

New Mexico narrows unaccounted student list

Written by gallupsun

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The New Mexico Public Education Department and its partners have accounted for 78 percent of the 12,000-plus students who were enrolled in public schools last spring but not this fall and were therefore feared to be outside the educational system.

As of this week, all but 2,716 students have been accounted for and their status documented. A cross-agency team accomplished this by working with districts, cross-referencing databases, and making phone calls.

The PED and its partners -- the Early Childhood Education and Care Department; the Indian Affairs Department; the Office of African American Affairs; the Children, Youth and Families Department, the Human Services Department and the Graduation Alliance -- have called hundreds of families since early January, talking directly to some and leaving messages for others. Those who didn't call back received a second and sometimes third call.

The PED is now condensing the remaining list by siblings, and the Children, Youth & Families Department has begun making COVID-safe home visits, starting with students in grades eight to 12.

"These are wellness checks, nothing more. We want to ensure that these families have all the supports they need," Nick Costales, the CYFD deputy director leading that effort said. "All the COVID safety protocols are in place. No one is going inside a home, and they are wearing

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masks.”

The agencies do not have current contact information for 653 of the remaining students on the list. Those names are being cross-checked once more with existing databases and with districts where the students were last enrolled in an effort to find a phone number or address.

“We’re leaving no stone unturned to find these students to assure that they are safe and learning. In the end, there may be some students we just can’t reach, but it will be a very small number,” Katarina Sandoval, the PED deputy secretary leading the project said.

Most of the students accounted for so far have enrolled in private schools (26 percent) or moved out of state (23 percent). About 15 percent were found to be enrolled in a public school, and 7 percent are being home-schooled. About 3 percent have dropped out of school altogether.

Districts are required to report enrollment and attendance data to PED at regular intervals, beginning in late October. That data is usually not released until it is carefully verified -- a weeks-long process -- but because of growing public concern about disengaged students amid remote and hybrid learning models, the department broke protocol in November by announcing the unverified data suggesting more than 12,000 students were unaccounted for.