



Office of the Governor

MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Gov. Lujan Grisham announces
“Supporting Teachers and Families” initiative
State workers, National Guard encouraged to step up to keep
kids
in class, support teachers and parents

SANTA FE – Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham on Wednesday announced Supporting Teachers and Families (STAF), an innovative initiative to provide critical support for New Mexico’s schools and child care facilities, which, like those in the rest of the nation, are facing extreme staffing shortages due to a surge in COVID-19 cases.

The initiative encourages state workers and National Guard members to volunteer to become licensed as substitute pre-K-12 teachers and/or child care workers and work where they are needed to keep doors open for in-person learning and child care. All volunteers must fulfill the same requirements as regular substitute teachers and child care workers, including undergoing a background check and completing an online substitute teaching workshop through PED for individuals applying to work in schools. The state will also ensure that the needs of schools and the state are balanced to ensure that state services are not affected by this effort.

“Our schools are a critical source of stability for our kids – we know they learn better in the classroom and thrive among their peers,” said **Gov. Lujan Grisham**. “Our kids, our teachers and our parents deserve as much stability as we can provide during this time of uncertainty, and the state stands ready to help keep kids in the classroom, parents able to go to work and teachers able to fully focus on the critical work they do every single day in educating the next generation.”

By bringing multiple agencies and school districts together to facilitate the licensure processes for substitute teachers and child care workers, the initiative will allow state workers to use administrative leave to work in schools and child care programs with staffing shortages. The additional staffing will allow schools to avoid the disruptive process of switching between remote and in-person learning and prevent child care programs from having to shut down altogether.

Currently, many schools are being forced to shift to online learning and child care facilities are being forced to temporarily close when staff members test positive for COVID-19 or are identified as close contacts and must isolate or quarantine for 5 days. The goal of the state's effort is to ensure these establishments have the staffing resources to temporarily fill in during these gaps. Since winter break, around 60 school districts and charter schools have moved into remote learning. Since the beginning of the year, 75 child care centers have partially or completely closed due to staffing shortages.

The initiative was announced at Santa Fe High School, which is currently operating under a remote model due to a lack of substitute teachers.

"We've heard from multiple districts that a lack of substitute teachers is among the most critical staffing issues right now, and they've asked for the state's support," said Public Education **Secretary Kurt Steinhaus**. "This is state government at its best, and we are ready to step up to support our teachers, who have been on the front lines of the pandemic for nearly two years now, by increasing the state's pool of substitute teachers."

"Santa Fe Public Schools greatly appreciates the STAF initiative by Governor Lujan Grisham, as this will be instrumental in helping us return and continue in-person learning by covering staff vacancies and reducing the stress on our remaining staff who have taken on additional duties," said Santa Fe Public Schools **Superintendent Hilario "Larry" Chavez**.

"Every day, child care programs call the department to let us know that they have to temporarily close due to staffing shortages," said Early Childhood Education and Care Department **Secretary Elizabeth Groginsky**. "These closures create enormous stress for parents and disrupt young children's learning and care. Remote alternatives don't exist for most of our youngest learners, so this initiative is critical to keeping child-care providers' doors open so they can continue to support children and families through this difficult period."

The state sent a letter today asking for volunteers from state agencies and the New Mexico National Guard. The Public Education Department is allocating additional resources and working with districts and charter schools to streamline their licensure processes. The Early Childhood Education and Care Department has set up an online application for individuals interested in providing substitute support in child-care programs.

"Teachers all over the country are doing what they can to alleviate some of the strains associated with the teacher crisis and sub shortages as a result of the pandemic," said **English Language Arts teacher Adriana Cuen Flavian** of Santa Teresa High in Gadsden Public Schools. "We miss lunches, combine classes, take temperatures, provide comfort, check emotional well-being, and disinfect in an effort to keep seeing our students learn and thrive."

In addition to children and teachers, parents are also negatively affected by the fluctuation between in-person and remote learning, as they often must miss work or arrange childcare on short notice.

"The New Mexico Parent Teacher Association is grateful for the governor's actions to help keep our students in school," said **MaryBeth Weeks, New Mexico Parent Teacher Association president**. "This initiative will help create a stable school environment, as well as help parents who are having to juggle childcare and jobs."

“This intergovernmental collaboration will help keep New Mexico students in the classrooms, with their teachers. We know that is the best place for our students. Thank you to Gov. Lujan Grisham for supporting New Mexico Public Schools,” said **Superintendent Arsenio Romero** of Los Lunas Public Schools.

“We want to thank Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham and the Public Education Department for thinking outside of the box in imagining and instituting the STAF program,” said **Whitney Holland, president of the American Federation of Teachers New Mexico**. “Targeted use of state workers and National Guard members will help ease the dire need for substitute teachers in our schools. On behalf of New Mexico’s public educators, we want to offer our sincere thanks to those who will be serving their communities and our students with us through this program.”

“We’re grateful that the governor is recognizing this moment for what it is – a crisis. We must invest more in our schools and our educators to safely retain the educators we have, and competitively recruit new educators into our schools,” said **Mary Parr-Sanchez, president of the National Education Association New Mexico**. “Our elected leaders can do that right now by enacting bold remedies and by supporting an increase in educator salary tiers, by fixing the inequitable healthcare benefit system, and by promoting proven strategies like community schools and early childhood education. In the meantime, thank you Governor for doing whatever it takes to keep our schools going.”

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