



RAM COUNTRY NEWS

CUBA INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

WINTER 2020

Cuba Cares helping students, families during pandemic

November 30, 2020

CUBA, N.M. — Cuba Cares was born out of necessity in March when students were forced to do remote learning and school buildings ordered closed because of the raging COVID-19 pandemic.

With students at home a majority of the time, remote learning became challenging. A team of teachers and school administrators began brainstorming of ways to improve communication and to check on students. A major component was to provide support to students that needed it the most.

Victoria Dominguez, school counselor and social worker at Cuba Independent School District, lead the charge in the creation of Cuba Cares. She explained some students were not participating in school anymore and so they needed a way to support them.

“It was a way to check in on students, especially our at-risk kiddos,” she said. “I wanted to let the students know that we were still here and we still cared for them. It was a way for us to support our students.”

Dominguez and her team established a system where they would do weekly check-ins with students, especially those categorized as high-risk and those with various needs.

One of the first events was the wave parades. Cuba Cares organized several wave parades where they made signs, decorated their vehicles and caravanned through communities within the school district to show their

support and wave to their students. The parades were from a safe distance and all precautions adhered to per CDC standards. The wave parades were a hit as students eagerly waited for the parades standing outside their homes or near resident entrances.

Other programs developed, Cuba Cares continued with home visits and helped families with food and clothing, and to ensure everyone had basic needs during the difficult time.

These efforts lead to the creation of the Ram Locker to address the need in the community for clothing and other basic needs like food, supplies and personal hygiene products.

“I started first by sending an email to the school staff asking them for clothing donations,” she said. “We have clothes for all ages and we don’t only give to the students because we figure if the students need clothes then the grandma, grandpa, aunt, uncle, Mom, Dad and whoever is in the household could probably also use clothes.”

The Ram Locker gives clothes to anyone who wants it and they also have stuff for little kids all the way up to adults. They have formal wear, casual wear and everything in between.

The distribution of food boxes was another big project for Cuba Cares. They managed to distribute more than 235 boxes of food to families in need.

“I’ve been working with different religious organizations and other groups to secure food for families,” said Dominguez. “I’ve been working



with different food banks and churches in Albuquerque, they provided non-perishable food boxes.”

“We got a ton of non-perishable food donated from the Legacy Church in Albuquerque. They gave us over 50 boxes of non-perishable food and over 300 student care packages for students.”

Cuba Cares also purchased personal hygiene supplies for students through a grant they received from the New Mexico Appleseed Project.

Dominguez is grateful for the outpouring of support and she

thanks the teachers, staff, school administrators and the community for helping. She also thanks Legacy Church and the New Hope Gospel Baptist Church, both in Albuquerque, for helping with food boxes.

Dominguez knows Cuba Cares has made a positive impact. She witnessed on a few occasions of parents coming in and in complete awe of the resources, clothing, supplies and food

CONTINUED PAGE 2/
Cuba Cares

IN THIS ISSUE



Appleseed Project helping students...Page 4



Sports tentatively scheduled to begin...Page 5



School Board of the Year Award...Page 6



Cuba Cares

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

available to them at no cost.

"Tears came to their eyes when they realized that we were not charging for this," she said. "[A mother] was able to get bags and boxes of food... bags of clothing. She was so grateful—that was a real big positive. I just know that all the stress has been worth it because that is our biggest goal is to help families get through this rough period."

Dominguez said they are also working with the New Mexico Coalition to give jackets away to kids and they are also working with other community members on jacket donations. She also said they were

working on a Thanksgiving food giveaway as well.

"This was a very eye-opening experience. We now realize that there was always a demand but the supply has never been there," she said. "I think [Cuba Cares] will continue on into the future because there is always a need."

"We are all in this together and that is our big message from Cuba Cares," she added. "Whether you need social and emotional support, need hygiene products, food or clothes, let us know because we are here for you."

