



# Cuba Independent Schools support education during the stay-at-home order

May 9, 2020

Dear Parents, Students and Community Members,

Cuba Independent School District is fast-approaching the end of the 2019-2020 School Year and what a year it has been.

Who would have thought in August, we would be ending the year in a remote learning situation? I want to tell you that we are continuing to do everything we can to support your children academically, socially and

emotionally and also providing school meals.

As a History teacher myself, I should know that our world is always in flux and everything changes and we learn from both the past and the present.

I am very proud of our principals and teaching staff for shifting so quickly and adapting to differentiated methods to reach students in a remote learning environment. I am extremely proud of the collaborative units they

# A Message from the Superintendent

developed and I look forward to seeing more of this in our schools as the years go on.

I also want to thank the counselors, social workers, special education, transportation, business office, federal programs, Indian Education, Indigenous work with our communities, custodians, and our maintenance staff.

But most importantly, I want to thank our students and the community for the overwhelming support you have given us as we adapted to provid-

ing educational services in a different way.

Our next newsletter will highlight the senior class of 2020 who deserve special congratulations for everything they have had to endure this year.

Thank you—Ahéhee’—Gracias,

*Dr. Karen Sanchez-Griego, Ed.D*  
 Dr. Karen Sanchez-Griego, Ed.D

# Pre-K Program completes first year at Cuba Schools

March 14, 2020

CUBA, N.M. — The pre-K program at Cuba Independent School District completed their first year in operation and it is helping to prepare students for kindergarten with a school readiness curriculum.

The program has two locations, one at Cuba Elementary School and the other located in the community of Ojo Encino on the Navajo Nation.

In Cuba, Ana Lucero serves as the pre-K teacher and her teaching assistant is Norma Jim. In Ojo Encino, the lead pre-K teacher is Jerusha Ignacio and her teaching assistant is Eugenia Charlie.

Lucero said she enjoys teaching this

age group of 4- to 5-year-olds and explained her students are wonderful. She has been teaching at Cuba Schools for nearly 15 years. She first started her teaching career as a pre-K teacher and then switched to teaching fourth-graders for six years and then second-graders for four years. She eventually returned back to working with pre-K students in the last year.

Lucero is a product of Cuba Schools. She earned her degree in visual arts

**CONTINUED PAGE 2/ Pre-K**

*PHOTO: Jerusha Ignacio, lead Pre-K teacher at Ojo Encino Pre-K, reads a story to students March 12, 2020, in Ojo Encino, New Mexico.*



Students go to the Roundhouse...Page 3



Preserving the Navajo language... Page 5



Wave Parade... Page 6-7



Students visit UC-Berkeley... Page 10



## Pre-K

### CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

from Miami Institute of Art and then continued onto New Mexico Highlands University for her teaching credentials.

"I enjoy their curiosity," she said. "They are so engaged with whatever I bring out for them to learn or whatever book I am reading. I enjoy their excitement in school."

Lucero explained the curriculum they use is mostly geared toward exploration and investigation.

"We help the pre-K students with developing inquiry skills and developing their gross and small [fine] motor skills so they can cut and write," she said. "We also teach them to be social in settings within a classroom, to be able to use teamwork, to share, and to also work on their emotions because at this age, they don't know how they are feeling—they are missing mom and date when they first come, so by the time they leave, they are ready to go on and they are not scared anymore."

Pre-K students are in school Tuesday to Friday for regular school hours and they usually ride the bus home with other upper grade levels.

At Ojo Encino, Ignacio is busy with the same curriculum and works with children mainly within the community and outlining Navajo communities.

Ignacio previously taught at the Native American Community Academy (NACA) in Albuquerque before taking on the new teaching position as a pre-K teacher. She said she jumped at the opportunity to work back in her home community on the Navajo Nation.

The community of Ojo Encino has been without an early childhood program for nearly 11 years.

"Our building has been sitting here empty for that long until it was reopened this year," said Ignacio.

The Ojo Encino pre-K program has 12 children.

"We also have some kids from the Counselor area and one from the Torreon Mission area," she said.

Ignacio said she enjoys her job and she really enjoys working with this age group.

"They love to learn and they definitely want to be in school. They are so curious and they learn and absorb information so quickly," she said. "They also have a lot of energy and they are always happy."

Ignacio is passionate about early childhood education and she's been doing this work for more than 12 years.

"This is where everything happens," she said. "This is where they begin to learn how to write, how to read and all that good stuff."

