



The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

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President Nez urges all schools to submit School Reopening Plans to the Department of Diné Education

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer are calling on all schools to submit their required School Reopening Plan to the Department of Diné Education (DODE) and a Signature of Attestation from schools operating on the Navajo Nation ahead of the new school year.

With the start of the fall semester, there remain over 75 schools that have yet to submit their reopening plan and attestation form to DODE. This means the department is unaware of safety plans a school district has to protect its students and staff from a potential COVID-19 outbreak, as well as whether the school is prepared to safely reopen.

“We are in this fight against COVID-19 together and we need the cooperation and partnership of all schools to help safely reopen schools. If your school has yet to submit a plan to DODE, please do so immediately to ensure that all schools have safety guidelines and protocols in place. The wearing of face masks is required for all students, teachers, administrators, and other school employees at all times. We also strongly encourage those who are 12 years and older to get fully vaccinated for COVID-19,” said President Nez.

The Navajo Nation School Reopening Plan is the result of a collaboration between DODE and the Navajo Health Command Operations Center (HCOC) to guide the safe reopening of schools on the Navajo Nation in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Schools located within and operating on the Navajo Nation are required to complete their own comprehensive and detailed COVID-19 policies and procedures, which regulate safe practices to prepare administrators, staff, and students to return to the premises for in-person instruction. Those schools must create, submit and implement a School Reopening Plan and complete an accompanying Reopening Readiness Assessment Attestation form to DODE prior to providing in-person services.

Schools must develop their reopening plans to address the needs of the schools, the students, and the communities they serve. The reopening plans shall comply with NNBOE and Navajo Nation Council resolutions, as well as Navajo Nation PHEOs and executive orders. The reopening plans shall be approved by the local school board.

A school's individual reopening plan must meet the following criteria:

- All Schools are expected to have consulted with parents and families, through surveys and other outreach methods, to determine the best setting for their children.
- All schools will continue to abide by current Navajo Nation Executive Orders and Navajo Nation Public Health Orders.
- Schools must have three instruction plans in place: Remote, Hybrid, and In-Person Learning.
- Schools will follow the Navajo Nation COVID-19 Safe Schools Framework. The Safe Schools framework safety measures are categorized in two main areas of prevention: Core Prevention Strategies, such as mask-wearing and distancing, and Conditional Prevention Strategies, such as temperature and symptom screening.
- All school reopening plans will incorporate CDC guidelines and appropriate state guidelines for safety protocols and procedures.

Then a school must have a Reopening Readiness Assessment completed by an assessment team comprised of the following individuals:

- (1) school administrator
- (1) local health worker
- (1) educator
- (1) facility/maintenance representative
- (1) parent/guardian or community member

Once the assessment team is created and they have reviewed the school's reopening plan, the team completes a physical walkthrough of the school premises, documenting their findings on a checklist to generate recommendations for a safe reopening. All team members sign attestation statement included with checklist. The team will then come to a consensus on whether they recommend the school reopen.

The signed attestation form and reopening assessment with recommendations are submitted to DODE, the school administration, and the school board. All school reopening documents are sent to schoolreopening@nndode.org. The assessment team will either state the school requires more time to fulfill the requirements of the assessment team before they can reopen, or the school will be approved to safely reopen to students.

"By working together through this process, we hope that it will help to ease some of the safety concerns expressed by parents. The pandemic has created so many unprecedented challenges for everyone, but we have to continue to work together and support one another. Please be safe, mask up, and get vaccinated," said Vice President Lizer.

The full Navajo Nation School Reopening Plan, along with the attestation forms and Safe Schools Framework, can be viewed at <https://www.navajonationdode.org/navajoschoolreopening/>.

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