Hello NEA-NM Members and Leaders,

I’d like to report out on two timely and key issues during this busy and dynamic time, namely the announcement by the PED to reopen NM schools and the passage of the American Rescue Act.

New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) Secretary, Dr. Ryan Stewart, announced at a Superintendent’s meeting on 3/8/21 that the NMPED “plans to support our school districts and charter schools in a full return to in-person learning (100% by April 5th) in the coming weeks…,” while respecting tribal public health orders. Read the full memo

As the CDC and state health officials highlight declining trends in COVID-19 spread and lower contagion rates in schools, the Governor has been feeling a tremendous amount of pressure to fully reopen schools from many stakeholders, including Superintendents and business leaders. As an organization, NEA-NM has held the line, consistently making the case that we recognize the gold standard is in-person instruction, “as soon as safe and equitable conditions are in place.” I applaud Local Affiliate leaders and members throughout the state who have been at the table with districts to assess conditions on the ground as we wade through reentry processes. This has required collaboration with staff and getting feedback, working with administrators, and speaking at School Board meetings.

From our internal surveys and other check-ins, we know that about 40% of educators are ready to return to in-person instruction and that another 60% are not, at least not until they are fully vaccinated. Parents and students not ready to return will be given a choice about whether they want to keep their children in a remote setting or move forward with in-person learning. School staff must be included in upcoming, critical conversations, preferably at the bargaining table, to reconcile teaching modalities in response to simultaneous instruction for in-person and remote students. The students that remain in a remote environment will continue the need to be taught. Employees should be included in these critical conversations, preferably at the bargaining table where possible.

At the 3:30pm press conference on 3/8, following the Superintendent’s meeting, Secretary Stewart also said that school Districts need to continue to follow COVID Safe Practices and that, “to the greatest extent possible,” implement the 6 feet rule of social distancing. Dr. Scrase added that in his opinion “schools are safe.” NEA-NM will continue to work with Local Affiliate leadership and staff to promote best practices to monitor compliance and engage in development of safety and health protocols for staff and students.
In addition to bargaining for reentry conditions, Local Affiliate leadership and employees must assess and engage in the conversation about how their District leadership has spent the millions of dollars already received from federal stimulus packages that were specifically purposed with the intent to get schools ready for a safe and equitable return.

The second topic at hand is the announcement of the passage of the single largest investment in public education in history. The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 provides 1.9 trillion dollars to help the country recover from the ravages that COVID has brought about. To learn more about this historic boost, please read NEA’s summary of “American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.” This package includes 170 billion dollars for education, nationally. We anticipate the amount for New Mexico will be billions. It is a golden opportunity to finally staff our schools at appropriate levels with more teachers, social workers, counselors, educational assistants, bus drivers, nurses and mental health providers. It also gives us a powerful tool to advocate for the schools our students most certainly deserve.

Mary Parr-Sánchez
President, NEA-New Mexico

From the Roundhouse to Your Schoolhouse

In the wake of the PED’s announcement of schools reopening to full in-person learning by April 5th, legislators began Week 8 by passing HB 268, a bill that expands workers compensation eligibility if an employee falls ill with Covid-19. Safety continues to be our top priority during the pandemic for both students and educators and for this reason we ask you to write or call your legislators and tell them to vote in favor of bills that will set the foundation for a safe return to in person learning. Tell them to vote for HB 2, HB 268 and *HB 232.

There are still plenty of public education related bills waiting to be legislated and only a handful of bills have made it to both chambers but still need to be acted on for final approve. With one week
remaining before the regular session comes to an end (Saturday March 20th at noon), intense debate and political maneuvering still looms ahead. A deal between SB 40, the bill mandating K-5 Plus and Extended Learning by adding instructional days to the school calendar year and HB 184, a bill providing for K-5 Plus and Extending Learning instructional hours in lieu of instructional days remains to be hammered out. The same is true for HJR 1, the bill that amends the State’s Constitution to increase annual distributions from the land grant permanent fund by 1 percent for early childhood and SJR1 a similar bill but with the key difference of using the additional funds for teacher salaries and instruction. We know that only one of these two bills will make it out of the legislature and to the ballot for voters to decide. (For your reference, we provided commentary around these two bills in our Week 5 Legislative Update).

