- PS Overview
- Adoptions
- Foster Care
- Child Abuse & Neglect
- Children's Trust Fund

- Facilities
- Probation & Aftercare
- Reintegration Centers
- Transition Services
- JJS Special Programs
- Volunteer Services

- BHS Overview
- Domestic Violence
- Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health
- Licensing & Certification

- RFP

# PED, CYFD, ECECD, IAD, and HED Announce Collaborative Plans to Protect, Feed, and Educate Children - and to Support Families - During Public Health Emergency

***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***

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**SANTA FE** — On Tuesday, New Mexico state agencies - including the Public Education Department (PED), Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD), Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD), Indian Affairs Department (IAD), and Higher Education Department (HED) - announced expanded plans for coordination during the COVID-19 public health emergency. The goal of these collaborative efforts is to ensure that children in New Mexico are protected, fed, and educated, and that families are supported, during this crisis.

"We know that numbers don't begin to tell the story of how this crisis has hurt New Mexicans," said ECECD Secretary Elizabeth Groginsky. "And just as individuals and communities across New Mexico are helping their neighbors in new and inspiring ways, state agencies are teaming up to deliver better-coordinated, better-targeted, and more effective supports to our fellow New Mexicans."

"School has never just been a place where kids go to learn," says PED Secretary Ryan Stewart. "With our school buildings physically closed to students for the remainder of the academic year, state agencies are partnering in new and unprecedented ways to make sure that the physical, social and emotional needs of young New Mexicans are met while we practice distancing strategies to stop the spread of COVID-19."

"Many New Mexican families have been living with complex challenges for generations, but the COVID crisis further exposes the needs of our state's most impacted people," said Children, Youth and Families Department Cabinet Secretary Brian Blalock. "Across our divisions, CYFD is ready to step up to the plate in providing innovative services while improving old systems to respond to the crisis now and be stronger in the future. Should any family be in need of supports, CYFD and the state of New Mexico are here for you."

"Many tribal communities still lack access to the internet, running water and electricity," said IAD Secretary Lynn Trujillo. "The Indian Affairs Department continues to work with our tribal, state and federal partners to leverage the resources that will help to support tribes through this difficult time. Our partnership with our sister agencies PED, CYFD, ECECD and HED stands as a testament to the state's commitment to all 23 tribes, nations and pueblos of New Mexico."

**Protecting Children**

In addition to closing public schools, PED is maintaining social distancing at meal pick-up sites and distributing guidance to school districts and charter schools regarding student privacy to ensure child safety during online learning.

Similarly, CYFD is taking advantage of phone and video technology to "over-visit" with youth in care in order to identify, address, and meet their needs. CYFD is also increasing telehealth availability for critical behavioral health services for children and adults. In addition, the Department is increasing communication with domestic violence shelters, youth shelters, hospitals, police, the Department of Health, and other partners involved in keeping children safe.

The New Mexico Crisis and Access Line remains open 24/7 to provide nonjudgmental support with mental health challenges and issues surrounding COVID-19. (NMCAL can be reached at 1-855-662-7474.) Statewide Central Intake (SCI) is also fully staffed 24/7 to receive, screen, log and prepare staff to investigate all reports of suspected child abuse or neglect. (SCI can be reached at 1-855-333-7233 or #SAFE from a cell phone.)

CYFD is working with youth shelters and domestic violence shelters to establish emergency operations and continuity of operations plans. CYFD's juvenile justice facilities have established such plans, as well as procedures for supporting young people who may have been exposed to COVID-19 or who test positive but do not need hospitalization. The Department is also working with the Human Services Department (HSD) and other agencies to identify funding that would support hotel vouchers for quarantined or self-isolated individuals and families who have no place to live but who may be exposed to COVID-19.

CYFD investigators also continue to investigate reports of suspected child abuse and neglect - and are taking proper health and hygiene precautions to protect children, families and themselves.

Similarly, ECECD has issued enhanced health and safety guidelines for child care centers that remain open to support other classes of essential workers.

**Feeding Children**

PED and CYFD continue to offer "grab and go" meals, reaching 47% of students in New Mexico. The Departments also obtained a USDA waiver that allows parents or guardians to pick up meals while their students are at home, including picking up several days' worth of food at once. PED and CYFD distribute over 200,000 meals a day.

ECECD is likewise continuing to connect child care centers with essential food and supplies. The Department is also coordinating feeding sites across

the state, including in tribal communities.

Funding from CYFD for shelters, including youth and domestic violence shelters, includes daily meal provisions for 3 meals and snacks per person. And in collaboration with PED and ECECD, CYFD is also coordinating and providing information to all shelters about meals available for youth at school and community sites.

