

Starting In-Person/Hybrid Schooling: An ATF Proclamation

The stance of our union, the Albuquerque Teachers Federation, has never changed—we want our schools to open as soon as it is safe for all staff and students.

Every educator in APS is anxious to return to in-person schooling. We know that in-person schooling is best for our students. We are devoted to providing the best education and social/emotional experience possible to all we serve.

That being said, we are confused by the sudden rush to transition to in-person hybrid learning while the pandemic continues to rage out of control.

First, we must ask: Why now? We have waited 10 long months for a safe return to in-person schooling. We have met the challenge of building remote learning programs and offering consistency and stability to our students, families, and communities. We have trusted science. APS's December 2020 Plan to return to in-person learning once our county is "in the green" for two weeks is a sound plan. Bernalillo County is currently deep "in the red."

It is ironic that just as the possibility of educators receiving vaccinations is imminent, we are now being asked to rush into the implementation of hybrid learning without vaccines. We are confused by the availability of vaccines for educators in some districts (and private schools) while APS staff are told to wait our turn. To be clear, we do not advocate that we "cut line" in front of other citizens in this process. However, we insist that educators should have the opportunity to be vaccinated before returning to in-person learning en masse.

Secondly, we know that consistency, structure, and routines are essential for our students. The timing for a transition to hybrid learning could not be worse.

As we understand it, the phase-in to a hybrid schedule that will be presented to the APS Board of Education on February 3rd is riddled with disruptions and will undo the order we have worked so hard to establish for our students during remote learning.

APS's Proposed Schedule

- Staff will return to their classrooms while continuing remote learning for 4 days during the week of February 16-19.
- Hybrid learning will open for small groups (about 25% of the class at a time) from February 22-March 5.

- Educators and students will begin the 50% model in hybrid mode for 2 weeks from March 8-17.
- There will be no classes for students at all levels because of parent/teacher conferences March 18-19.
- Schools will be closed for Spring Break March 22-26.
- Then, we must ensure that those who traveled during Spring Break are quarantined for 2 weeks.

We ask that our leaders, colleagues, and families consider that our current remote learning model may indeed be providing a better educational experience than the consistent disruptions inherent in this proposed schedule. Also, we must take into account the probability that we will need to shut down classrooms and schools as COVID-19 cases are detected.

Furthermore, approximately 25% of our school nurses and health assistants still do not have N95 masks. Before any mass reentry, our Board of Education and district leaders must prioritize the safety of our nurses and health assistants. They are essential in the function of our schools as a whole and will be tasked to staff the isolation rooms and well-child rooms in our schools. They must have the proper PPE.

Finally, it is important that every educator, parent, and student understand the limitations of small group and hybrid schooling. In newly-reopened classrooms, teachers will be instructing up to 50% of our students in person for 2-days every week while the other 50% continue learning remotely from home. Then, the two groups flip locations. In a hybrid model, our students in the classroom will have the same on-screen lessons as our students at home; they are still learning in the virtual environment. Their location and surroundings are what will primarily change.

As such, the rich in-person experiences we all crave, such as interactive learning activities, will not yet be possible because of safety concerns and social distancing. They will not be able to use books, handouts, or manipulatives. They will spend the majority of their day in their individual desks working on their computers. Social interactions will be kept to a minimum.

Educators do not want to be the people keeping kids from sports and parents from working.

Some educators are ready to return to the hybrid model now. Many others are not because they fear for their safety and the safety of their loved ones and the families of their students. We ask that a voluntary plan be considered so that those who are

ready may return first. Once every APS educator has had the opportunity to be vaccinated, all will return. Doing so will end potential acrimony between colleagues.

The Albuquerque Teachers Federation proclaims on behalf of all the educators we represent:

- We all want in-person teaching and learning as soon as it is scientifically safe. This means adhering to the December 2020 Reentry Plan and vaccinating all educators.
- All educators want to go back, after we have the opportunity to get vaccines.
- The APS Board should approve a voluntary phase-in into hybrid until such time as the vaccine is available for all staff.
- We advocate that hybrid learning be decoupled from sports. The connection is unnecessary. If communities and families decide they want their student athletes to play sports this should not be contingent on all staff and students returning to in-person learning before it is safe.

We, the Albuquerque Teachers Federation, believe that all stakeholders want what is best for our students. We serve the public and are deeply concerned with public safety. We contend that this proclamation is based on sound pedagogy and real science.

**Green or Vaccine
Whichever Comes First**

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