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SCHOOL AIR FILTRATION SYSTEMS TO BE UPGRADED STATEWIDE

DISTRICTS THAT OPENED THIS WEEK TO MAKE IMPROVEMENTS BY END OF NEXT WEEK

SANTA FE — Many school buildings across New Mexico will get upgraded air filtration systems in the coming weeks to assure that students return to in-person learning in the safest possible environment, the Public Education Department announced today.

The Public Education Department is working with the Public School Facilities Authority and school leaders across the state to determine what air filters are

currently in use in school buildings and how effective they are at removing tiny particles like viruses from the air. Additionally, they will identify the highest-quality air filters compatible with each existing heating and cooling system. Taken together with mask wearing, social distancing, frequent handwashing, and other enhanced safety measures, upgrading filtration systems is yet another commitment the state is making to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus.

Ventilation system upgrades and improvements will increase the delivery of clean air and dilute potential contaminants within each classroom and school facility.

Elementary schools that brought students back this week have been asked to assess their current filters and upgrade them where possible by the end of next week.

Schools and districts planning to open later will have to procure and install recommended filters before beginning classes in the hybrid model, which includes days of both remote and in-class learning each week. The PED will contact those district and charter school leaders next week to launch that process and provide guidance on optimizing filtration systems.

To further augment air flow, occupied New Mexico schools are required to take measures outlined by the national Centers for Disease Control for this purpose, including opening windows, running central air fans constantly, deploying portable fans, especially for windowless rooms, and opening dampers.

“Our knowledge about the novel coronavirus is constantly evolving, and we must keep evolving with it,” Public Education Secretary Ryan Stewart said. “If we’re going to let our precious children and our cherished educators return to in-person learning, we must do everything in our power to keep them as safe as possible. We now know that upgrading air filtration in buildings is one such thing,” he said.

“Education leaders across New Mexico have been working hard in order to leave no stone unturned in our drive to make school reentry in the hybrid mode as safe as is physically possible,” Stewart said. “We know it’s frustrating to keep adapting in this ever-changing landscape, but we must adapt when the health and lives of students and staff are at stake,” he said.

New Mexico public schools closed to in-person learning in mid-March due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Districts and charter schools that have met strict safety

criteria were cleared to move from remote-only to a hybrid model this week, although they were not required to do so.

Districts and schools still in the remote mode must meet these safety criteria, established by the CDC, to be cleared for reopening:

- District/school county is in the “green zone” for new daily cases and test positivity rates
- District/school has a PED-approved reentry plan
- District/school has safety and support plans in place, including any necessary upgrades to facilities and air filtration systems.

In addition, each district must have a written protocol on inspecting, repairing and providing maintenance on ventilation systems within all school facilities on an ongoing basis.