

Public Comment from the LCPS Board of Education Regular Session on March 16, 2021

School Board Members: I share your grief in the loss of Dr. Trujillo. What I don't share is Mr. Jaramillo's disgraceful statement to the press associating your disastrous return to school plan with the Superintendent's memory. Dr. Trujillo came before you on February 2nd, and was the first member of this organization with the moral fortitude to recommend that LCPS finally do the right thing and return to the classroom. Instead, the members of this board chose the teachers union's path of sloth and cowardice by refusing to compel teachers to return to the classroom. The abomination that is the current plan does not even qualify as education and was forced upon Dr. Trujillo by this board's obstinance. It is not even babysitting. We don't want day care for our kids, we want formal, in classroom education, and this is not it. Even a small dose of insight can easily predict what will happen now. The Teacher's Union is acting like an organized crime syndicate. While they may not be ordering murders, the tragic loss of Dr. Trujillo could not be more convenient. Now they and their puppets on this board such as Ms. Flores will force the hiring of a complete sycophant into the Superintendents position. This person will place the demands of the organized criminals in the teachers unions above all else. Students and parents will continue to finish last. The teacher's union in fact does more damage to the community than any gangster ever could and is every bit as evil. They are destroying the fabric of our local community by universal refusal to educate our children in the classroom under any reasonable condition. I have written many angry letters to this board. At this point, I don't believe the English language to contain strong enough language to describe your atrocious behavior. Nothing I have said has gone far enough. I am at a loss for words to describe how fully you have betrayed and damaged the community you claim to serve by refusing to allow children to return to their classroom or compel teachers to return to work. At this point, I think LCPS is a detriment to this community. You should disband your board, close the school district, fire every teacher and administrator, and sell your infrastructure to a private entity. The local community would be better off with your budget being turned over to a private enterprise to administer education to our children. This board and school district is clearly incapable of this great task. Jeffrey Thomas Painter Exasperated Parent

I am filled with joy upon learning of NMPED's decision to get our students back in school full time. Please do not fail our children by dragging your feet on this! Every study shows kids need to be back in school full time. Most teachers in LCPS who want to be vaccinated have already been so, or are in the process of completing their vaccines soon. So please, no more excuses! March 19th marks one full YEAR of our kids being denied face to face instruction. It is past time to make our students a priority! All kids who want to be in school full time, need to be given the opportunity to do so on or before April 5th. They need REAL face to face instruction with their actual instructors. Not "increased in-person opportunities", that basically amounts to babysitting, for a tiny percent of LCPS students, for a few hours a week. Please move quickly on this. It does not matter that it is near the end of the school year. We have to start sometime and we can at least give them a few weeks of quality education and set the stage for a successful Fall reentry. Our kids emotional and social health depend on you doing the right thing by moving forward to getting them back to full time, in school instruction. Kindest Regards, Terry Hamilton (Mother of a 4th grader and a 9th grader)

Las Cruces School Board: The behavior of the members of this board has now descended into organized criminal conduct. The state code mandates that you provide in person instruction for 180 days per school year. The Governor excepted that requirement with a public health emergency order, but that exception has now been rescinded. Anything less than 5 days of weekly in classroom education beyond 5 April is in violation of state law. The parents and students of this school district have long since learned that this board cares nothing for laws, science, or common sense evidenced by your pathetic return to school plan currently in place. In online public comments, Mr. Jaramillo continues to publicly deny the validity of the PED return to school mandate. All the while he uses his public platform to peddle his books and placement in his private school enterprise like a snake oil salesman. It sounds like returning to the classroom might be bad for business for Mr. Jaramillo. The Teacher's Union is manipulating this board like an organized crime syndicate. While they may not be ordering murders, the tragic loss of Dr. Trujillo could not be more convenient. Now they and their puppets on this board such as Ms. Flores will force the hiring of a sycophant into the permanent Superintendents position. This person will place the demands of the organized criminals in the teachers unions above all else. Students and parents will continue to finish last. The teacher's union has done more damage to the community than any gang of criminals and is every bit as evil. They are destroying the very fabric of our local community by universal refusal to educate our children in the classroom under any reasonable condition. Your deliberations are equally predictable. This board will argue and quibble over any possible opportunity to ignore state law and the PED order to return to the classroom. Your behavior thus far has been indicative of an organized conspiracy to violate the law and continue to get away with it at the expense of district students and parents. You will continue to do whatever it takes, including criminal behavior to placate the corrupt teacher's union and their laziest members. I have written many angry letters to this board. At this point, I don't believe the English language to contain strong enough words to describe your detestable and now illegal behavior. Nothing I have said has gone far enough. I am at a loss for words to describe how fully you have betrayed and damaged the community you claim to serve by refusing to allow children to return to their classroom or compel teachers to return to work. At this point, I think LCPS is a detriment to this community. You should disband your board, close the school district, dismiss every teacher and administrator, and sell your infrastructure to a private entity. The local community would be better off with your budget being turned over to a private enterprise to administer education to our children. This board and school district is clearly incapable of this great task. Jeffrey Thomas Painter 5756784872

I know that I am incapable of being and particularly incapable of being seen as unbiased in this matter as a parent of one of the affected students. We find ourselves in the position of being told after the second day of tryouts on Tuesday 3/9, that there are not enough players to field a full JV and a full Varsity team. It was mentioned that they may only field one team, it was still uncertain. There is mention of some 24hr before contacting the coach with comments that we hadn't heard in the previous 2 seasons....further clarified with the example of a parent who may have issue with their senior getting to play. I guess I was naive and thought that coach Bobby