So before you buckle up for final stretch of the 55th legislature, which guarantees to be an intense ride, we want to offer you our Week 8 Legislative Update. As always, we start with providing a summary of what bills were heard both in the Senate and House Floor followed with a detailed summary of bills heard in the Senate and House Education Committee.

Again, we want to mention that omission of any bills in this legislative update does not mean that we view them as irrelevant or not important. All bills are important to someone and many bills relate to public education in one way or another, albeit. In the name if brevity, however, we have opted to focus on bills that closely correlate with our NEA-NM legislative goals.

View Updates

Save The Date! Saturday, April 17

Join us for a reimagined Read Across New Mexico! Celebrate READING that promotes our state’s great cultural and linguistic diversity, all from the comfort of your own home!

Who: All classified and certified members of NEA-NM

When: April 17th, 2021

Time: 9AM - 1PM

Where: Zoom Virtual Event
Save your spot by pre-registering here: [2021 NEA-NM Read Across New Mexico](#)

Join us for prizes and surprises, along with incredible professional learning opportunities that focus on ideas, plans, and lessons that will add culturally responsive literature to your library and teaching practice.

This half-day event is a must for all New Mexico Educators “to highlight diverse authors and books for an increasingly diverse student population across New Mexico and America.” In collaboration with NEA-NM, NEA-LC EL3 has aligned with NEA’s Read Across America Advisory board’s theme of “Celebrating a Nation of Diverse Readers.”

We would love to have you share your expertise at our event.

If you are interested click here:

- [Call for Presenters: 2021 NEA-NM Read Across New Mexico](#)

Looking forward to seeing everyone there!

NEA-LC EL3 Team

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**Virtual Townhall with NMPED**

**Secretary Dr. Ryan Stewart**

We are pleased to announce yet another opportunity to hear directly from Dr. Stewart on Thursday, March 18th, from 5pm to 6:30pm.

Mark your calendars for this valuable webinar in which the Secretary will answer more questions from our members around school reentry. NEA-NM will also provide updated information on Leave Accommodations so this will be a very valuable time to tune in!

Please register for the event and submit your questions. We look forward to your attendance as we continue to add your voice to this process.

[Submit Questions] [Register]
Professional Development Opportunities

Take a minute to review these valuable PD opportunities that provide cutting edge resources from NEA experts—our staff, affiliates, and members—on the skills and topics educators need to join, stay in, and advance our profession.

Learn More

Stay Connected Campaign

Congratulations to the WINNERS of the first round of our “Stay Connected” campaign! Over the past month, members have received correspondence from NEA-NM via email and mailings, inviting them to verify and update their contact information. Thank you to the hundreds of respondents! Having updated contact information takes on added importance during these challenging times. Moving forward, we continue to work at strengthening our two-way line of communication with our members using traditional and new platforms.

If you didn’t get a chance to update your information, it’s not too late! Please share with your colleagues!

See the Drawing  Share Update Link

Mental Health & Your Classroom Culture

Coronavirus has taken a toll on the world, mentally and physically, and after almost an entire calendar year of adapting to the constant changes in education, our teachers and their students are feeling the effects. Here are 4 easy ways you can create a classroom culture that encourages positive mental health.

Learn More
Take Note of...

- March - Women's History Month
- March 18 - Student Debt Webinar
- April 1 - NEA-NM Early Enrollment
- Due April 2 - Veterans for Peace Essay Contest
  April 17, 2021 - Read Across America, NEA-
- New Mexico, “Celebrating a Nation of
  Diverse Readers.”
  Due May 28 - Keleher & McCleod Scholarship
- Virtual Jump Start - TBD