Additionally, CYFD staff members are volunteering to pick up and deliver meals to New Mexicans' doorsteps - including families headed by seniors and grandparents - via coordination with the Department of Aging and Long-Term Services.

IAD is coordinating with CYFD on meal-sites in tribal communities - as well as responding to requests from tribal leadership on streamlining meal services for children and families.

**Educating Children**

While public schools are closed, PED is requiring districts to provide Continuous Learning Plans (CLP), including online learning and other forms of remote learning. The Department is also exploring the purchase of mobile devices and increased Internet connectivity for communities without broadband.

PED is also maintaining special education services for students with disabilities ages 3-21. Schools will remain responsible for providing free appropriate public education (FAPE) - in a safe environment - of eligible students who have an individualized education program (IEP).

PED is also supporting vulnerable students by ensuring that communities have mechanisms for connecting with educators - whether by phone, learning packets, or devices with downloaded curriculum. The Department is also informing families of support services at community schools, including food depots and virtual counseling services, and is keeping school-based health clinics open.

PED is making extra efforts to support English language learners, including ensuring that families have information in home languages, providing multiple options for demonstrating work, and preserving ratios for English language instruction in online settings. The Department is also focused on delivering resources to at-risk students and their families, as well as prioritizing transition grade levels (including high school seniors and 8th graders). And during this stressful time, the Department is emphasizing socio-emotional learning as much as academic learning.

In order to facilitate a smooth, orderly transition to distance learning and online platforms, PED is also offering professional development opportunities to all educational partners, including private schools and nonprofits. In particular, PED is collaborating with IAD to offer support for tribal charter schools and Bureau of Indian Education schools.

ECECD is also offering extensive resources to families and children under the stay-at-home order. This includes assembling a cross-departmental Home Learning Initiative with CYFD, PED, and external partners to provide top-quality educational, health, child development, and mindfulness-related resources via the Internet, traditional media, and paper-based resources.

In addition, the Department is providing ongoing early childhood development services via early interventions, child care, home visiting and pre-K. ECECD has also lowered barriers to service by establishing presumptive eligibility for infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities.

IAD is also collaborating with PED and the Department of Information Technology (DoIT) to address concerns related to broadband access and other educational resources - as well as providing resources to tribal leadership and tribal education directors on how tech- and non-technology-based virtual learning can work in rural communities.

CYFD is developing additional, creative educational activities and content to deliver to foster families, youth in care, and young people in juvenile justice facilities. Examples include virtual book clubs, household supply science experiments and other fun activities. The Department will also work with families to help coordinate access to educational options offered through individual school districts - and check in with children in care and families on school progress.

HED has asked colleges and universities to work with school districts to ensure dual-credit students can complete their coursework, including via online instruction. Dual-credit high school seniors who need a dual-credit class to meet high school graduation requirements will receive priority. HED has also asked colleges and universities to offer the option of withdrawing or receiving an incomplete for students who cannot get Internet access.

**Supporting Families**

While protecting public health is the first priority of all state agencies, we recognize the many impacts that this crisis has on normal community life. PED is strongly urging districts to find a way to host graduations and other milestone events - either virtually while the stay-at-home order is in place or after it is lifted. The Department is also ensuring that families have continued connectivity with counselors and social workers.

Similarly, ECECD is continuing to provide home visiting services for pregnant mothers and young families. The Department has also waived child care copayments and expanded child care eligibility for health care professionals, first responders and other essential employees.

CYFD is also working to support families with children in foster care through enhanced access to phone or video visits in order to maintain family connections and continue progress on reunification plans. In addition, the

Department is standing up telehealth services for behavioral health care, conducting weekly meetings with domestic violence and youth shelters to help meet their needs, and connecting families and shelters with food and supplies.

IAD is partnering with tribal governments to address worker displacement and develop safety protocols for working families - as well as supporting tribal communities in building community response plans.

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**Contact:** Matt Bieber
Director of Communications
Early Childhood Education and Care Department
matt.bieber@state.nm.us
505-629-9675

**Contact:** Nancy Martira
Director of Communications
Public Education Department
nancy.martira@state.nm.us
505-690-6038

**Contact:** Melody Wells
Public Information Officer
Children, Youth and Families Department
melody.wells@state.nm.us
505-470-3417

**Contact:** Sherrie Catanach
Public Relations Coordinator
Indian Affairs Department
Sherrie.Catanach2@state.nm.us
505-469-7599

**Contact:** Carmen J. Lopez
Deputy Secretary
Higher Education Department
Carmen.Lopez@state.nm.us
505-795-2302



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