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**EMBARGOED NEWS RELEASE**

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## **School-based quarantine requirements updated**

*New 'Test to Stay' guidance will get most students back in class faster*

SANTA FE — Students identified as close contacts to a positive COVID-19 case could get back to class and extracurricular activities more quickly under new guidelines published this week by the Public Education Department and supported by the Department of Health.

The Public Education Department's updated COVID-19 Response Toolkit introduces a "Test to Stay" program that allows student and staff close contacts to continue participating in classes and extracurricular activities if they test negative on rapid COVID-19 tests on days one, three and five following a possible exposure.

Until now, students and staff members had to quarantine at home for 10 days after being identified as a close contact to someone who tested positive for COVID-19.

"We've heard a lot of concern from New Mexico families about long quarantines for asymptomatic students in districts where full-scale remote learning isn't an option," said Public Education Secretary (Designate) Kurt Steinhaus. "We want to keep students in class to the greatest extent possible and provide a safe learning environment for students and staff. We believe this Test to Stay program checks those boxes."

"Testing and vaccination continue to be our best tools for containing COVID-19 in New Mexico – and for ensuring the in-person learning that we all want for our students, schools and communities," said DOH Deputy Secretary Dr. Laura Parajon.

Beginning immediately, school districts will start hiring staff and developing school-site procedures for COVID-19 testing. Implementation begins Nov. 1. Districts that have not implemented Test to Stay by Dec. 1 will receive a warning letter, phone call or site visit by either the Public Education Department or Department of Health. Any district or state-chartered school that has not implemented the program by Jan. 1 could be fined.

If a parent refuses to allow an exposed child to participate in testing, the child will quarantine at home for 10 days as was required previously.

The testing program is supported by a \$64 million federal grant funded by the American Rescue Plan Act and administered by the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The state Department of Health used some of that to contract with Premier Medical Group to visit every participating school at least weekly to assist with testing. Public, nonpublic, charter and tribal schools are all eligible.

District participation in the Test to Stay program is required, but districts must register to receive a share of \$37 million to support testing. Registered districts will receive a \$70,000 base grant plus \$30 per enrolled student to cover expenses related to developing a school surveillance testing program. Districts can use the funding for a broad range of testing-related expenses, including hiring a school nurse or other support personnel.

To date, 58 of New Mexico's 89 school districts (65%) serving 684 schools have registered for the funding, along with 48 charter schools, 15 non-public schools and four tribally controlled/Bureau of Indian Education schools.

District and school leaders who learned of Test to Stay last week in a meeting with Public Education Department leaders expressed support for the program.

"I don't like sending students home as it places a burden on families. I think this will support families and student learning," said Jesus Moncado, principal at Christine Duncan's Heritage Academy in Albuquerque.

"Keeping students in school is the most powerful, important and impactful thing we can do," said Stan Rounds, executive director of the New Mexico Coalition of Educational Leaders.

When there is a delay in learning of exposure, the testing sequence begins on the first day a school is notified of the exposure and the close contact is in attendance. If a testing day falls on a day school is not in session or the individual is absent, the testing sequence will resume on the next school day.

The Test to Stay program still requires student and staff close contacts to quarantine except for school and school-related activities, and Test to Stay is immediately terminated if the individual exhibits COVID symptoms. In that case, self-isolation is required pending a negative COVID

test. If COVID is confirmed, self-isolation continues for 10 days following the day symptoms began.

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The New Mexico Public Education Department partners with educators, communities and families to ensure that all students are healthy, secure in their identity and holistically prepared for college, career and life. Currently, the NMPED serves more than 317,000 students in 187 districts and charter schools. Find an abundance of resources for administrators, educators, families and students at [New Mexico Public Education Department](#) or follow the NMPED on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).