

LCPS finalizes plan to increase in-person learning: Classes to begin Feb. 22 and March 1



LAS CRUCES – Las Cruces Public Schools will initiate a plan to increase in-person learning opportunities that was presented at Tuesday night's school board meeting.

Increased in-person learning opportunities begin on Feb. 22 for high school students. For elementary school and middle school students, these opportunities begin on March 1

based on individual student need.

LCPS Superintendent Karen Trujillo led the presentation. The plan was constructed after the school board [rejected Trujillo's initial full hybrid plan on Feb. 2.](#)

"At this point, we really do need to prioritize those that we've identified as really needing that extra level of support from us," Trujillo said during the meeting. "(Thank you to) our parents, for being patient, I know it's difficult, and (to) our students for understanding, and being able to come back and follow all of the rules, because if we don't all do it together, it's not going to work. The last thing we want is to open just to close."

Read more: [Las Cruces Public Schools has a plan to present to the school board. Here are some takeaways.](#)

Districts now have control over learning models after New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham announced on Jan. 26 that [districts will be permitted to return to in-person hybrid learning regardless of the number and rate of COVID-19 cases in each county.](#)

LCPS has been in remote learning since March 2020 after New Mexico schools were shut down in order to mitigate the spread of SARS CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. This will be the first instance of in-person instruction for

students in that last 11 months outside of specific special education groups.

What is the plan?

Teachers are being asked to enter in-person learning on a completely voluntary basis. When polled, teachers said they would feel more comfortable returning to the class after receiving the vaccine.

According to Trujillo, out of the 3,412 staff members in LCPS, 56 percent requested a COVID-19 vaccine through the district. Out of those that requested a vaccine, 82 percent have received a vaccine. Teachers who have gotten the vaccine are expected to receive their second dose by Friday.

Vaccination Data Requested by LCPS School Board

LCPS STAFF	Formally Requested Vaccine	Number who received vaccine	Percentage of staff requested vaccine that received vaccine
School Building Staff	1298	1126	87%
Bus Drivers	65	32	49%
Substitutes	51	15	29%
PPD	52	32	61%
Security	73	34	45%
Health Services	53	49	92%
Nutrition Services	89	91	102%
Admin Office	125	132	105%
Custodians	105	64	61%
Total	1911	1575	82%

LCPS Employee Categories	# Employees
Certified Employees	1,883
Classified Employees	1,141
Non-Union Employees	59
Admin & Management	197
Temporary / Subs	132
Total	3,412
Percent of staff who requested vaccine	1911/3412 = 56%

Michael Montoya, associate superintendent of operations

and high schools at LCPS, introduced the high school plan.

The district sent a questionnaire to its 6,387 students at Las Cruces, Mayfield, Oñate and Centennial high schools on Feb. 9, asking whether they wanted to remain fully online, receive in-person assistance on a need basis or commit to hybrid learning two days a week.

In total, 77.2 percent of high school students will continue to learn remotely.

On Feb. 22, 1,137 high school students will begin hybrid learning.

"We will be able to give more kids the opportunity once we know more teachers will be able to come in," Montoya said.

Both Centennial High and Mayfield High have a deficit of teachers needed on Feb. 22. Montoya said that other school staff members will fill in until more teachers are comfortable moving into hybrid learning.

Students in hybrid learning will remain in the same cohort for the full day and there is no switching rooms.

After working with their in-person teacher for an hour in the morning, students will switch to remote classes on their laptops for the rest of the day in the same room. They will still have support from their teacher in-person, but will

receive instruction from a teacher remotely for their individual classes.

Online classes are from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. with an hour break for lunch outside or off-campus. Students will attend in-person classes in two cohorts, one on Mondays and Tuesdays and the other on Thursdays and Fridays.

Heather Kingery, associate superintendent of middle schools, introduced the middle school plan.

About 731 middle school students will begin small group in-person instruction on March 1.

