

PED, partners aim to locate every disengaged student

Written by Staff Reports

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SANTA FE — The Public Education Department and 13 New Mexico school districts committed themselves to finding thousands of New Mexico students who were enrolled last spring, but not this fall, in order to make sure they are safe and engaged in learning.

The PED has calculated that more than 6,270 students may be unaccounted for based on attendance data reported to the agency as of Dec. 30. Thirteen school districts account for an overwhelming majority of that number, and superintendents from those districts met virtually with PED leaders to discuss what comes next.

“This is a huge priority across the state and an all-hands-on-deck partnership. We’re going to dive deeply and see how many of them we can find and support,” Public Education Secretary Ryan Stewart said.

The superintendents made clear that they were reaching out to disengaged students long before they were required to report the so-called “40th day” attendance figures to the state in late October.

“All of us have done everything we can think of to reach out to these families,” Supt. Arsenio Romero of Deming said. “Is there anything else in our toolbox that we haven’t done in the past?”

“We’ve written letters; we’ve called; we’ve knocked on doors,” Supt. Sue Cleveland from Rio Rancho said.

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PED and its partner, the Graduation Alliance, sent letters through the mail. Early replies indicated some students have enrolled in private schools or Bureau of Indian Education schools; some are being home-schooled, and others have moved out of state.

To obtain better contact information, the Human Services, Children, Youth and Families and Early Childhood Education and Care departments are cross-checking names on PED's list with their own databases.

HSD's cross-check turned up about 5,000 matches; CYFD's cross-check turned up about 4,300 students who had previous contact of some kind with that agency.

"Our goal is to understand where these students are living, what they're doing, whether they need services, and what their plans are for schooling — present and future. If they need assistance re-enrolling, we'll provide that, too," PED Deputy Secretary Katarina Sandoval said.