Cuba Cares also has a website called the "Cuba Cares Calming Room" created for students and staff to help minimize stress, the website is <https://sites.google.com/cuba.k12.nm.us/cuba-calming-room/home>. 🐏



CUBA INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT



December 4, 2020

Dear Community,

Academics, social emotional needs, the health and welfare of our students is at the center of our work as we continue to move into January 2021.

First semester, as you know, students have been in remote learning and we have been working to ensure that we have full connection to our students even when we are not physically on campus.

We have placed hot spots in several areas of our communities including chapter houses on the Navajo Nation. We have placed individual jet packs in student's homes and hot spots on buses using HughesNet, Verizon, T-Mobile and phones. We continue to send books and supplies via our wonderful transportation department.

Know that we are here to educate your kids in high levels and diverse ways understanding that their culture and language drive our work. We are working hard in our curriculum development to honor and integrate into each lesson the beauty of our kids and the people of New Mexico.

We continue to partner with you to support your kids as we all navigate these changed times. We will be staying in remote learning from January 4 through March 5, which will be through the third nine weeks of second semester.

During these nine weeks we will be bringing in students 5-1 with the New Mexico Public Education Department's (NMPED) allowable guidelines. We will continue to keep our eye on how we proceed putting students and colleagues' safety at the forefront.

We will be spending many hours working with our high school seniors to help prepare them for graduation, college and career as they exit out of our school district.

We wish you a wonderful and safe holiday season, we keep our students and families in our positive thoughts and deep prayers.

Sincerely,


Dr. Karen Sanchez-Griego, Ed.D



Cuba Schools thanks New Mexico Appleseed Project, students being helped with basic needs.

November 16, 2020

CUBA, N.M. — Help came at the right time for some students at Cuba High School, thanks to the New Mexico Appleseed Project who provided funds to 18 students for eight months. The help could not come at a better time in the midst of a pandemic.

Dr. Donna Navarrete, executive director of Data & Accountability/Federal Programs, at Cuba Independent School District, explained the school district formed a response team called Cuba Cares in early March, a group managed by Victoria Dominguez, a counselor and social worker.

“[Ms. Dominguez] put together a team of staff members that provided extensive outreach to our students over the springtime while they were home for remote learning,” Navarrete said.

Cuba Cares checked on students in-person and from a distance abiding by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines to simply let students know that the school district cared about them and to ensure they are all one community. They checked to see if they needed anything, whether it was technology needs or food.

“Ms. Dominguez would report information back to the school district and we would help provide assistance in any way we could,” Navarrete said.

During outreach, the Cuba Cares team was discovering a lot of students were homeless as defined by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Students Assistance Act, a federal law that funds and helps to define homelessness which ranges from living with other families in one home, living in a motel, camp ground or complete loss of housing.

“[The] Act includes students who



are living in substandard housing as well, like they don’t have electricity and running water,” Navarrete added.

During the summer, Dominguez reported these findings during a leadership meeting. Dominguez asked Navarrete if she knew where she could get money for basic needs for these students, such as personal hygiene items, food and other things.

Navarrete, who also has extensive experience as a grant writer, began contacting several entities like big box stores and unfortunately received no replies. Luckily, she discovered a grant for \$3,000 to help homeless students through the New Mexico Appleseed organization and she applied. Lo and behold, Cuba Schools was awarded the

grant a few weeks later.

“I was thrilled! It wasn’t a major grant but it was a little funding that Ms. Dominguez could use,” she said. “[Appleseed] also said they would like to get together and talk about some additional funding they had for homeless students and I was like, ‘Oh my gosh. OK.’”

School officials met with New Mexico Appleseed Project who works with other New Mexico public schools. Appleseed explained they had received funding from Los Alamos National Laboratory Foundation to support homeless students. The funds provide students identified under the McKinney-Vento Act with a monthly stipend for six to eight months. Only

two northern New Mexico schools were awarded funding and Cuba Schools was one of them.

Navarrete explained the stipends help students and their families.

“Perhaps students would become more engaged in school and do better without having to worry about hunger or electricity or whether they’re going to be able to sleep tonight because they don’t have a heater,” said Navarrete. “The idea is to help families experiencing homelessness and in exchange, the students have certain criteria to meet academically.”