Ignacio said her goals this school year was to successfully get the pre-K program up and running in Ojo Encino and to get it fully enrolled. Her main goal is to also ensure the pre-K students are ready for kindergarten next school year. She also wanted to ensure the community has a program for its children.

"We are meeting the needs of the community and making sure our kids are ready," she said. "That was missing out here in Ojo Encino. A lot of the kids out here are not necessarily ready for kindergarten and many went straight from home to kindergarten and ended up struggling with basic stuff. We are hoping to make a change."

Ignacio is also a product of Cuba Schools and graduated from Cuba High School. She earned her bachelor's degree in early childhood education and a master's degree in education from New Mexico State University. She earned a second master's degree in educational leadership from Northern Arizona University.

Ignacio is a Navajo tribal member, her clans are Nóóda'i Dine'ë (Ute Clan), born for Hasht'ishnii (Mud Clan), and her maternal grandfather's clan is Kin lichii'nii (Redhouse People)



PHOTO: Ana Lucero, Pre-K teacher at Cuba Elementary School in Cuba, N.M.

and her paternal grandfather's clan is Tódich'ii'nii (Bitter Water Clan). 

## ADMINISTRATION

Dr. Karen Sanchez-Griego, Ed.D  
*Superintendent*

Dr. Matthew Williams, Ph.D  
*Assistant Superintendent/Federal Programs Director*

Dr. Pedro "Pete" Vallejo, Ph.D  
*Principal, Cuba High School*

Arsenio Jacquez  
*Principal, Cuba Middle School*

Amy K. Romero  
*Principal, Cuba Elementary School*

## SCHOOL BOARD

Dianna Maestas  
*President  
District 4*

Taylor Pinto  
*Vice President  
District 2*

Vivian Keetso  
*Secretary  
District 1*

Elizabeth Martin  
*Member  
District 3*

James D. Casaus  
*Member  
District 5*

## CONTACT

Cuba Independent School District  
50 County Road 13 | P.O. Box 70  
Cuba, N.M. 87013

(575) 289-3211 | Fax (575) 289-3314





## Cuba students go to the Roundhouse

April 18, 2020

CUBA, N.M. — Five students from Cuba Elementary School visited the state capitol Feb. 27 in Santa Fe to learn more about their state government and their functions.

Victoria Dominguez, school counselor and social worker at Cuba Elementary school, is in charge of student counseling at the school and decided to take some students on the unique trip to expose them to the state's leadership.

"It was really cool," she said. "The kids are always asking about field trips, so I thought it would be a really cool idea to take the leaders of our school to go see what the leaders of the state do."

Dominguez said she scheduled a tour with a staffer at the state Legislature.

"She showed us a lot of the historic art and discussed in-depth about the different meeting rooms, even the

rotunda at the Roundhouse. She gave us the history, the facts and so it was an amazing experience," she said. "We had an awesome tour guide and she was also able to get us into the governor's office as well."

Dominguez said the students learned about the history of the state and the building, and about the many heroes of the state.

"It was really cool because they got to see how and where bills are passed into laws," she said. "The tour guide also explained the process of how everything goes, how the bill is formed and what it means to be passed into a law. That was my whole idea behind this trip."

Dominguez said the trip went very well.

"These kiddos are leaders of our school and why not go and show them what the leaders of the state do?" she said. "We are growing our own and who knows, one of these students may end up as our next state governor? We need to show them and encourage them to keep working hard, and show them that there are cool and awesome things to do out there. I encourage them to find their passion and go for it." 🐍





*What I miss during this time...*

”

"I miss our basketball season together and seeing you guys everyday in practice! I hope you guys are doing good?"

— Celia Chavez, Senior

“



## Teacher Highlight: Steve Velasquez

December 8, 2019

CUBA, N.M. — Steve Velasquez is a fifth-grade math and history teacher at Cuba Middle School.

He has been teaching for more than 15 years and said he is planning to retire at the end of the school year.

Velasquez said he loves teaching.

He is from a little community northeast of Cuba called Gallina, New Mexico.

"It's a small community, a ranching community... not very much people out there," he said. 🐏

PHOTO: Steve Velasquez, fifth-grade math and history teacher at Cuba Middle School

## FIND US ONLINE



@cuba.schools



@cubaisd



www.cuba.k12.nm.us



## Matilda Lee helping to preserve the Navajo language

April 9, 2020

CUBA, N.M. — Teaching the Navajo language is extremely important for Matilda Lee because she does not want the language to disappear.

