Today’s column is credited to NEA-SF President Grace Mayer, an Art Teacher at Milagro Middle School, and recent 2021 Excellence in Student Achievement Award winner from the Santa Fe Public Schools BOE and the New Mexico School Board Association. The following message has been adapted for all educators around the State:

As most of us have returned to in-person teaching at our worksites, NEA-NM wants to thank you for the professionalism and creativity that you have demonstrated daily during the challenges of this pandemic. This includes the navigation of teaching through various online learning platforms and utilizing different techniques to reach your students. In January, NMPED stated that all schools should reopen in a Hybrid Model. Then, in April, we were told that schools would be fully open for in-person instruction to each student who chose that path. We could never have imagined doing all of these things only one year ago. You have shown up for your students and their families in New Mexico in extraordinary ways, and we have no doubt that you will continue to do so until the end of the academic year.

We have collectively experienced great loss and anxiety this year and, currently, as we continue to survive the pandemic. As you know, this situation has exacerbated an already uneven playing field for students and families in poverty. Many lack adequate access to medical health care services, experience home and food insecurity, and consistently face systemic social and racial inequities. These societal ills were never the responsibility of educators to solve alone, and yet we have been unfairly asked to do just that as well as teach students and love them like our own. The remarkable thing is that we continue to show up and attempt this monumental task.

What courageous optimism we exhibit! While some may call it foolishness, I would like to think our humanity is such that we believe in a future for young people, filled with opportunity, and one that compels us to stand up and fight for them.

Many of us have been fearful to return to in-person learning because we felt that a large number of students had settled into their virtual learning. We have been frustrated with top-down decisions that dismiss our voices and expertise. That same frustration has sometimes turned to anger as we have navigated a roller-coaster of changing directives and expectations. We have also been conflicted because we miss our students and the connections we have created with both them and our valued coworkers. We know that for some students, school is the only safe place they have in their lives and where true connections with adults and peers are made. For our little ones, we long to read to them and share the joy of teaching them about wondrous things while satiating their never-ending curiosity.

All of these feelings and experiences are valid and we need to let ourselves work through them. How we do this will be different for each of us. Show compassion for yourself and your colleagues for what we are trying to manage. There is no lesson plan that exists that we can use to get through this. Please do the best you can to provide instruction and bring some happiness to our students in the last quarter of the school year.
I loved this article from Grace because I think she has tapped into many of the anxieties and frustrations that educators have been feeling. Above all, I appreciate her tremendous advocacy for our members.

Please fight to have your collective voices included in decisions regarding our precious students for the upcoming school year. There is no other single group of people with more expertise than you to advocate for what they need. We must also advocate collectively for what you need, because without you there are no public schools.

Finally, please also work with your local association to elevate the impact you can have on the school calendar, programs, and extended learning time. No decisions should be made in either a unilateral or top-down fashion. Work with your Superintendent and School Board to ensure that both you and your students have what you need to continue creating a brighter tomorrow for all.

Best,

Mary Parr-Sánchez
President, NEA-New Mexico

Newsmakers: KRWG Fred Martino and State President Mary Parr-Sánchez

This relevant and timely interview discusses how the pandemic has affected K-12 education, the return to in-person classes, and the initiatives needed to improve education in the state.

Watch Interview
Q&A With NMPED: K-5 Plus and Extended Learning Time Programs

We summarized the discussion for quick reference to help your local and members work in collaboration with your school district to implement both K-5 Plus and ELTP only if your school district plans to opt-in for one or both programs.

Watch Video
View Summary

Help Build Your Union

These challenging times in education call for unity and strategic resolve to affect working and learning conditions for school employees and students throughout the state, respectively. We also must be ready to make the most of opportunities to address these challenges, as billions in federal monies are slated for education in NM. Will you help us build?

Our Early Enrollment Membership Campaign kicked off on April 1st, already leading to increases across the state. This campaign is designed to allow potential members, including past members, the opportunity to join NEA at no cost! Their first dues will not begin until the beginning of the following school year. Please help get the word out by sharing with your colleagues today!

Join Now
Membership Doesn't Cost.. It Pays!

There are a range of incredible member benefits at your fingertips, that have the power to both customize and enhance your membership experience while saving you valuable dollars along the way. Some major topics to explore include the following:

- Vacation and Travel Adventures
- Student Loan Forgiveness & Refinancing
- Investing and Retirement
- Home and Auto Insurance
- Everyday Savings

Join NEAMB Affiliate Relations Specialist Antonio Galindo for an exclusive overview of your NEA Member Benefits on April 29th from 5 to 6pm.

Register

4 Ways to Help Struggling Virtual Learners

Throughout the past year, teaching a class without actually being in a physical classroom has been one of the most difficult adjustments for teachers and students alike. Through hard work and perseverance, teachers have learned to adapt their teaching methods and find new ways to help their remote students in their online environment, but unfortunately, some students are still falling behind.

If you have virtual learners that are struggling, here are a few ways you can give your students a helping hand.

Learn More
The Important Interplay Between Community Schools and ARPA

NEA-NM has long been a strong supporter of the Community Schools model as a transformational approach to teaching, learning, and living in a community. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have also seen the myriad ways that Community Schools in New Mexico are uniquely positioned to assess student and family needs, provide rapid ongoing support, and serve as hubs for community care, collaboration, and healing during the crisis. Now, as we seek to rebuild a more robust and compassionate education system, we have the unprecedented opportunity and responsibility to address the short-term needs associated with the pandemic and to invest in the structural changes that, over the long term, will make schools more equitable and whole-child focused. This is because on March 11, 2021, Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), providing just over $170.3 billion for education -- the largest ever single investment in our schools -- to respond to the impact of COVID-19.

Please learn more about the numerous ways that this Act positively impacts our Community Schools outlook right here in New Mexico and view some exciting webinar opportunities presented by our partners at the Afterschool Alliance and the Partnership for the Future of Learning.

Learn More

Take Note of...

- May 5 - Memorial Day, NEA-NM Offices Closed
- Check out NEA's Pop-Up Practices on our webpage