*CONTINUED PAGE 5/
Appleseed Project*

ADMINISTRATION

Dr. Karen Sanchez-Griego, Ed.D
Superintendent

Arsenio Jacquez
Principal, Cuba Middle School

Amy K. Romero
Principal, Cuba Elementary School

Dr. Donna Navarrete
Executive Director, Data & Accountability/Federal Programs

Dr. Matthew Williams, Ph.D
Director of High School Turn-Around

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



Sports tentatively scheduled to begin Feb. 1, contingent upon COVID-19 impact

December 14, 2020

CUBA, N.M. — High School sports across the state of New Mexico remains canceled and at a stand still because of the COVID-19 pandemic which forced closures of school campuses and for remote learning to take place.

Bruce Hatch, athletic director at Cuba Independent School District, explained the New Mexico Activities Association's (NMAA) board of directors recently met and approved the sports calendar for spring 2021 for all 13 sports offered by the association.

According to the NMAA schedule: football is scheduled to start Feb. 1; cross country and volleyball Feb. 15; soccer on March 1; spirit, basketball and swimming/diving on March 22; wrestling on March 29; tennis, baseball, softball, golf and track & field on April 5.

Hatch said Cuba Schools only participates in football, volleyball, cross country, basketball and track & field, and those start dates will apply to them.

"Whether or not we are going to have sports is dependent on the

governor's health orders and the COVID-19 numbers," said Hatch. "If and when we are able to have sports, we are prepared to conduct them safely. We want everyone to be safe and we're going to do everything possible so that the kids can get an opportunity to participate in sports."

Hatch explained sports were initially cancelled back on March 15, 2020, when the state shut down all schools for three weeks. At that time, the high school state basketball tournament was occurring and they were allowed to continue but with no fans in the audience.

As for other spring sports like track, baseball and softball, they were being played up to that point until schools were shut down.

"Everyone thought we were just going on a three week break and pick up and finish the season," he said. "Well, three weeks went by and of course the rest is history. They basically shut schools down and put it all on remote."

Hatch said other states around New Mexico continued with their outdoor high school sports activities during this time, like in Colorado, Utah,

Arizona and Texas but New Mexico opted to cancel the seasons.

If all was normal with no pandemic, Hatch said cross country and volleyball would have concluded at the beginning of November, and football would have ended in mid-November with the first round of the playoffs occurring. Basketball practice would have also started in November with the first game scheduled Dec. 1.

In October, in anticipation of sports starting back up, the volleyball team started practicing and even had tryouts for its JV and varsity teams. They were one week away from starting the season and the state changed the start date for sports again, essentially shutting it all down once again because COVID-19 numbers were on the rise.

"COVID-19 cases in Sandoval County were really high and some areas had uncontrolled spread," said Hatch. "We were allowed to have practice with four athletes to one coach. However, to keep everybody safe, we put everything on pause and decided to come back and practice when the numbers went down and when we could do it safely."

During these practices, Hatch said the coaches adhered to standards as set forth by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Students and coaches both wore masks and social distanced.

Hatch knows many student-athletes are disappointed but he tells them it's for their own safety and for the safety of others. To keep students active and conditioned, he is encouraging them to continue practice at home on their own.

As a solution, coaches put together Google classrooms where they communicate and work with students via virtual workouts. This access requires internet and luckily the students have that access thanks to computers and hotspots provided by the school district.

"The coaches have done a really good job putting workouts together for the kids," said Hatch. "My advice to all kids is stay active, stay healthy and have fun, get up and move."

For now, Hatch is hopeful sports will occur come Feb. 1. 🐏

Cuba Cares

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"We were absolutely thrilled that we were selected, selected to receive funding to support our homeless students," she added. "We have over 100 students on record in our school district identified as homeless. That is so many families but we only received funding for 20 families. We talked about how we could start at the high school level and identify all the students struggling the most and that we want to see graduate."