Lee is one of a few Navajo language instructors at Cuba Independent School District and she has been teaching the language for more than 20 years. She teaches Navajo I and Navajo II at Cuba High School to more than 72 students.

With her instruction, she is hopeful the language will continue with this next generation. She explained a majority of her students understand the Navajo language and a few of them have difficulty in replying back in Navajo.

“They can only respond back with one or two words,” she said about the students that are just learning to speak Navajo.

She said there are others that speak it fluently like Thaddeus Pinto, a senior, in her Navajo II class.

“He is very fluent and he’s able to carry on a conversation in Navajo,” she said. “There are a few of those students that are fluent like that and they are mostly juniors and seniors.”

Lee said a few freshmen are also fluent in Navajo.

“The freshmen that are fluent surprise me when they start speaking to me,” she said.

Years ago when Lee began teaching, she said a majority of her students stopped speaking Navajo at school and at home. Their parents spoke to them mainly in English and so the language was slowly fading away.

Since then, she heavily concentrated her efforts to teach Navajo to any students who were willing to learn.

“It is really important to hang on to our language and culture,” said Lee. “I am a fluent speaker and we don’t have that many people like this anymore, so we are kind of like a dictionary.”

Lee explained her paternal grandfather told her the loss of the language is the end of one’s identity as a Navajo person and she truly believes that.

“For the kids, it is very important for them to learn the language because our ancestors told us to hang on to it,” she said. “It is sacred and it was valued.”

Lee is thankful the Navajo language is taught at Cuba Schools but she said the program can be strengthened.

“I would like to see more Navajo language teachers, more young ones coming up to teach the language,” she said. “Right now, Navajo language instructors are hard to find. The school is having a hard time finding a teacher at the middle school.”

She is hopeful that one day, one of her Navajo language students will step up to the plate and become a Navajo language instructor.

“I would like to see some of these kids come back and teach Navajo, to keep it alive, to help revitalize the language for future generations,” she said. “I want to see the younger generation come back and teach it—I’d like to see that. Maybe Thaddeus may become a teacher? That’s one of my main things that I was taught, to help out our community.”

Lee encourages parents to either

“It is up to us to make a change.”

— Matilda Lee



PHOTO: Matilda Lee, Navajo language teacher at Cuba High School

start or continue speaking the language at home.

“It is up to us to make a change,” she said.

Lee is originally from a small community near Tinian, New Mexico, which is west of Torreon. Her clans are Hasht’ishnii (Mud People), born for Tó dich’i’i’ii (Bitter Water People), her maternal grandfather’s clan is Naakaii

Dineé (Mexican Clan), and her paternal grandfather’s clan is Kin lich’i’i’ii (Red House People).

Lee earned her associate degree at Navajo Community College, now known as Diné College. She earned her bachelor’s degree in bilingual education with a minor in Navajo language at Fort Lewis College in Colorado. 🍌

## The Diné Club at Cuba High School

April 9, 2020

CUBA, N.M. — The Diné Club at Cuba High School is a club for mostly Navajo students but is open to any students wanting to be a part of it.

Matilda Lee, a Navajo language teacher at Cuba High School, serves as the club’s sponsor and explained they have 38 students in grades 9-12 that

are active members.

Before becoming the Diné Club, it was known as the Native American Club.

“The students changed the name because a majority are Navajo students,” said Lee.

If students are interested, they simply have to sign up voluntarily.

“During the school year, we had

meetings with the students. The club has club officers that run the meetings, just like any other club at the high school,” she said. “The club organizes and plans various cultural events at the schools, they participate in parades and they also organize the annual Native American princess pageant.”

Lee said before the school closure due to COVID-19, the novel coronavirus,

the club was planning a powwow event this year but of course that did not happen. The club organized powwows in previous years but has not had one in recent years.

Lee is thankful for the members of the Diné Club because they help in promoting and educating others about their unique Native American cultures and languages. 🍌

# WAVE PARADE



## Teachers, staff conduct wave parades at communities across Cuba Independent School District

May 8, 2020

CUBA, N.M. — A group of teachers and staff from Cuba Independent School District call themselves “Cuba Cares,” and they have gone out to the communities within the school district for Wave Parades to let students know they are thinking about them and to give them a boost in morale.

Cuba Cares did their final wave parade May 8 in the communities of Cuba and La Jara with two Sherriff deputies from the Sandoval County Sherriff’s Office that came along for the ride and escort.