Bertoldo was referring to playing time. The following day, Coach Bertoldo didn't attend tryouts but left his capable assistant to the task. The next day was the final day of tryouts when everyone was going to get feedback and results. Coach Bertoldo danced all around the subject fidgeting with his phone, but eventually confirmed to my senior daughter that she was being cut. Now the aforementioned statements make sense. He had predetermined her fate as well as another senior. The basis of his dismissal was not enough improvement over the years...this in itself doesn't sound bad, but you have to understand what's been evolving the last few years to make sense of it. The previous year, Coach Bertoldo selected freshman in mass to play Varsity. Nobody would question their skill or potential. Maturity and experience was an evident deficiency. All juniors (players that would be this year's seniors) were left either entirely on JV or at best floating. Yes, the future seniors were left to the revolving door of assistant coaches for their final development prior to their final eligible season. So now we get to the part that doesn't make sense, and I apologize if I was long-winded. In the event that there was a single team, we can understand that maybe there were 22 others that deserved to be Varsity ahead of our senior daughter. We have however learned that there is a JV team as well. Not enough girls for 2 teams, so let's cut some girls, including seniors and field 2 teams? This can only mean one thing to us...seniors were cut to avoid putting someone placed on Varsity last year (prematurely in our eyes) from not being able to continue to be Varsity. Coach Bertoldo created this situation. He was in fact rewarded for it last year with a Coach of the Year award. This year he chooses to continue his grand plan to focus on last year's incoming class (including daughter of Principal and Booster club president and many of their teammates) at the expense of those in between. In a year when everyone talks about returning to normalcy, and when everyone is touting that it's about the kids, the tactical dismissal of 2 seniors seems a bit more ill-timed. Dismissing the fact that they miss out on participating in team events, they are further ostracized by not being able to be present at games in person and cheer on their former teammates of past years. I don't have any expectation that anything will result in my daughter getting to play. I don't want to make it any more difficult for my daughter to return to school and face her classmates. I would just like to draw some attention to the situation in the event that others might also find it unjust so that maybe the class of 2022 doesn't get treated the same way. In fairness, the principal acknowledged her potential bias in the matter and offered to put us in touch with Mr. Viramontes. Everything is compressed this year and I didn't want to miss the opportunity to reach this board before everything is but a fleeting memory. Respectfully, Dan Wofford

Dear Las Cruces School Board Members, As the mother of a Las Cruces student, I support the "Equity and Excellence for all Students" policy. Focusing on equity as a foundational premise for our schools is long overdue and will result, over time, in expanding and improving options for our students while connecting them to their identities in tangible ways. I urge the Board to take a courageous step in advancing Las Cruces and our youth into a complex 21st century. As a professor of Ethnic Studies at NMSU, I attest that Ethnic Studies is a curriculum, a pedagogy, and an approach that respects our students and our teachers and prepares critical thinkers with an eye toward true democracy and inclusion. A vote against Equity or Ethnic Studies is a decisive action to prolong inequities that lock our learners out of the chance to be motivated to improve their own lives, as well as those of their neighbors. I am currently working with a handful of wonderful LCPS teachers. I encourage you to visit their classes to see what Ethnic Studies can do for young

peoples' minds and hearts. I also have an open-door policy for people who want to see what we read, discuss, and create in my courses at NMSU. Most people who oppose Ethnic Studies often leave surprised by how this type of education restores dignity to the process of learning. Right now, our nation is grappling with a past that has prevented full thriving for women, LGBTQ+, and groups such as Mexican Americans and Indigenous people, who make up a majority of New Mexicans. As a society we are working to remedy a past that placed restrictions on these groups so they remain: trapped in low-wage jobs, living in less-safe neighborhoods, in relatively poor health, and with earlier than normal death rates. There exists an abundance of data proving that racism and sexism have dire consequences. Ethnic Studies is a field whose approach to these social problems includes 1) historical awareness and media literacy, 2) compassion for the self and each other, 3) capacity building toward healthy, community-based solutions, and 4) action toward achieving one's highest expression of self in service to the common good. Regarding the Equity Statement, itself, I applaud the efforts taken to strengthen and amplify this document. As Education-Invested Las Cruces, I hope we have reached a point in our community's history where we care equitably about each and every one of our students. As a parent, I have seen the damaging effects of vocal parents who possess class and race privilege advocating for their children as most important—and openly denigrating children and families who lack privilege. I hope that this is not the case with the Board and that you consider the most vulnerable, voiceless, and marginalized students in our community—those who most often go unheard. The conversation about Equity is about them—not about those with the largest platform or the loudest voice. People fearfully agitating against Equity are often those with the most security. It is time we examine power relationships and become good shepherds of our most vulnerable. Thank you for your time and consideration, Dr. Dulcinea Lara Ethnic Studies professor at NMSU Mother of an 8-year-old who learns Ethnic Studies every day and is thriving

Board Members, As I sit here writing this email, I wonder why do I even bother? You do not take advice from parents into consideration. You don't even take the direct guidance from the Secretary of Education into consideration. Your reentry plan is flawed, like most of the decisions you have made for the past 6 months. You had the choice to go back to hybrid in September, and choose not to. You had the choice to go to full hybrid in February, and again choose not to but rather hybrid for High School and small groups for younger students. Yet report to NMPED as being in full hybrid across the district, which is false. I was told from a board member that they feel like hybrid is being skipped over, well that's not true because all schools could have been in hybrid the past month, but again LCPS decided against that. Yes, the state has taken control away from you the boards, mostly because of your lack of interest in getting more students back in the classroom sooner than later. I fully believe that this boards plan was to not have students back in classrooms at all this school year if possible, which is sad. The plan presented does not even meet the requirements given by NMPED, the next sentence comes directly from the NMPED FAQ updated 8 March 2021. "Do schools have to offer a full day of instruction every day? We are returning to full reentry, which means all students may return to their school buildings for in-person learning up to five days a week." I don't see where it says stay remote Wednesday as an option. One board member told me that other districts are smaller and have an easier time going back, well the largest district APS is going back 5 days a week also. Why is it that LCPS cannot follow directions? The plan given by NMPED wasn't up for interpretation, it wasn't given as an option. It was given as a

direct instruction to follow, the only say boards had was to go back full-time sooner than the 5th. Please get with the program, it has been over 6 months since you should have had a full reentry plan. Don't worry I have already reached out to NMPED about this plan to not offer 5 days a week in person learning. Robert Laichalk