Navarrete identified 18 students that were at risk and high risk of not graduating but she also realized there were five siblings also in high school within the 18 families. These students also needed help and they would benefit from the funding as well.

"I gathered baseline data for all these students, grades, where they lived and created a survey for them and we worked closely with Appleseed to make sure that this program got off the ground successfully," she said. "I hired a part-time coordinator to run

this program, a community liaison who spoke Diné and hired tutors."

"A couple of requirements is these students must meet or check in with their English tutor and math tutor once a week, as well as participate in social emotional support or counseling or group counseling once a week," she added.

Appleseed is providing students \$500 a month for eight months starting in November as long as they are active participants in the program. Appleseed is also providing families an additional \$250 for the identified siblings in the form of retail gift cards like Walmart or for transportation fuel, or a check written for a specific purpose to pay a car payment or utility bill. For accountability and to ensure the funds are used for basic needs, submission of receipts is required.

Navarrete is very thankful for Appleseed's program.

"I feel so overwhelmed with gratitude for having this opportunity to assist these families," she said. "New Mexico Appleseed was so impressed with what we were doing to support the community and students, they

came back and provided this other opportunity. Dr. Griego and I were so floored with it. It was incredible and this money is helping to change the lives of all these students."

Navarrete thanks the Cuba Cares team and Ms. Dominguez, "It's just incredible the work that they have done under her direction."

Jennifer Ramo, executive director of New Mexico Appleseed Project, commended Cuba Schools and said Cuba was the most innovative school district they have ever worked with.

"[Cuba Schools] have everything to contend with and yet they clearly are soaring. What they do for their students in terms of connection and support should be replicated state-wide if not nationally," said Ramo. "We are totally honored to partner with them and believe that what we create together will make a meaningful difference in not just these children's lives but many others as well." 🐏



2020 Retirees

Corny Sanchez
Garrison Martin
Steve Velasquez
Corrine Jake
Mrs. Matters



FIND US ONLINE



@cuba.schools



@cubaisd



www.cuba.k12.nm.us



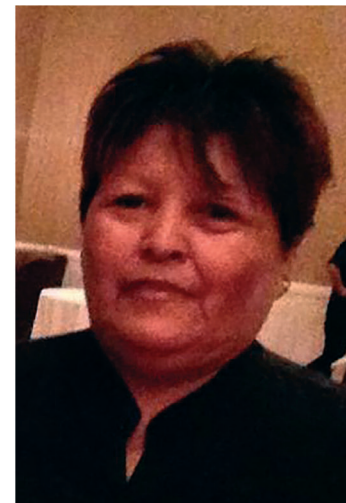
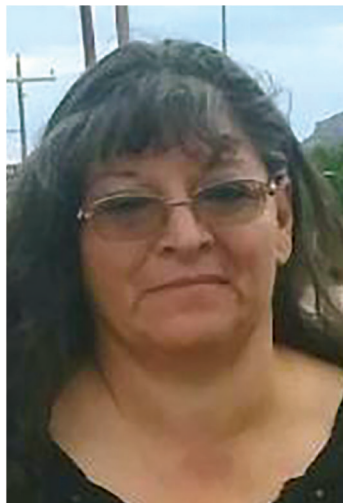
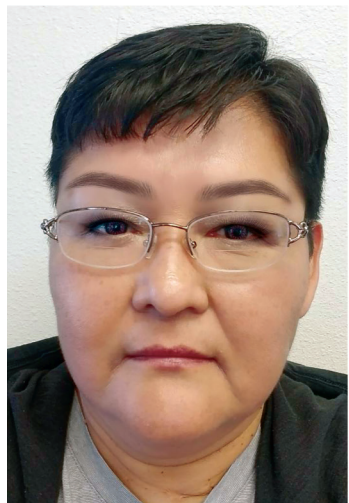
Cuba Schools receive School Board of the Year award

November 12, 2020

CUBA, N.M. — The board of education of Cuba Independent School District was recently awarded the “2020 Small District School Board of the Year Award” by the New Mexico School Board Association Dec. 4 during its 2020 Virtual Annual Convention.