“They sure did bring a lot of excitement with their horns and sirens!” said Victoria Dominguez, clinical social worker at Cuba Elementary School.

Dominguez explained for each wave parade, they met up at the high school

gym and decorated their vehicles with signs that read, “We miss you!” “We love you.” “Distance hugs to you.” “We’re in this together.” After their signs were made and their vehicles “dazzled,” they formed a line and headed out to the communities within the school district.

“We go to students’ houses one by one, honk and wave proudly from our vehicles,” she said. “It’s so heartfelt to see the kiddos’ faces light up when they see us and hear us coming down their driveways. These students are beautiful and often have a smile for ear to ear—just as we do from our vehicles.”

The group conducted six wave parades since distance learning began in March.

Dominguez said they have gone to

communities on the Navajo Nation several times. They visited the Navajo communities of Torreon, Rincon Marcus, Ojo Encino, Counselor and Tinian.

“The parades take anywhere between three to five hours,” she said. “Each one has been unique and very special.”

Dominguez is a social worker and often hears of struggles and she said going out to students’ homes has been a major eye opening experience.

“The saying, ‘walk a mile in my shoes,’ comes to mind when I see their hardships and it’s given me a better understanding of my community,” she said.

Dominguez thanked Dr. Karen Sanchez-Griego, superintendent, for being supportive of the wave parades and

she has even gone out with the group as well.

“The idea behind the wave parades is to let students know we love them, we miss them and we are still here for them—only now, it’s from afar,” said Dominguez.

The school district has a student population of 23.6 percent of students labeled at-risk districtwide.

“For some students, we are their safe place, so I truly believe it’s important to reach our students and let them know that we are still here and we still care,” she said. “One town, one school, one family! We’re in this together and we are Cuba Strong and Cuba Proud!”





## Thaddeus Pinto, a fluent Navajo Speaker, to receive Seal of Biliteracy

April 9, 2020

CUBA, N.M. — Thaddeus Pinto, a senior at Cuba High School, recently passed the Navajo Nation Seal of Bilingual Proficiency Assessment.

Matilda Lee, Navajo language teacher at Cuba High School, said this was awesome news for the Cuba Independent School District.

“He passed with flying colors!” she said. “I’m so excited for him and of course, this is sweet news for our school.”

Lee explained Thaddeus will be the first to receive the Seal of Biliteracy when he graduates from Cuba High School in May. The proficiency assessment is for graduating high school seniors only.

According to the Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education, students must be able to speak accurately, easily, conjugate verbs correctly, convey meaning through complex sentences and communicate effectively and competently.

Lee explained Thaddeus took the oral exam March 3 in Window Rock, Arizona, and then a second exam March 5 at the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in Albuquerque.

“The test is designed to measure a student’s ability to understand and produce oral Navajo language and it tests your knowledge on Navajo culture,” she said.

The first part of the assessment requires students to appropriately introduce themselves with their clans, where they are from, where their mother’s home area is, their parents and grandparents, related clans, personal interest, hobbies and goals.

The second part requires students to provide an oral presentation on a topic provided by the Office of Standards, Curriculum

& Assessment Development (OSCAD). Thereafter, they must answer a set of questions provided by OSCAD, and then they must provide a summary and analysis

of a video clip on a cultural topic. The entire assessment must be performed



Thaddeus Pinto poses with a Navajo history book with his Navajo language teacher, Ms. Matilda Lee March 12, 2020, at Cuba High School.

“Thaddeus explained to me that his entire family speaks Navajo at home. So that’s how he became a fluent speaker.”

— Matilda Lee

in Navajo according to the Department of Diné Education.

“He passed all of those parts and they provided him more questions at the end,” said Lee.

Lee said Thaddeus has been speaking Navajo all his life.

“I got to know him as a little boy, he really spoke Navajo when I worked at the middle school,” she said. “Thaddeus is one of the ones I will never forget because right away, he came into my classroom and he talked to me in Navajo. I started talking with him in Navajo and got to know him.”

Lee said Thaddeus continued improving his Navajo speaking skills throughout middle school.

In high school, Thaddeus continued to improve greatly.

