



RAM COUNTRY NEWS

CUBA INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

DECEMBER 2021

Stephanie Ortega was nominated for NMPED Teacher of the Year

November 12, 2021

Stephanie Ortega, an elementary school teacher at Cuba Elementary School, was nominated for the New Mexico Public Education Department's Teacher of the Year recognition.

Ortega, who teaches 5th Grade math and social studies, was nominated in October 2021 for this year's award.

"I was very honored to be selected to represent our [school] district," Ortega said.

Though she was not chosen for this year's award, Ortega, the only nominee from Cuba Schools, said it was still something she felt very honored to be recognized for.

After being notified by her peers, Ortega had to fill out an application where she described her philosophy for teaching. Ortega began her career in psychology, so she brings what she learned during her years in that field to magnify her focus on her students

and a "whole person mentality," which she believes sets her teaching apart and helps her better connect with her students.

"When I first started teaching, I think I reflected too much on how other people taught instead of doing what I felt comfortable with," said Ortega, "After a few years of getting into the groove of what is expected of me as a teacher and combining it with my own practices, I try to make my classroom as comfortable as I possibly can for students."

Ortega explained she really tries to connect with her students on their personal interests, their own unique cultures, and how they feel about themselves.

"That connection has supported me the last few years as a teacher and in one-on-one connections with stu-

CONTINUED PAGE 3 / Ortega



Cuba students getting Starlink internet hookups

November 12, 2021

Cuba Independent School District is making plans to install Starlink hookups in all homes to give students access to adequate internet connection.

Starlink, a low-orbiting satellite

project created by Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk, was designed to help more people have equal access to internet connection in rural areas.

Brian Voss, a technology, network, and systems specialist for the school district, said they plan to install the systems in up to 450 homes, covering

hundreds of students within the school district and enabling at-home learning access for households that normally would not have connection capabilities.

Voss explained that these small, motorized satellite dishes are set up at the homes of students, and they are designed to follow the orbit of satellites they are connected to, giving families the ability to have high-speed internet connection, regardless of where they

live. The district is utilizing emergency federal funds to provide these connections in conjunction with Cisco Systems. The district is acting as a pilot between Starlink and Cisco to see if this project can work on a grander scale in providing school network extensions to better support students

CONTINUED PAGE 2 / Starlink

IN THIS ISSUE



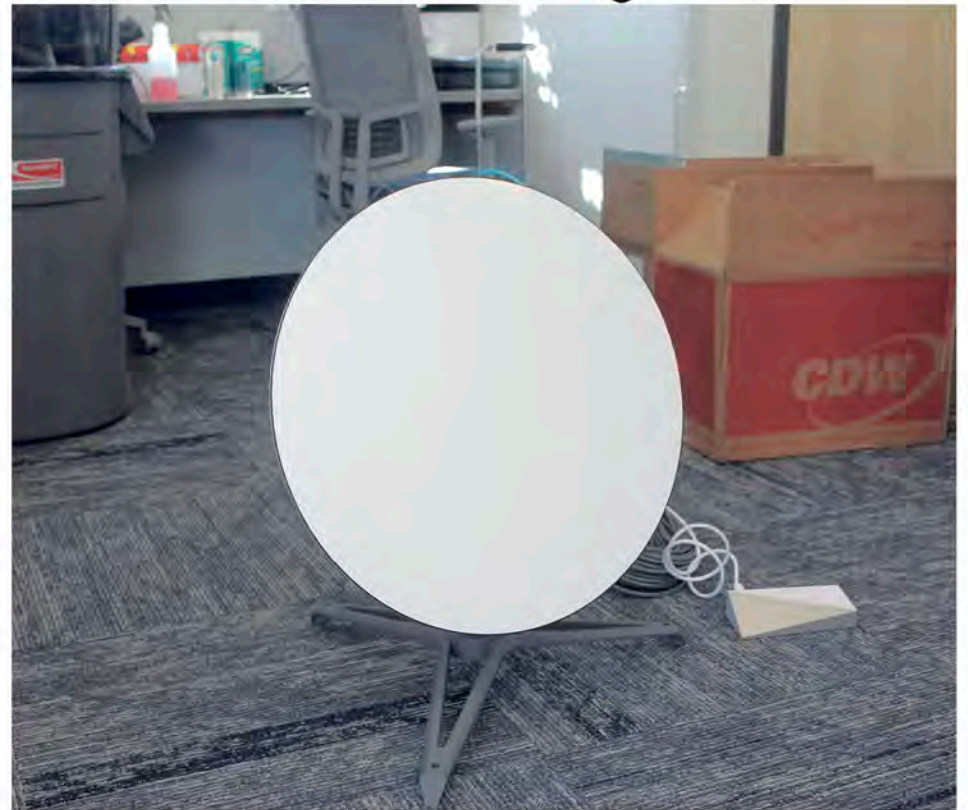
Extra precautions being taken... Page 2



CTE students adapted to remote learning... Page 3



School secretaries during pandemic... Page 4



Starlink

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

in remote situations.