Esteemed Board Members, Is it possible to apply for a waiver from the state to prevent schools from returning in Dona Ana? Our proximity to El Paso places our district in a unique situation of exposure from Texas and Mexico. We have lost 6 teachers already. How many more do we have to lose? Politics should not determine if a teacher or student lives or dies. Thank you, Breanne Woods

I am writing to you in response to the “Ring the Bell” plan released by the Public Education Department and reopening schedule. I have significant concerns for this new plan and would like to take the opportunity to provide my input:

1. According to the “COVID-19 Response Toolkit for New Mexico’s Public Schools” transmission primarily occurs “between people who are in close contact with one another (within 6 feet for 3 minutes or more)”. With the expectation to send 20 students back to one classroom, there is not sufficient space to allow for this mitigation strategy. As noted in the “Full Reentry for Public Schools Frequently Asked Questions” document provided by the state, “Covid Safe Practices include, but are not limited to mask-wearing, handwashing and social distancing to the **greatest extent possible**” which suggests that instead of recognizing that we are not able to meet the “covid safe practices” we have identified, we are saying that the best we can do is good enough – which I find very problematic.
2. Additionally, as mentioned in the “Full Reentry for Public Schools Frequently Asked Questions” In-person learning can take place safely if mitigation protocols are enforced – but if it’s only to the “greatest extent possible” is it going to be safe for students and staff that have not been vaccinated? Almost enforcing is not the same as enforcing.
3. Stating that students can remain online does not seem to be the case. Thus far, I am unable to determine if my student would even have the same teacher. Putting students back in the classroom from 8:30-2:30 doesn’t allow for a teacher to be in two places at once. One set, or even both sets of students would suffer. This puts a significant burden on the teachers who have already worked to create a consistent environment to work in for our students. Instead of commending this work and consistency we are once again asking teachers to shift in mere days and in a way that has not been clearly defined.

Pushing for reopening or remaining fully online are not the only options. Recognizing that this process needs to be flexible and as accommodating as possible, while not compromising or settling for “good enough” for safety is critical. Thank you for your time. Corey Purcell Parent of a first grade student

My name is Roseanne Baca and I am very excited that Las Cruces Public Schools is seriously considering the inclusion of Ethnic Studies for its curriculum. I was an educator for 27 years and know that students crave authentic lessons. There is nothing more relevant to people than to know and understand where they came from and where they can go in life because or despite their history. My phone number is 575-496-1541. Thank you.

March 15, 2021 Dear Las Cruces School Board Members, I write to express full support for the “Equity and Excellence for all Students” statement. I am a Lakota woman with a Lakota child enrolled in LCPS. My child is raised traditionally with his Ways (epistemology, ontology, and Lakota language). My child knows about the Boarding School Era here in the US and we have already had “the talk.” My child knows about the capacity for public schooling to colonize him. I hope LCPS knows it as well. I am a Ph.D. student in Counseling Psychology at NMSU and a researcher regarding how public schooling impacts Native students’ mental health and pushes them out. While my research has focused primarily on higher education thus far, but my dissertation will look at caregiver’s perspectives on how public schooling impacts their childrens’ Indigenous identity development. I can tell you, though, I am not the first Indigenous person be concerned about public education in the US or around the globe. I come from a long line of Indigenous scholars who are advocating for Indigenous childrens’ rights to an education that seeks to empower versus assimilate them. LCPS children need access to Ethnic Studies and equity. A vote against it is synonymous with assimilative practice, in my opinion. It is no secret that racialized and minoritized students’ attrition rates are through the roof. These students often feel school is not a place for them. Johnston-Goodstar and Roholt (2017) appropriately titled their paper “Our Kids Aren’t Dropping Out; They’re Being Pushed Out’: Native American Students and Racial Microaggressions in Schools.” I encourage you to reflect upon what micro and macroaggressions LCPS perpetrates by not providing access to Ethnic Studies and equity. I also encourage you to reflect upon how such an environment serves to widen the “achievement gap.” I can also speak to my own experiences as a Native student educated in public schools. The silence that took place around issues of race, ethnicity, and equity spoke volumes to me. I felt I could not trust my school to take care of me as an Indigenous person. I felt my school was unable to hold space for me. Now as a parent, I see it happening to my child enrolled in LCPS. He said, “Oh no one knows about Waniyetu (Winter celebration), Ina (Mom). So, I will just answer that my favorite holiday is Christmas like everyone else.” I let my child pick and choose his battles when it comes to resistance as an Indigenous person. However, I also continually reflect upon whether he should have to “battle” at all. While I speak predominantly from my Lakota perspective in this letter, I know that inclusion of Ethic Studies will serve to empower all racialized and minoritized students at LCPS. Like all parents, I want my child to feel seen, included, and welcomed in school. I want equity for my child. But I also want all children to be seen, included, and welcomed in my child’s school. I want all children to have equity in my child’s school. I fear if my child does not see such things happening, he is vulnerable to being “another statistic” and dropping out. I believe that LCPS can do better, can be better. As a stakeholder in LCPS, I respectfully ask you to consider my requests to stand by the “Equity and Excellence for all Students” statement and turn it into praxis for all Las Cruces children. Ohólaya (Respectfully), Stephanie M. Wescoup, M. Ed.