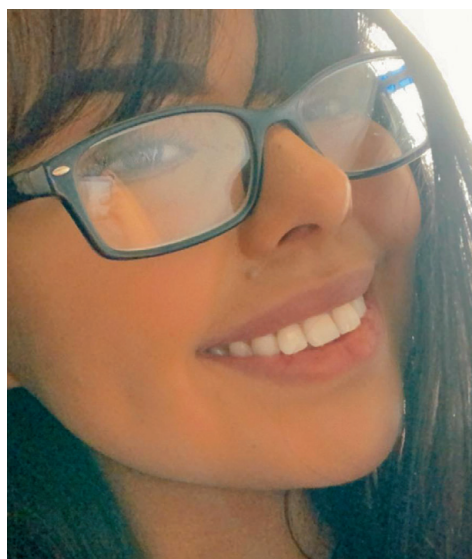
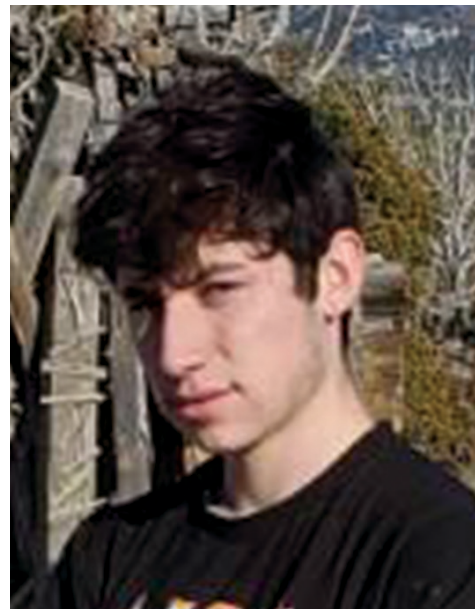
“Thaddeus explained to me that his entire family speaks Navajo at home,” said Lee. “So that’s how he became a fluent speaker.”

Lee commends the other Navajo language students that took the exam as well.

“I took five other Diné students to Window Rock for the assessment,” she said. “Unfortunately, the others did not pass but on a positive note, they all did great. A couple of students came close.”

The other participants included: Lashanti Lopez, Devereau Sam, Cymonia Garcia, Iris Gordo and Ally Augustine. 🐏





Students received the New Mexico State Seal of Bilingualism-Biliteracy in Spanish. From left, seniors Christopher Cavazos and Jerome Salaz, and juniors David Gauna-Casaus, Jacquelynn Sanchez and Kailee Casaus.

## Cuba High School students receive New Mexico State Seal of Bilingualism-Biliteracy in Spanish

April 18, 2020

CUBA, N.M. — Five students at Cuba High School received the New Mexico State Seal of Bilingualism-Biliteracy for their ability to speak Spanish in school year 2019-2020.

The students are seniors Christopher Cavazos and Jerome Salaz, and juniors Kailee Casaus, Jacquelynn Sanchez and David Gauna-Casaus.

Carol C. Chavez, Spanish teacher

and child development teacher, is happy for her students.

“Congratulations to my first cohort of students to be awarded the New Mexico Seal of Bilingualism-Biliteracy for Spanish at Cuba High School. I am very proud of them for acquiring this amazing accomplishment!” she said. “Felicidades a mi primer cohorte de estudiantes que recibieron el Sello Bilingüe- Bialfabetismo del estado de Nuevo México para Español, en la es-

cuela secundaria en Cuba. Estoy muy orgullosa de ellos, por conseguir este increíble logro!!”

Dr. Petro “Pete” Vallejo, principal at Cuba High School, also commended the students.

“Congratulations to the five students who took the exam and passed with flying colors,” he said. “Well done to all who participated in and administered the exam.”

Chavez explained this was the first

time the school offered this opportunity to its students. They had to complete a lengthy application process for the recognition.

The State Seal of Bilingualism-Biliteracy is a designation on New Mexico high school diplomas showing excellence for graduates who are proficient in speaking and writing a language other than English. 🇲🇽



## Cuba students visit the campus of the University of California, Berkeley

April 25, 2020

CUBA, N.M. — Four seniors from Cuba High School toured the campus of the University of California, Berkeley to gain insight into the university and as a possible option for future attendance.

Rose Etsitty, the head counselor for Cuba Independent School District, explained the opportunity was made possible through the University of California Berkeley Indigenous Programs who invited the students to California for the tour Feb. 27-29.

The students included seniors Hannah Murphy, Fernando Herrera, Sidano Guerito and Iris Gordo. All the students are Navajo tribal members.

“In order for the students to attend this program, they have to have a tribal census number,” said Etsitty. “That was the purpose and they are also in the top 5% of the graduating class of 2020.”

