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DR. VERONICA C. GARCÍA
SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

BILL RICHARDSON
Governor

September 18, 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: District Superintendents, Charter School Administrators

FROM: Dr. Veronica C. García (signature on file)
Secretary of Education

RE: H1N1 Update

Dear Superintendents and Charter School Leaders,

I want to thank Homeland Security and Emergency Management Secretary John Wheeler, Dr. Mike Landen, and Dr. Mary Ramos from DOH for joining me on the H1N1 conference call on Monday.

All schools and districts are encouraged to continue following the prevention guidance that has been given by DOH and PED, and is located on the PED website at <http://www.ped.state.nm.us/press/2009/h1n1/index.html> ,

As I mentioned in a previous email, school closures should be considered only if attendance reaches a level that makes operations of a school impractical. Please contact me directly if you believe school closure is imminent before making any public announcement.

In the last two weeks, PED has sent out two important documents pertaining to continuing education and food services in the event of a school closure. We have only received responses from four districts on the MOU for food services. I encourage you to work with your food service directors and the PED offices to have these MOUs in place in the next month.

School officials should continually provide basic prevention information for staff, students and parents. The Center for Disease Control (CDC)'s guidance is designed to keep schools open while they do what they can to protect students and staff. Recommendations include:

- The best ways to prevent influenza are getting vaccinated, frequent hand washing with soap and water when possible, covering noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and staying home when sick.

- Students and staff with flu-like illness should stay home and away from other people for at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever, without using a fever-reducing medicine.
- School staff should routinely clean areas that students and staff touch often with the cleaners they typically use. Special cleaning with bleach is unnecessary.
- Students and staff who appear to have flu-like illness should be sent to a room separate from other students until they can be sent home.

The New Mexico Department of Health recommends parents should check their children each morning for illness and keep children home if they have influenza-like illness (fever, cough, and/or sore throat). It's important for parents to keep their children at home for 24 hours after a fever breaks without using a fever-reducing medication. People should stay home from work if they are ill with influenza-like symptoms as well.

School and District attendance policies should be looked at so that students who are absent due to a flu-like illness would need only a parent's or guardian's note and not a doctor's note to return to school. Children may be out for 3-5 days or so with flu and we think that not requiring a doctor's note will work better for families and for potentially overloaded doctors' offices also.

We are reviewing guidance from the US Department of Education as to participation rates for NCLB, and we will get back to you with more specifics about that information.

I know that we all share the same concern regarding the swine flu for the well being of our students, families, and community. As information becomes available we will provide it to you.

Again, the best defense is prevention. Please follow the guidelines on the DOH and PED website. Thank you for your continued support and diligence on this important issue affecting the health and well-being of students and staff.

Truly,
Veronica C. García, Ed.D
VCG/BF

cc: PED Executive Team
John Wheeler, Secretary of Homeland Security and Emergency Management
Alfredo Vigil, Secretary of Department of Health
Brian Condit, Governor's Office
Peter Winograd, Governor's Office
Dr. Mike Landen, DOH Deputy Epidemiologist