"We're waiting right now because we have to mount that equipment on the premises. We have to put a pole in the ground, bury the cable going in, so that it's not a problem for them

and an eyesore. But we're waiting on that additional equipment," explained Voss. "The additional piece is made by Cisco, which allows us to extend our networks here as if the student is still sitting on our campus, and it still provides content filtering to allow us to keep our children safe and keep them from inappropriate content and also

manage content."

Voss also explained Cuba School's IT staff will oversee installation once the proper equipment is available. These units are the same kinds of units that any consumer buyer could purchase for their homes, and they run about \$499 for equipment with a \$99 per month service fee.

"We're hoping in December, we'll have everything cut, fit, ready to go, and in place," Voss said.

The initial program includes 107 homes, but the school district wants to make sure all their students eventually have access, so the plan is to provide Starlink to about 450 homes by the project's end. 🐏

Cuba Schools plans for improved school meals, hires new Food Service director

November 12, 2021

Cuba Schools will have new food service and a new Food Service director beginning in January 2022.

Robert Miera, culinary teacher at Cuba High School, will be transitioning from his teaching position and into the role of Food Service Director for the school district.

Chef Miera began his career at Cuba Schools in January 2020 and has been teaching full-time. However, after speaking to several students about Canteen, the current food service company in charge of the district's food services, Chef Miera discovered that many students were unhappy and that the service and quality have declined tremendously.

Canteen's current contract with the school district comes to an end in mid-December, so the district felt it was time to take this opportunity to bring management back in-house,

deciding to hire Miera, a nine-year culinary teaching veteran who also spent nine years working in the restaurant business across various venues. Chef Miera said that he wanted to make the food better for the kids.

"It's not about a fancy title or money," he told the school district, "It's about trying to make things better for the kids."

Chef Miera will conclude his transition to full-time director in December and has already been working with a replacement to take over his classes, though he plans to act as a resource to his replacement for the rest of the school year.

"My goal is to try to make as many freshly prepared meals as can reasonably be done without burning myself out," said Miera, "Add some culturally relevant foods in there, and balance something that tastes good with meeting the federal and state nutritional guidelines."



Chef Miera and his team of six will oversee breakfasts, lunches, and snacks to all three schools. All the food is prepared in the high school cafeteria and transported throughout the district.

"I'm looking forward to this challenge. I'm doing it for the kids... the kids are important to me. I'm gonna

miss teaching, but I'm going to go to teaching adults. I told the kids, 'Your opinion is important to me. If things are not going well, come in and see me. I want to hear. Their voices are important. That is who we're here to serve. We're here to serve the kids, and that's what's important,' he said. 🐏



“These Zombies Stole My Laptop” being filmed, debut planned

November 12, 2021

Cuba High School’s Film and Technology class teaches students to plan, write, and create their own short film.

Now in its final month of the semester, the Film and Technology class taught by Renee Armentrout teaches students all the tools needed to create their own film, which they will be shooting this month with hopes of showing it to the entire school district upon completion.

During the first nine weeks of class, Armentrout taught students all about film theory. They learned about camera angles, lighting, different shots, genres, and elements of creating a film, covering different topics each week, and watching clips from classic movies.

“Instead of doing a bunch of small projects, they’re doing one huge project,” said Armentrout. “They’re doing a silent film... we’re going to share it with everyone in school. They picked the genre, a horror film/comedy. It will be black and white, and the title is ‘These Zombies Stole My Laptop.’”

“They all have a different role. They’re all writing the story, and we’re almost done with it, and we’re going to turn it into a script,” she said. “Even though it’s a silent film, there’s a lot of acting. There’s a couple of students that will be in the film acting, but pretty

much everyone has a role. There’s a location person, director, producer... camera person, camera assistant, we have someone creating character and wardrobe and makeup, and everything is filmed on location here at school.”

Armentrout explained the goal is to teach students all the skills needed to plan, organize, and put together a large-scale project with teammates.

“They’re working together, producing, being organized, writing, putting together this whole thing. Being able to create their own film and delegating all the parts,” she said. “That’s the biggest takeaway is knowing how to do this, the process, the steps, and then taking it further in their academic career.”

The story is entirely unique and has been completely imagined by the students.