Dear LCPS School Board Members, Thank you for the work that you do. I am writing in support of the Equity Policy for LCPS, for incorporating Ethnic and Cultural Studies into our classrooms, and to congratulate you all on deciding to find a more inclusive and historically appropriate name

for Onate high school. Our students' success depends on feeling safe and included in school as well as having access to accurate, diverse, and culturally relevant learning. We must challenge youth and ourselves to learn from different perspectives and forge a way forward together, because it makes sense for our community and it is mandated in a court of law in the Yazzie Martinez vs New Mexico ruling. Let us celebrate all the histories and identities in our community and learn from the incredible wisdom they have to share! Thank you, Kayla Myers

Teachers were informed school would be five days. Teachers were told PED said full entry, no exceptions. Parents were sent an email from Interim Superintendent Ralph Ramos "a full return to in-person learning allows all students to attend school each day of the week." Teachers contacted parents and told us five days and now the board sneaks it in that Wednesday will be fully remote for all students. That is another full week of missed instruction for our children After missing a whole year. This is not each day of the week. A Disappointed Parent, Beth Smith

Hello School Board Members. I am a teacher in the district and I would like to bring up the issue with the Governor forcing our hands with going back to school prematurely. I could list for you many reasons why this is problematic, but I am sure that you will already be inundated with that information. Instead, I would just like to mention the two major complications. First off, you will lose teachers. I know a few teachers personally that are planning on quitting, retiring early, etc. before the April 5th date. In fact, even I am guilty of looking at open jobs in the area and debating whether or not I want to leave. Part of me does not because of my students, but the other part of me can't stand the anxiety of potentially seeing my students in a hospital bed, or worse. Which brings me to the second major point. Johns Hopkins University recently put out an article answering questions about the new strains of Covid-19. Part of the article discusses how these strains affect children. According to their information, over the past 2 months, the amount of children being diagnosed with Covid has been on the rise. There have also been more hospitalizations of children with Covid-19. While extensive research has not been done, it does appear that children are highly susceptible to two of the mutated strains of Covid-19. Both of those strains are present in New Mexico. While the teachers might have the vaccine (which does not prevent you from being a carrier, by the way), students are unable to receive it. I ask you to put yourselves in the shoes of the parents. How would you feel watching your child suffer through or potentially die of Covid-19? I ask you to put yourself in the shoes of the students. How would you feel if your friend became incredibly ill and it may have been you, as an asymptomatic spreader, that spread Covid to them? I ask you to put yourself in the shoes of the teachers. How would you feel if your student ended up hospitalized or worse? I know how I would feel, and bereavement leave would not cover the amount of time I would need to recover from that mental state. I implore you to fight against this! Do your job as a school board and fight for your teachers! Fight for your students! Don't let a government official who is only after money and power force your hand on this situation! We had already made a plan, and it has been working well. Fight against this atrocity and show your constituents that you truly have a heart! Thank you for your time. Amanda VanVeen

Dear School Board Members, I support the inclusion of ethnic studies in the Equity Policy you are considering for district-wide adoption. I currently teach high social studies at Alma d'arte

Charter High School and social studies methods courses for the Teacher Preparation, Administration and Leadership department at NMSU. Over the last 15 years, I have seen how unprepared teacher candidates are in regard to working with students from diverse backgrounds. Every year, they rue the fact that they are learning about the historical inequities racial and ethnic minorities have faced in the United States so late in their preparation as educators. Teacher candidates often put their lack of exposure to these histories on the fact that their high school social studies experiences were so averse to a critical study of history. The evidence that racial and ethnic inequities are a major contributor to the achievement gap is well documented. These historical inequities have inflicted historical trauma on communities of color and ethnic studies is a way to heal those traumas starting earlier in students' education. The Equity Policy needs to be courageous document that calls us to action for an equitable society. Respectfully, Ramón Padilla

Good afternoon to the board, We hope you and your family continue to be well in our current times. I am writing to support the inclusion of ethnic studies into our LCPS curriculum as this is American history that, for whatever reason, is not currently taught. At the moment, our students are learning more about U.S. History in movie theaters and on television. Unfortunately, it provides an unrealistic version, but this is where our schools can help. As we better prepare our students for the actual world around them, we can better prepare them to understand how we got to where we are and how to progress as a society moving forward. Please give our students a complete educational start as they continue their educational/career journeys. Thank you. Michael Ray Director American Indian Program New Mexico State University Member Las Cruces Public School Equity Council

Esteemed Board and Superintendent, It is absolutely mind boggling that ADA Accommodations are being voided. The Americans with Disabilities Act Accommodation Form states: Step 4 – Evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodation. “Revisit after the end of the 2020-2021 SY or when employee requests a new accommodation. This accommodation will become null and void when the pandemic ends.” Neither of the two terminating criteria are met nor changed. I hope the Board fixed this mess. This is a legal matter and shall be dealt with as such. Carmen Merlano-Whitlock, MA