Middle school in-person opportunities are focused on needs-based criteria. The presentation listed factors that could make a student eligible for in-person instruction including those who attend Zoom classes but are failing, those who demonstrate a lack of understanding while still participating, those with a high level of need for social emotional learning support, those without internet, those who are homeless, in special education or are English learners, and those who have zero or sporadic submission of assignments.

Much like the high school plan, middle school students will remain with one teacher for the entire day. Kingery said that in the future, LCPS might consider moving the teachers from

class to class while the students remain stationary.

Online classes are from 12 to 3:45 p.m. after a morning of in-person support and a lunch break. Students are split between one and four cohorts, depending on the middle school. Students will attend school in-person two days a week, except for students at Picacho Middle who will attend one day a week.

Tiffany Hinsley, an LCPS administrator, introduced the elementary school plan.

About 1,780 elementary students will be returning to school in small groups on March 1.

In-person learning opportunities are for elementary students who are not engaging or who have known connectivity and scheduling issues.

Students will work with one teacher. This teacher may not be the teacher they had the rest of the year, but they will be considered their in-person teacher.

The idea is to create as much consistency and as little disruption as possible.

Hinsley described each grade as a "team" that will work together to ensure each student's needs are met.

"Teachers will not be required to instruct students while they're in the building and online at the same time," Hinsley said. "We remind ourselves that all of our students are our students. And we're coming together right now to do whatever we can to accommodate them, their families and do what's best for them."

For now, elementary school students will attend class for two hours a day, two or four days a week. Third through fifth grades attend class in the morning, and pre-K through second grade attend class in the afternoon. The two cohorts will not hold class in the same rooms, so there will be no possible cross-contamination.

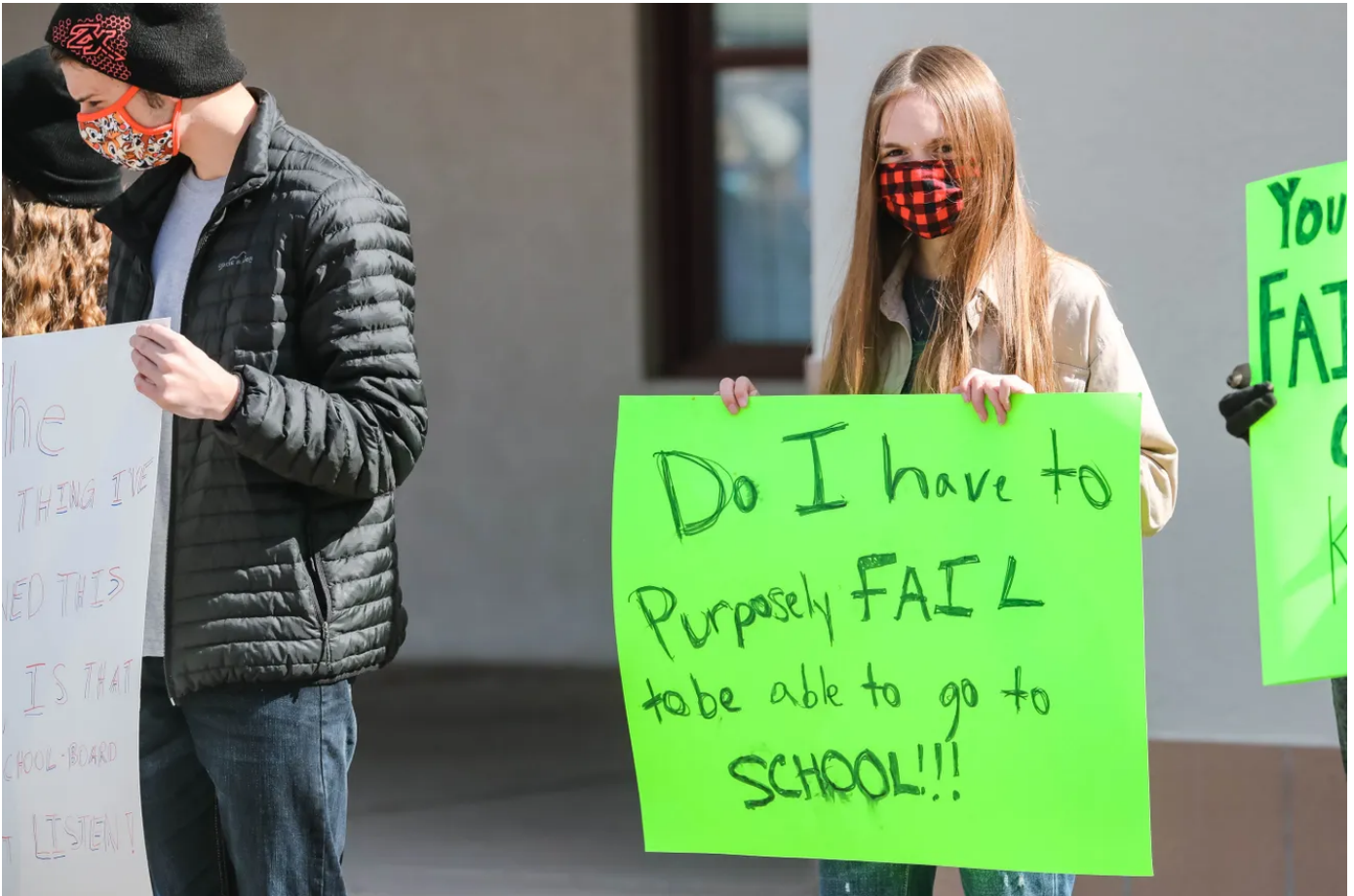
"It's very important for people to understand that we have specific guidelines that we have to follow that are extremely strict, and we're doing our very best to bring back as many students as possible following all the guidelines we have to follow," Trujillo said.

