



To: New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham
Cc: New Mexico Public Education Cabinet Secretary Dr. Ryan Stewart
New Mexico Higher Education Deputy Cabinet Secretary Carmen Lopez
New Mexico Early Childhood Education & Care Cabinet Secretary Elizabeth Groginsky

Re: New Mexico Public Education in Light of COVID-19, an open letter.

April 9, 2020

Dear Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham,

The Transform Education NM Coalition advocates for the rights of New Mexico's public school children to a high quality education, particularly the students facing the deepest educational inequities -students with disabilities, English Language Learners, students in low-income and rural communities, Hispanic and Native American students, and other students of color.

First, we express our sincere appreciation for the efforts being made by your Administration to protect the health and safety of New Mexico students and their families, as well as their educators and the surrounding community. We understand how critical it is to stop the spread of the coronavirus, COVID-19. Second, we write to offer our suggestion for steps that can be taken to protect the educational rights of all New Mexico students during this difficult time and beyond.

We strongly believe that a task force or working group is needed to intensely focus on efforts to deliver effective and equitable education to our students in the coming weeks and months.

The extraordinary closing of New Mexico's public schools is unprecedented. No matter how well school districts and the Public Education Department respond, we can anticipate that a significant number of students will fall behind educationally while their schools are closed. This group may include, but certainly is not limited to, preschoolers, students in the early elementary grades, students with disabilities, English language learners, students who are homeless or in foster care, and all at-risk students throughout the age spectrum. For example, preschoolers who are denied the social interaction and learning that is such a critical part of their program will not be adequately prepared to enter kindergarten in the fall. As another example, many students with significant disabilities will regress to a great extent without speech-language, behavioral, and/or other services that are essential to their educational programs.

Because of the critical importance of continuous, year-to-year educational progress for students, we are calling on the State to immediately establish a Coronavirus Education Task Force with the mission of ensuring our students emerge from this national and statewide emergency as educationally intact and with equal opportunities to succeed as possible. We recommend that the role of this new Task Force be twofold, both with equity as a central value: addressing short-term efforts to provide education while schools are closed and preparing for what will be needed when our schools reopen.

The first function of the Task Force will be to ensure a statewide response that is applied consistently for all students, that would include carefully monitoring the services that are being provided by school districts during school closure - reviewing district plans for services and online learning, requiring regular reports on implementation, addressing concerns, providing guidance to address inequities and gaps that may occur, and sharing effective practices among districts. For instance, if the Task Force learned that only 40% of a district's low-income students were successfully picking up meals at school, while another district was successfully delivering 95% of those meals using school bus drivers, it could share that information and recommend that meal delivery be adopted by all districts.

With regard to the longer term, the Task Force will begin to examine the steps necessary to transition students successfully back into school when the crisis is over and to recommend how to assess and determine the need for compensatory services for those students who have fallen behind. The overall goal would be to determine how to keep and make our students whole, in order to minimize long-term harm and prevent another whole generation of New Mexico students from carrying the scars of this crisis, and persistent inequalities of opportunity, throughout their lives.

We recommend that the Task Force report to your Office, be chaired by the Secretary of Education (or his designee), and include representatives of the Attorney General's office, the Department of Children and Families, Early Childhood Education & Care Department, and the Department of Health. Most important, however, the Task Force must include educational experts and educators from representative school districts throughout the state, as well as parents and students and advocates for parents and students.

We cannot overstate the importance of bringing the parents of students affected by school closure, and those who advocate for them, into the decision-making process. Each of the undersigned organizations stands ready to assist. We thank you for your consideration of this urgent request and are available to answer any questions or address any concerns. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me at 505-450-3155. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



**Charles Goodmacher, Government Affairs
Transform Education NM**

On behalf of:

**Teachers Against Child Detention, Albuquerque Chapter
Coalition for the Majority
Dual Language Education New Mexico
Learning Action Buffet - The LAB
The Learning Alliance
National Education Association, New Mexico
New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty
New Mexico Voices for Children
Somos Un Pueblo Unido**