Joe Guillen, executive director of the school board association, congratulated the school board via email.

“My sincere congratulations and best wishes on this outstanding honor!” he said. 🐏



Teacher professional development encourages culturally responsive community at Cuba Schools

November 6, 2020

CUBA, N.M. — Students, teachers and administrators at Cuba Schools are working with several professors from the University of New Mexico who are helping to create a more culturally responsive community through teacher professional development.

Earlier this year, Cuba Independent School District hired a group of four consultants lead by Dr. Vincent Werito, an associate professor in Language, Literacy and Sociocultural Studies at the University of New Mexico (UNM) to help in this effort. The other three members of the team included Dr. Nancy López, professor of Sociology at UNM; Dr. Shiv Desai, associate professor of Teacher Education, Educational Leadership and Policy at UNM; and Leola Tsinnajinnie Paquin, assistant professor in Native American Studies at UNM.

The school district administration provided this development to its teachers to help them further develop their skills and to learn about their craft.

“It is really about creating a community of practice where people are sharing and that often doesn’t happen because teachers are so overwhelmed they have so much on their plate,” said López. “By creating a convening space where we share our practice and activities is one way to creating a community of practice. A lot of it is to create a place where teachers can share with each other.”

The group initially planned to come into the schools, work directly with

students and teachers and conduct several in-person workshops but the pandemic changed those plans. Their delivery changed from in-person to virtual through video conferencing and conference calls. Through these means, they provided support to teachers and worked with students using Youth Participatory Action Research which provided students the opportunity to share their perspectives of their environment.

They developed four different modules using critical race theory to explore identity and they also included storytelling, counter storytelling and two other Indigenous educational modules. Some students received and responded to the modules and Werito explained they were really impressed by how they did on the activities.

As the school year concluded in May, the team shifted their focus to teachers and conducted several workshops with the themes focused on: identity, counter storytelling, community and efforts of solidarity.

Werito explained student identity was a main focal point.

“If a student has a strong cultural identify and cultural foundation, they’ll do well, their resilience will come through,” he explained. “Teachers have to recognize and affirm the student’s identity, their cultural knowledge and their cultural strength.”

“The goal is to create a healthy community and create awareness about one’s own identity and to use that as a way of understanding other people’s identities and hopefully creating unity [and] a sense of solidarity,” said López. “We can’t get to a point of solidarity unless we

understand our past. Then with the hope that once you understand your own identity, your own history, you can actually shift and understand other people’s experiences and create a sense of solidarity, a sense of empathy, a sense of love and understanding, and a healthy community.”

Werito explained their approach and framework for professional development at Cuba Schools was based on data from a survey that assessed staff, students and parents. This survey was conducted by Cuba Schools and it proved valuable in jump-starting their initiative.

“In terms of schools that serve a large number of [Native American] students, the schools often, from the perspective of parents and students, don’t really meet the needs of their students in terms of providing them culturally relevant curriculum and teaching,” Werito explained.

Werito said Cuba Schools was part of the *Yazzie and Martinez v. State of New Mexico* case and they did their best to align their development according to the court rendering and to also structure their efforts based on the survey information. Their goal was to help address cultural divide and underlying cultural tensions within the school and community.

The intent is to help all the staff and not just a certain group with professional development and to provide sustained professional development.

“We wouldn’t just come in one time and then leave, but that we wanted to continue this process,” said Werito. “There is research [that] suggests that ongoing sustained learning is way

better than just coming in and doing your one-time shot deal.”

Paquin explained it was the four team members who did a lot of the planning and content creation but it was always in discussion with Dr. Karen Sanchez-Griego, superintendent, who provided the direction. They participated in many virtual meetings with Sanchez-Griego and the community where they presented their ideas, answered questions and solicited feedback.

“The core partnership stemmed out of discussions with the school district’s leadership. But at all times, it was meant to encompass the community whether it be through the surveys or the meetings,” said Paquin. “That’s where things really took off for us because we were able to really engage with the teachers and leaders who attended the workshops over the summer.”