Dear LCPS Board, Here is my script for the LCPS Board Meeting: "Good evening Superintendent Ramos and members of the board. My name is Yarely Arellano and I am a Unified Prevention Coalition member of Doña Ana County. Our coalition is currently disseminating an important survey for our county adults 18 years of age and older, called the New Mexico Community Survey. This survey is like the census and is in both Spanish and English. This survey benefits us all by helping plan and keep resources for youth prevention programs in our county. The survey is anonymous and the information is confidential. We know this is a very difficult and confusing time for our Las Cruces community but as we find ways to support each other as a county, what better way than to reach out for a chance to hear every community member's voice? We would really like to have the voice of the Las Cruces community in this survey, especially during these trying times. The results of this survey help guide and better strategies for the programs that cater

to our youth in Doña Ana County. This data will help locate areas for improvement or areas where we may concentrate our efforts better. We would like to request the Las Cruces School Board support in helping our coalition disseminate this crucial information to our LCPS parents by sharing the survey link with them. Please know that you have our coalition's support as you enter a new re-entry phase next month. We are currently supporting your social media efforts with your hashtag "check in with your kids," please let us know if we can do something additional to support the LCPS family. We hope to count on your help in supporting our youth programs." Yarely Arellano

Dear Board Members, My name is Donald D. Pepion, I am a Professor at New Mexico State University (NMSU). I have taught Native American Studies for twenty years at NMSU and ten years at Blackfeet Community College in Montana. I am an enrolled member of the Blackfeet Indian Nation. I respectfully urge the members of the Las Cruces Public School Board to enact the new **Equity Policy**. I applaud the members of the School Board for the vision and spirit to create a free and truly democratic society for our children's' futures. According to an on-going international study the five best practices of exemplary leadership are as follows: 1) model the way: *set the example*, 2) inspire a shared vision: *enlist others*, 3) challenge the process:, 4) enable others to act and 5) encourage the heart. The number five in part means "celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community". (Kouzes & Posner, *Leadership Challenge*, 2016). Experts in American Indian education unequivocally acknowledge incorporating culturally relevant material reinforces self-identity and self-esteem. Our educational system evolved from an elitist Eurocentric worldview. Although our Western (American) system has worked toward equity and equality our learning and teaching philosophy and methods, *has excluded the values and experiences of Indigenous peoples*. It is time for us to move forward with a new inclusive TRUTH and question the stereotype images and information that glorifies past inhumane atrocities of so-called heroes who killed and maimed Indigenous peoples. The Las Cruces Public Schools **Equity Policy** sets the example for our State and Nation and shows people the way. It reinforces *our shared value of a true democracy and free society*. And yes, it challenges some of our society that wants to maintain privilege and illusion of power. Lasty, education raises the level of our consciousness. We can't change what we don't know. Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* taught us how some of the oppressed become the oppressor and cling to negative cultural representations that allow unfair treatment of Indigenous people. It takes courage to dismantle structural racism. I appreciate the opportunity to support the Las Cruces Public Schools Board in passing the **Equity Policy**. I wish you all peace and safety during our trying times of the COVID 19. Sincerely, Donald D. Pepion, Professor Anthropology, Native American Studies New Mexico State University dpepion@nmsu.edu

Covid really messed things up for our students especially the seniors which is why I was so sad to hear about a senior soccer player getting cut from her team. I feel bad for her and wonder why that decision was made. It's not a full season anyways right? I wished the coach would have shown some compassion and allowed her to play even just five minutes or at least let her sit next to her teammates to bring her some joy after having such a crappy year. Honestly, it really makes me question the character of the coach that made this decision. "Let them play" was the big sentiment

expressed but this coach really missed the mark didn't he? Thanks for taking the time to listen. Nancy Clifton

Board members, I write this letter, feeling discouraged. You have told me that without knowing the "right people in the right places", there could be 2,000 of us parents concerned about an issue and "it wouldn't matter". I have become one of the people you roll your eyes at when you receive my emails or phone calls. All of this because I, and many parents like me, have expressed the opinion that you have failed our children. Our kids have been out of in-person school for over a year. Private and parochial schools have shown us since September of last year that our children's education can be successfully maintained and cultivated in person without compromising safety. Yet, here you are, meeting virtually, speaking to news reporters about how it's "too soon" and about how you "just feel so bullied and blindsided". "Bullied" is a word Señora Flores used so insensitively and inappropriately in a past meeting. Our children have borne the brunt of your political theater for almost a year. In the beginning, we were all afraid and I've tried to extend compassion to that fear. Yet here we are, finally going back to full in person school - not because you had the courage to lead from the front but only because the PED has had enough of the dance school boards and unions across our state have been play-acting at. You assume parents like me have an ulterior political motive. Sadly, you misinterpreted our desires as parents to improve the educational lives of our kids. We want nothing but for you to serve our children. You have squandered that opportunity in ways that cannot be recovered from. Stop being politicians and be the fierce advocates for our children we elected you to be. The education of our children is not a political football. It's time for you to get out of the way and let our district admin lead us forward. No more posturing, no more grandstanding. We've had enough. Kelly Bloomfield

Dear Las Cruces School Board Members, I write to express full support for the "Equity and Excellence for all Students" statement. Ethnic studies, as a discipline, supports multicultural diversity and inclusion. We need this kind of inclusion in the borderland region. Thank you, Cory Cascalheira **Cory J. Cascalheira, B.A.**

Dear Las Cruces Public School Board, I am writing to support your commitment of developing a policy of *Equity and Excellence for All Students* in the Las Cruces Public School District. I am a resident of Doña Ana County, member of the League of Women Voters of Southern New Mexico, and an Associate Professor of Sociology at NMSU. It is an exciting time to be an educator in southern New Mexico. Growing evidence of social movements and collective efforts to transform the outdated assimilationist education model in New Mexico can be seen across the state and in Las Cruces. Let me highlight a few examples:

- The landmark NM Supreme Court decision in *Martinez/Yazzie vs. State of New Mexico*,
- An active citizenry currently pushing for the passage of pro-public education legislation in our NM State legislature,
- The development of empowering Ethnic Studies curriculum in K-12 and Higher Education in Las Cruces and throughout the state, and

- The hiring of a Vice President of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at New Mexico State University.

