

GMCS in limbo

Written by By Molly Adamson Sun Correspondent
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What will the 2021-2022 School Year look like?

The Gallup-McKinley School District is still trying to figure out what the upcoming school year is going to look like.

During the August 2 school board meeting Assistant Superintendent of Business Services Jvanna Hanks gave the board an update on the New Mexico Public Education Department's COVID-19 guidelines for the 2021-2022 School Year.

She explained that the NMPED hasn't come out with new guidelines since the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention came out with its update July 27.

The latest NMPED COVID-19 toolkit was updated July 26. Then the CDC changed its guidelines one day later in response to the uptick in COVID-19 cases.

The new guidelines require that all individuals in an elementary school wear a mask while in the school building, on school transportation, or at a school-sponsored event, regardless of

vaccination status.

Middle school and high school students, staff, and volunteers who are fully vaccinated and able to provide documentation of that fact, do not have to wear masks indoors. Secondary school students, staff, and volunteers who are not vaccinated or do not show proof of vaccination will be required to wear masks while in a school building, on school transportation, or at a school-sponsored event.

No one will be required to wear a mask outdoors.

At any indoor school events, such as a basketball game or a theater performance, unvaccinated spectators will be required to wear masks. They will not need to provide evidence of their vaccination status.

The NMPED is still putting individual districts in charge of making sure everyone follows the rules when it comes to masks.

Hanks told the board she would let them know when and if the NMPED makes any further changes. She said she suspects they will make more decisions this week. At the time of publication no further changes had been made.

“We want to assure parents and our students we will do everything to keep schools clean [and] sanitized,” Hanks said. “We will have appropriate PPE (Personal Protective Equipment)... all of the things from last year are still in place.”

Hanks then went on to express her enthusiasm about the upcoming school year.

“I’m very excited to get back to providing full support to all of our students in a method that is going to be most beneficial to them,” she told the *Sun*.

IMPLEMENTING CHANGE

For the rest of the meeting Hanks reviewed school updates. She said that this year the district's main focus would be on implementing automated flush toilets, sinks, and paper towel dispensers, along with automated lights and automatic water bottle filling machines across the district. She said all of these initiatives are being put in place in an effort to combat COVID-19 and other viruses.

One change struck a chord with board member Priscilla Benally, Dist. 3. She asked Hanks if the Thoreau football field had to be changed to turf or if it could remain a grass field.

"I think our football field is natural grass," Benally said. "It's beautiful, they maintain it.

"The kids just like playing on grass better than turf," she stated.

Hanks responded by reminding Benally of the state's drought conditions.

"Long-term with the drought situation we have in New Mexico, we're just not going to be able to maintain [grass fields] long term," Hanks explained. "It is a very dire situation for the state of New Mexico ... It's definitely an issue we can continue to discuss, but there is gonna come a point where we're not going to be able to maintain our fields due to the water shortage."

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