The group has extensive experience working with other schools individually and in partnership with each other, but Cuba Schools is the first project with all four of them working together. López and Desai also work with Albuquerque Public Schools as part of a research practice partnership that is working to implement ethnic studies.

“We have been trying to do community engaged work that centers on reducing and hopefully eliminating inequality and creating communities at schools that empower and create a healthy community beyond the school walls,” said López. “That’s our goal, I think each of our life’s work speaks to that?” 🐏

College and career readiness now targeted to K-12, not just high schoolers

November 13, 2020

CUBA, N.M. — Cuba Schools is taking a different approach in promoting college and careers to its students by targeting students as early as kindergarten and not just high school students.

“We’re trying to make a priority of exposing our students from a very young age to all kinds of potential opportunities in life,” said Anna Brown, student success adviser at Cuba High School. “Whether it be careers or to developing passions for something in life so they can pursue their education in a meaningful way, to understand why they’re going to school and to reach their goals.”

Brown explained in the last year, there has been a lot of discussion about the need to improve the way they expose high schoolers to college and career readiness through college and career fairs. She also realizes the need to expose students at a much younger age as well and help them develop ideas of what they find interesting in life and what they are passionate about.

Brown primarily works at the high school level and there is a counselor, Rose Etsitty, who works for the Indigenous Education Program and

she works with K-12 students. Brown explained Etsitty is working to develop a program or a roadmap for students K-12 with a focus and connection to Indigenous and cultural terms.

This past spring, Cuba Schools hosted a career and college fair for the entire school district. They had speakers, presenters and former alumni of Cuba Schools talk about careers and options for students to ponder and plan.

“[We] had students in different assemblies all the way from elementary to high school, I think that was really nice for the kids,” said Brown. “They got to see not only different job and career exposures but they also got to meet and talk with Cuba alumni who shared their journeys from Cuba High School to their careers.”

Brown said it was a great experience for the students. They were exposed to different career paths to help them visualize their futures as Cuba graduates and onto their careers, and to one day come back and inspire their community.

Other college and career fairs were planned but all that was interrupted by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic as students converted to remote learning.

Brown said working in the midst of the pandemic and remote learning has been very challenging for student outreach.

“I spend a lot of time setting up college recruitment presentations via Zoom and unfortunately it’s not nearly as well-attended as they were when I would have actual recruiters come to the campus,” she said. “If we were in-person, there’s usually an average of 30 students that sign up to attend but now with everything being virtual, our attendance is really atrocious at this point. We’re trying to figure out ways to create incentive to get kids engaged again.”

This school year was the first time the school district decided to target K-12 with college and career fairs, before the fairs were mainly targeted to high schoolers.

“We’re trying to make it much more inclusive for kindergarteners on up so kids can start developing interests and drawing connections earlier in life—that’s the No. 1 priority,” Brown said. “Students are often really excited about school when they are in kindergarten but by the time they hit third grade and perhaps sixth grade, a lot of that excitement goes out the window and kids seem to lose focus.”

“We’re trying to recreate that excitement or at least that awareness that school isn’t just something to jump through hoops,” she said. “[Education] is a way for you to pursue things that inspire you and motivates you, it gives you a purpose, it gives you some kind of meaning or sense of accomplishment. That’s what we’re trying to do, to help kids draw that connection.”

Brown said parents are crucial in this effort because they need to support their children in their educational endeavors. Parents can speak with their children about the importance of school as a practice for responsibility in life, for building resiliency and learning about determination. All these lessons provide good life skills at a personal and professional level.

“Parents could reinforce that notion at home with students about why they are going to school every day and pursuing their education,” she said.

Brown said she is always open to feedback about their events and she wants to hear ideas from students and parents about things that interest them. 🙌

STOP COVID-19

Protect yourself
and others from
getting sick



Avoid close
contact



Clean your
hands often



Stay at
Home



Healthy
Lifestyle



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



Happy Holidays

From the

Students, Staff, Administration and School Board
of Cuba Independent School District

Cuba, New Mexico