The naysayers, fear-mongers, and conspiracy theorists will try to distract us with old ideas and dire warnings. I ask that the members of the Board keep your *eyes on the prize* of achieving equity and excellence for all students in Las Cruces. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your outstanding leadership. Sincerely, Cynthia Fabrizio Pelak

Good morning, I have questions/comments to be read at tonight's Board Meeting. Questions for the Board Members: The mission statement of Las Cruces Public Schools states that, "The Las Cruces Public Schools provides an equitable student-centered learning environment that cultivates civic engagement, promotes excellence, and celebrates diversity." 1) Many students are immune compromised or live with those that are. That is one of many reasons why a parent would not want to send their child back to school right now. This decision will penalize those students by practically eliminating all instruction time. 30 minutes of instruction for only one group of students is not equitable learning. 2) 35 students is a common class size in middle school. How are teachers supposed to socially distance 35 students in one room? How are those students going to line up in hallways? 35 students, even at 3 feet apart, is a 105-foot line. 3) If schools have "overflow" classrooms, who is going to oversee those rooms? Who will provide instruction to those students? Thank you for your time. Ravyn Deerinwater

After re-entry is dealt with, you should take a closer look at sports programs and coaching at schools. My impression is that there are a lot of injustices happening behind closed doors. I've heard so many stories from frustrated parents whose kids drop out of the sports they love due to unfair treatment. It seems very political and that's not what should be influencing decisions for our future youth. I've heard about bullying by teammates and coaches, favoritism and most recently a senior being cut from the team this year when she didn't have to be. Considering most kids don't go on to play professionally, what should be the most important goal of offering sports to our kids? I hope you will take some time to look at this more closely. Thank you for your dedication to LCPS. Jamie Sells

To LCPS School Board Member's, As a parent whose child attends LCPS, and someone who holds a Master's degree in Education focusing on Curriculum and Instruction, I fully support the LCPS Equity Policy as well as the infusion of Ethnic Studies into the curriculum and the classroom. This will be crucial for overall student success and critical thinking. Thank you, Oscar Mendoza.

Board Members, Thank you for leading our community in the beautiful comments and actions to honor Dr. Trujillo during the past days. I hear you are now considering naming the administration building after her. While this is a wonderful honor, I also ask you to consider two others who should deserve the same recognition: Mrs. Virginia Foltz and Mr. William Byron Darden. Mrs Foltz was also an LCPS superintendent, interim supt., high school principal, and teacher for many

years. Mr. Darden was an LCPS Board President and Member for more than 20 years. Both provided great leadership for our schools. Dr. Trujillo was a wonderful educator and I do not mean to downplay her memory. But please know there are others who also served LCPS in leadership roles that should be considered. Respectfully, Jo Nash

We are trying to survive a pandemic. We are very concerned that our children's mental health is in jeopardy. Concerns that go along with mental health are self-confidence, self-worth, sense of belonging, social interaction. There are interscholastic league rules which allow 22 girls on each Jr. Varsity and Varsity teams. Why have these girls been cut when their coach could have been letting everyone who has come out play? Girls who have come to all practices, been faithful to their teammates, kept their grapes up. My daughter is under a 504 plan for dyslexia, she kept good grades and awesome dedication to her team, went to every practice, every game. Billie started practicing with her team her freshman year. The Girls did not have a coach, one of the vice principals volunteered to attend practice with them. They would practice early in the morning every day at NMSU. These girls (kids) were there every morning practicing without a coach, because they wanted to be part of that team, a unit, a family, with or without a coach. She continued to be at practice everyday and went to every game and attended summer workouts. It is the responsibility of the coach to protect our girls and fight for their mental health. This is a public-school team, not a private team. Parent kickbacks should not determine who gets to play! I don't understand how the booster club works. "The Committee" is all LCPS employees. They push hard for the fund raisers, then only "they" get to decide how the money gets spent. They are raising over \$11,000 / year, \$15,000/year. Where is that money? They require the girl's parents to donate food or bring their own for their meals "out of town" The coach has not been professional in his conduct. From requesting videos of the girls working out to punishing all teams because Varsity lost. When he cut the girls from the team, he blocked them from team app, so he would not have to deal with any questions about his choices. He cut the girls told them not to contact him for 24 hours. Within that 24 hours period he removed the girls and their parents from the APP the only means of communication. Last year the "committee of ladies" knew who was going to be cut before the girls were told. They already had uniforms ready to hand out to Varsity/ Jr Varsity immediately after the girls were told. Was the committee in on making the decision of who made the team?! If so, they were choosing their own daughters. My daughter was graded on a point system. This system was supposed to have started March 8, according to interscholastic rules. She was graded going back through the summer. How does this seem fair? She has never lettered in spite of almost a 100% participation over the four years. The coached critic of my daughter is the following. We have used a point system this year to grade you for strengths, stamina, ball skills.. your skill were average to just below for ball skills. Your fast but don't have enough basic skills. You also haven't progressed much from freshman year. "It's be one constant Billie over the years." Your attendance for the pods is there, but your attendance for zooms and drive by is nonexistence, less than 25 %. I'm sorry but I just don't see you playing varsity this year and since you're a senior you can't play JV. Haven't these girls lost enough? Because they were shut down last year, these girls have lost their senior year. Are we more concerned about our egos than our student's mental health? Elizabeth Handley