Community response

About 60 Las Cruces community members gathered at the LCPS central office on Tuesday morning — before Trujillo's presentation to the school board but after her plan had been posted online as part of a publicly available packet — to protest the proposed plan for hybrid transition. The parents and students who attended wanted more opportunities for

in-person learning.

Nora Talbot, a seventh-grader, displayed a sign that read "Do I need to purposely fail to be able to go to school?"



Talbot said she felt all her hard work to keep her grades up is in vain.

"Hearing that no matter how hard you're working, no matter how hard you're trying to do your best, how hard you're trying to keep your grades up, (in-person learning is) not going to happen for you," Talbot said. "They're not going to put you in their priorities to help you learn better."

Kelly Bloomfield, who has five children in LCPS and helped

organize of the event, said the "in-building" and in-person learning are two very different things. She described the district's plan as "in-building" because students will still be in on their computers for most of the day in secondary schools.

"The building isn't special or sacred. It's a building just like their homes," Bloomfield said. "My daughter has a sign that says four walls are four walls. It's not about the building, it's about the quality of the education that they're getting."



Related: [LCPS parents and children advocate for in-person schooling](#)

LCPS will go forward with the current plan in place. Public Education Department's required classroom health inspections will be completed by Feb. 22 for high schools

and by March 1 for elementary and middle schools.

The district plans to expand in-person learning as more vaccines are distributed and more teachers choose to return to the classroom.

"It's extremely complicated," Board president Ray Jaramillo said near the end of the plan's discussion, while encouraging the community to meet standards set by the state's Red to Green framework. "I would use the complexity of this to ask the community for help. We have to stay in the yellow. We have to move towards green for this to work. Because if we go the other way (more COVID-19 cases), we can't increase, we can't get to that full hybrid model."

Trujillo recognized the five LCPS educators that have passed due to COVID-19 since October. Most recently, [Elizabeth Placencio, a media teacher at Mesa Middle School, passed away on Monday night.](#)

"When people talk about that we don't care about our teachers or our students, that is the furthest thing from the truth," Trujillo said. "I just want our community to know that we take this very, very, very seriously.

"We want to honor the needs of our students and the needs of our staff."

Miranda Cyr, a Report for America corps member, can be

reached at mcyr@lcsun-news.com or [@mirandabcyr](https://twitter.com/mirandabcyr) on Twitter. Show your support for the Report for America program at <https://bit.ly/LCSNRFA>.