Hannah Murphy, a senior at Cuba High School, said her trip to California was so much fun.

“I got to travel to another state which was quite a ways from my home,” she said. “I was nervous at first but decided to take the chance to experience getting on an airplane for the first time and visit the University of California, Berkeley campus.”

Hannah said she has seen photos of the UC Berkeley campus in brochures but she was still in amazement to be there in person.

“To actually set foot on campus was such an experience. We visited destination points on campus and in the city of Oakland and San Francisco,” she said. “The people who hosted us were so nice. They gave us an awesome tour and took care of us. We all saw new and amazing things. Most of all, we had fun. Thank you Ms. Rose [Etsitty] for the awesome experience. I will not forget it.”

Etsitty explained she worked in other school districts and she often took students to visit college campuses all over the country including Dartmouth College, Cornell University, Harvard University, Stanford University and St.



Mary’s College.

“Those are the colleges we wanted to expose our students to,” she said. “I want to bring the same thing to Cuba High School so that students can get the opportunity to visit a college, an Ivy League school and a bigger college campus.”

Etsitty said she wants minority students, like many that come from the Navajo Nation, to realize there are other opportunities out there for higher education instead of in-state schools and universities.

“I want them to experience going out there,” she said.

Etsitty said she understands some students will not attend these schools for their undergraduate degrees but she wanted to help expose other options for the students.

“This opportunity may be planting a seed for them for their future, perhaps for their graduate program or doctorate program,” she said. “That’s the whole vision. Even if they don’t go to one of these schools, they can have their children or grandchildren in the future attend the schools.” 🐏



## Sports Roundup with Coach Marti Toledo

March 15, 2020

CUBA, N.M. — All spring sports at Cuba Independent School District have been canceled due to the novel coronavirus pandemic. The state of New Mexico ordered the closure of all its public schools since the first part of March.

The day before the closure, Marti Toledo, physical education teacher at Cuba Elementary School, talked about spring sports and remained hopeful that the closures may be lifted after a few weeks but that never happened.

Toledo serves as the head coach for volleyball, assistant coach for basketball and head coach of the track and field team at the high school.

On March 12, she explained the track and field season was scheduled to begin March 21 and cheerleading was just wrapping up. They were planning to participate in the Dulce Invitational but the season was canceled.

Toledo explained the restriction at that time applied to all high school sports activities including baseball,

softball, and swimming and diving that are normally done in the spring time.

“Before all of this with the school closures, we were just getting our boys basketball participants back because they were out for the state basketball tournament,” she said.

Track and field season usually lasts from the middle of March to the beginning of May with the state meet scheduled the first part of May for seven weeks of competition.

Toledo said she had 52 boys and girls ready for the track and field season.

“It’s a disappointing time with the cancellation of many events,” she said about the school closures.

Toledo said she was optimistic about the season. Last year, the team took 23 athletes to the state meet.

“That was the most we have taken to state in probably four years,” she said. “I was hoping to build upon that, especially because we graduated a lot of good seniors last year and I was hoping to see what my underclassmen

would be able to do this year.”

During the winter, Toledo was an assistant coach for the varsity girls’ basketball team at Cuba High School. She said the team did OK and they ended the season really strong.

“We were on a winning streak for a minute,” she said. “We just peaked at the wrong time.”

She explained the girls basketball team did not make it to the state tournament but the boys’ team did. The girls ended their season with an overall record of 10-15. 🐏

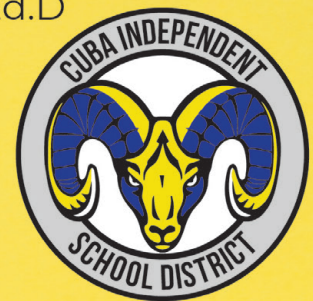


Seniors,

I wanted you to know that you have been in our thoughts and prayers. We are doing everything to ensure a smooth end to your senior year and looking towards a wonderful beautiful graduation.

Dr. Karen Sanchez-Greigo, Ed.D  
*Superintendent*

2020  
CLASS OF



# STOP COVID-19

Protect yourself  
and others from  
getting sick



Avoid close  
contact



Clean your  
hands often



Stay at  
Home



Healthy  
Lifestyle

**Rams**



## CUBA INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

50 County Road 13 | P.O. Box 70  
Cuba, N.M. 87013

(575) 289-3211 | Fax (575) 289-3314



[www.cuba.k12.nm.us](http://www.cuba.k12.nm.us)