

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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House GOP response to PED restorative justice scheme

Farmington, NM – The New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) recently announced a new initiative aimed at dealing with school suspensions and expulsions. PED plans to introduce restorative justice programming into New Mexico schools.

House Republicans today raised concerns about the true intent of the PED's plans. Given the rise in behavioral issues across our state as a direct result of Governor Lujan Grisham's mandatory lockdowns, House Republican Whip Rod Montoya (Farmington) questions what we can expect within our schools by not directly addressing problematic behaviors and holding individuals accountable for their actions.

"You cannot hide from the violence permeating our communities," said House Republican Whip Rod Montoya (Farmington). "Local communities are dealing with the problems created by Santa Fe policies that are weak on accountability. PED's initiative would issue the same 'No Consequences' policy in the classroom that has proven to be detrimental to criminal justice. Democrat policies that keep violent offenders free on bail have led to record breaking violent crime across the state- should we prepare ourselves for similar results in our schools?"

Rep. Montoya contends that the removal of serious consequences, in favor of an approach that limits educators' handling of classroom disruptions, will foster an environment in which consequences for actions are not taken seriously.

Rep. Montoya continued, "PED should be focusing on improving New Mexico's poor educational performance, which declined even further during the governor's instituted COVID lockdowns. Eliminating consequences for unacceptable behavior will not make our schools safer. Removing consequences for bad behavior will almost certainly produce the same results we are seeing in our criminal justice system."

Rep. Montoya's letter to PED is attached to this release.



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The Honorable Kurt Steinhaus
Secretary of Education
New Mexico Public Education Department
300 Don Gaspar Avenue
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

Dear Secretary Steinhaus:

On June 29th, the Public Education Department (PED) sent out a press release announcing a new initiative designed to help schools avoid suspending and expelling students for behavior that could be linked to traumatic childhood experiences.

The press release further stated that this would be achieved by implementing trauma-responsive and restorative practices in New Mexico schools, and that these restorative practices are based on the principles of restorative justice, an approach to understanding and responding to crime in society.

This effort begs numerous questions be addressed if parents are going to buy into this effort.

Can PED site any evidence where "restorative justice" has been successful in changing inappropriate behavior in society?

How or when will students be disciplined if they exhibit violent behavior, if they bully or harass other students, or if they make threats to teachers, administrators, and/or other students.

How would the principles of restorative justice be applied to students who exhibit violent behavior, or pose a dangerous impediment to a classroom? Would a student who brings a firearm or knife to school still be subject to suspension or expulsion?

PED uses the example of one specific restorative practice of a talking circle where the group (including the offender) discusses who was harmed by the behavior and determines how to repair that harm. What types of misbehavior would be addressed by using these talking circles? Should I assume these taking circles will be utilized for students who physically assault, bully or harass other students?

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If students who exhibit violent or bullying behaviors are not suspended or expelled, will parents or guardians be forced to seek a restraining order to protect their children from these violent offenders? Will local school districts be assuming any liability by not taking strong and strict action against students with violent behavioral histories?

Is this "help" from PED optional, or will local school boards and local school administrators be forced to adopt these practices? At first glance, it appears this anti-suspension/expulsion effort is yet another example of PED slowly eroding the control of local school officials.

If this initiative is mandated on local school districts, will PED withhold SEG funding and other financial resources if local school boards refuse to implement the restorative justice approach?

At a time when crime and other inappropriate behaviors are seemingly becoming more prevalent within our schools, I question the timing and the approach of this anti-suspension and expulsion effort as it could further exacerbate worries that our schools are unsafe.

I am certain that many parents, teachers, school board members and administrators will have concerns over what impact restorative justice practices will have on the majority of students who are just trying to get an education.

Rather than promoting an effort that will lessen the likelihood of consequences for inappropriate behavior, PED should be more concerned with providing students with a safe and effective learning environment.

I look forward to your explanations and answers to these concerns.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration of my request,



Rod Montoya
House Republican Whip