guidance. We will continue to report violations through the state-established safety portal and through NEA-NM’s safety violation reporting system.”

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