Dear board members, I am excited for my children to return to in person learning. My concern is with the presentation that has circulated online. Why are Wednesdays no longer considered school days for Las Cruces children? I don't understand why we are willing to accept 4/5 time as acceptable for our children's education. Please realize that our students are now not only falling behind children around the nation, but you are setting them up to fall behind peers within the state. Other districts are returning to full time in person learning. Why must we continue to be below standard? Let's strive to be leaders and not substandard. I believe the intent of full time in person learning was clear in the information presented by NMPED. Please implement their expectations for our kids. Christina Painter

Hello, As a former high school educator of seven years I learned, through the students themselves and in conversations with teachers, that the lack of cultural diversity in public school education not only does a dis-service to the students but to society as a whole. We have witnessed over the last several years how that dis-service affects communities and our society. Disagreements over social issues stem NOT from disagreeing viewpoints, but from misunderstanding and a lack of knowledge. How many people present have ever said to themselves, "I never learned that in high school" or "that's not the way it was taught in high school" or any variation of that during a college course, book, news report, or some from any other source. Our society is facing the highest degree of division because we fundamentally DO NOT have the same base knowledge and understanding to converse in an informed way. Ethnic studies is not about including other viewpoints, it's about inclusivity of facts, of multicultural truths that dispel ignorance and allow for greater understanding of ourselves as a community. Daniel Aguilera

The coach cut Billie Handley from the LCPS soccer team with two months left of her senior year based upon her missing 50% of her pre-season zoom meetings. This action is unprecedented. He pulled her aside and told her she was fast but not good enough, and while doing this he made a pun using her name. He told her not to have her parents contact him for 24 hours but by the time the 24 hours were up he had blocked her from the team app so her parents were not able to even contact the coach for the reasons for her being cut from the team. The coach should not have cut Billie from the team for such flimsy reasons which will have long lasting effects on her self-esteem. He should have involved a counselor. He should have communicated with the parents. He should have given forewarning that not attending all of the pre-season zoom sessions would lead to this. She has four years of reliable attendance of games and practices four years of deferred vacations so that she could participate in a sport that she loves. She is an honest, hard-working, spunky girl and did not deserve to be singled out by an apathetic and inexperienced coach who does not have the best intentions. Rebecca Bailey Retired teacher

I was dismayed by the decision of Coach Bobby Bertoldo to cut two seniors from the girls soccer team he coaches at LCHS. I have watched both players for many years, and know firsthand that they are dedicated and enthusiastic contributors to the soccer team's success. I also know they are devastated by the decision to not allow them to play with their long-time teammates in their last year of high school. The decision to cut them by Bertoldo seems not only short-sighted but downright cruel in this year when students have already suffered so much and are grasping for

those few opportunities to regain normality that are available to them. It is very much out of step with the positive and caring attitude towards students that most administrators have worked so hard to foster at LCHS. I have communicated my concerns to LCHS Principal Michelle Ronga and discussed them with the Athletic Director, but not get the sense that they shared the same sense of dismay about the impact their coach's action were having on these students. I hope the school board can investigate further as to whether proper protocol was followed in this case, and whether putting senior athletes in their final season is really something that should be considered during this year that has been so difficult for so many students. Respectfully, Tim Wright

Dear Members of the Las Cruces School Board, We are the co-founders of the Southern New Mexico Equity Forum. We are writing to endorse the "Equity and Excellence for All Students" statement and policy being put forward by LCPS. We applaud Las Cruces Public Schools for tackling its Equity Policy and for taking seriously the work of remedying the past harms done to individuals and communities in our district. We stand ready as a community-based Forum to continue informing and advancing Equity work in our schools and beyond. We are a group of education-invested professionals who believe that centering our youth in all decisions that are education related requires an equity lens in order effect transformation. In 2020, we co-wrote an Equity Pledge that can be found at <https://www.labc.org/equity> and from this, we have launched a community awareness and involvement campaign that hosts monthly public meetings to advance the work of equity. To date, the Equity Pledge has over 140 individual community signees and 17 community organization signees. Our work focuses on five areas we call tenets: curriculum transformation, equity infusion at the district and state levels, teacher preparation transformation, long-range equity-based comprehensive plan, and structural and philosophical shifts. Our monthly meetings consistently see representation from school board members from local districts, district administrators, NMPED staff, educators (ranging from brand new to 30+ year experience), students/learners, non-profit organizations, and parents. We are an open and collaborative forum engaging in dialogue toward building actions we can take to advance equity work in our region. We invite Las Cruces Public Schools' Equity Council to join this growing conversation—all voices are needed in this work! This is a step in the right direction to remedy old practices in our public education system that have been detrimental to the advancement of students, specifically those named in the Martinez/Yazzie legal ruling. Signed, The Southern New Mexico Equity Forum Dulcinea Lara, Ph.D., NMSU Professor Andrew Montoya, Organizer, NEA-Center for Social Justice Michelle Valverde, Ph.D., LAB Director Cynthia Wise, Doctoral Candidate at NMSU

I had a rather lengthy submittal on the subject, but looking now I see that I didn't have all the submittal requirements. I'll boil it down a bit. The girls soccer coach put a plan in motion last year to focus his efforts on the incoming freshman class. The five current seniors (juniors at the time) were relegated to JV, with 3 of them floating to Varsity. It was frustrating, but at the time, what could you say besides "there's always next year"? Next year arrives after starts and stops due to our wonderful 2020 friend, Covid. Said coach finds himself with less girls than are needed to field a JV and Varsity squad fully. Does he make only a Varsity squad?...no. Does he keep everyone and fit them into 2 squads?...again no. He chooses to cut a couple of seniors and still field JV and Varsity teams. As the father of one of those seniors, I've been told that the Athletic

Director will look into. Meanwhile, I'm left scratching my head as to why this coach would tell my senior daughter that she was on par with skill, but not expected to improve. I find that to be rather bold words from a coach that never personally spent much time coaching her. My question for anyone in a role to care about such things is, "what message is intended to be sent by intentionally removing 2 capable seniors when there were spots left unfilled?" More importantly, is that the sort of behavior that should be endorsed? It is most likely too late for my senior, in this truncated season. Please think about those that may be affected in the future. Daniel Wofford

Those studies that prove that schools are safe are based on the school's ability to meet the CDC guidelines of mask wearing, cleaning hands, and social distancing. NMPED and LCPS are not requiring social distancing. We function elbow to elbow most of the time; it is impossible to social distance with full re-entry. We cannot even accomplish a meter, 3.28 feet much less 6 feet. The NMPED says "to the greatest extent possible". Does that sound safe to anyone? I invite anyone to contradict my point. Find a study that says no social distancing was required. Please let us return in Hybrid for the 7 weeks we have left, to prevent illness and death in our community. Respectfully, Biviana M. Cadena RN, BSN, NCSN 22 years of School Nursing Experience

Jessika Montaya

I have three kids in school, and I would like to voice my concerns about returning everybody at once. My situation is a little bit different, where my parents are extremely medically fragile, and they cannot receive a vaccination and my kids are wanting to return to school. If there is a way for people in my situation to continue in hybrid into the fall; there is too much of a risk with the floodgates wide open for my kids to return. If you could consider some type of option for people such as myself it would mean a lot. Thanks. (Transcribed)

Dear Las Cruces School Board Members, I write to communicate and declare my full support for the "Equity and Excellence for all Students" statement. I am not a parent, educator, or school-affiliated worker. I am an NMSU Counseling Psychology doctoral student. As a therapist, I have listened and witnessed the disproportional damage wrought by inequitable educational systems and policies. Admittedly, part of my training and pedagogy as an aspiring counseling psychologist demands that I engage in social justice and advocacy on my clients. However, I am compelled more by my experiences of being exposed to Ethnic Studies as early as Kindergarten. The lessons that I learned through deliberate exposure to cultures within and outside of the U.S are incalculable. A significant quantity of research speaks data, science, and numerous benefits of intentionally including an Ethnic Studies curriculum. However, I will instead speak from the heart. I am concerned with the massive increase of hate, discrimination, racism, and outright violence that surged within the past years. I am depressed, angry, and disappointed; the divisive rhetoric from those in power appears to be corrupting the youth's minds before they have opportunities to develop critical thinking skills. Such messages incite people to draw lines in the sand and cut-off friends, neighbors, family, or potential relationships. I observe society working harder to exclude, vilify, and castigate those who seem different without ever attempting to find common ground. Our nation is rapidly approaching a fork in the road. One path visually seems daunting, laden with obstacles, and would surely test our resolve. On the other hand, there is a path that

appears to be well-trodden and like the path, we are currently following. It is natural to be afraid, nervous, and hesitant when confronted with change. The psychological literature is abundantly clear that change is hard. Nevertheless, if we do not attempt to try something new, these current issues will become magnified and more severe. The people of New Mexico, of past and future generations, deserve better. By adopting the proposed changes on "Equity and Excellence for All Students," we are boldly stepping in a new direction that propels us towards a brighter future. Thank you for your time and consideration, Jordan Kocon M.A. [Counseling Psychology Doctoral Student New Mexico State University](#)

Dear School Board Members, Thank you for your willingness to serve the public during these extremely challenging times. We truly do appreciate your leadership. We know that you all are being called upon to make some very difficult decisions about our full re-entry to school. Staff members, myself included, are concerned about our return to school because we will not be able to socially distance our students. My classroom for example is small and I have about 17 students coming back. I know middle and high schools have very large class sizes. At Mesa Middle School alone there are teachers with over 30 students in a classroom. We will not be able to keep our students or the community safe if we cannot properly distance them. As a teacher this is something that is extremely concerning. We know that the Public Health Order was changed in our state about social distancing specifically for schools, however the CDC has not changed their guidance. Within our community we still have to follow the six-foot social distancing. It seems highly contradictory to fully reopen our schools when there are still so many restrictions in our county. For example, indoor dining is still restricted. If indoor dining is restricted in our county, then why would we have students dining in the classroom or cafeteria and possibly exposing them to the virus? Decisions such as these are truly concerning. I know teachers want to go back to school and work with their students, but this is something that must be done safely. We must protect our students and our community. Without being able to distance our students we will not be able to mitigate the spread in our classrooms. I do not know if there is anything that can be done to enter a hybrid model instead of the full re-entry. At least with the hybrid model we could distance our students in order to keep them and their families safe. This will allow more people within our community to get vaccinated for full re-entry in the fall. I truly appreciate your consideration in this matter. Respectfully, Erika Soltero-Ortega

I would like to express full support for the "Equity and Excellence for all Students" policy. Now more than ever do we need a culturally and linguistically responsive education system in southern New Mexico that addresses issues of discrimination and equity so all students can succeed. The long history of racial violence in this region, including the recent mass shooting in El Paso, demands that we provide a humanizing, compassionate, and critical education for students in this region. Providing an Ethnic Studies-infused Education will enable our community to address structural racism and violence, catalyze restorative and reparative justice, and heal from past collective and individual trauma. Thank you. Nicholas Natividad