“These Zombies Stole My Laptop” is the story of a damsel in distress who puts off doing an essay, so she pulls an all-nighter in the school’s library,” said Armentrout. “She works late into the night until she falls asleep, only to wake up and discover that zombies have stolen her computer. The students are excited to film and show their work to other students.”

“They’re doing [this project] beautifully,” said Armentrout, “It’s going to be fun and funny.” 🐾



Educational assistants hired to support teachers, students

November 12, 2021

Several educational assistants were hired this school year to help teachers and students transition from a year of remote and hybrid learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to an in-person learning environment. Educational assistants provide support in these areas and help students where needed.

Johnelle Trujillo-Montoya is one of the educational assistants and works at the middle school with 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students. She began in August 2021, and this is her first year working at Cuba Schools. She works primarily with the English Language Development classes where she helps the teacher with students that need extra time and extra attention in class, and she also assists with Navajo Language classes.

Trujillo-Montoya explained she helps students with many things, such as: logging assignments online, submitting work, figuring out how to navigate assignments, and helping to explain teacher instructions.

“I’ve been teaching for over 10 years as an educational assistant,” said Trujillo-Montoya. “I worked two and a half years as a kindergarten teacher in a parochial school and as a preschool teacher in that same school.”

Trujillo-Montoya expressed she eventually wants to go back to school

to finish her Bachelor’s degree and become a full-fledged teacher. A Navajo herself, she wants to teach the Navajo language and she is currently certified in Native Culture and Language.

Many of the educational assistants have plans to continue their education and pursue their long-term educational and career aspirations.

The other educational assistants are: Delandra Bitsue, Cathy Romero, Ceejay Duran, Morningstar Vice, Heavenly Coyle, Selena Chavez, Lacy Sandoval, and Shanae Wagner. 🐾

Ortega CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

dents,” she said.

Ortega is in her eighth year of teaching and has spent her whole teaching career at her current school. She was born and raised in Cuba, New Mexico, and graduated from Cuba High School in 2001. After high school, she attended the University of New Mexico, where she obtained her bachelor’s degree in Psychology. Ortega also holds a Master’s degree in Curriculum and Assessment for Elementary Education from Walden University. 🐾



State ambassadors help advocate teacher needs to state

November 12, 2021

State Ambassadors work with schools to represent the needs of teachers and help advocate those needs to the state for positive reform.

Joy Gouripaga, an English teacher at Cuba High School, is one of 22 state ambassadors for Cuba Independent School District. Gouripaga has been a student ambassador for two months and has been working on a variety of different projects.

Gouripaga's most immediate issue is training and more support for new teachers, incentives for senior teachers, and advocacy for a mentoring program. As part of her assignment, she attends weekly Zoom meetings, sometimes up to three meetings each week with her 21 other state ambassadors.

"[We're doing a survey] and we're going through different steps to get more data on it," said Gouripaga. "Specifically with Cuba Schools, the goal is for me to get data, talk to my teachers, extend the help for the teachers, and if we have any issues, take it to the [New

Mexico Public Education Department]."

Gouripaga has greatly enjoyed her first couple of months as a state ambassador. She hopes to use the rest of the year to achieve her goals and achieve equal compensation and reform for her fellow teachers.

Gouripaga's time as a state ambassador will last the entirety of the school year before the reselection process. Educators must submit an application accompanied by recommendations from their superintendent and principal to be selected for this position.

Gouripaga was born and raised in India. She also went to school in India where she was able to work at an international school with all different kinds of stu-

dents, but she was left wanting to do more. She decided to come to the U.S. five years ago to further her knowledge in teaching special education. In doing so, she earned a Master's degree in English and degrees in General Education, Special Education, and her National Board Certification. She is also currently working on her psychological Doctorate degree. 🐏

“

The goal is for me to get data, talk to my teachers, extend the help for the teachers, and if we have any issues, take it to the [New Mexico Public Education Department].

Joy Gouripaga, State Ambassador

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New CHS assistant principal not new to Cuba Schools

November 12, 2021

Former teacher Gilbert Dominguez has taken on a new administrative challenge this semester as Cuba High School's assistant principal.

Dominguez, who previously taught physical education and health, began as the high school's assistant principal in August of this school year and he is very excited to be in this new administrative role.

"The opportunity came up, and I took it," Dominguez said, "It is a lot different on this side rather than being in the classroom."

Dominguez said he is in his 20th year teaching at Cuba Schools. As he

completes his second decade with Cuba Schools, he said he is "looking forward to more school involvement and [encouraging] students [to be] more involved in what's going on in the school."

Dominguez also explained it has been very challenging for some students to get back into the swing of things. After a year of facing the COVID-19 pandemic where remote learning was the norm, the transition to in-person learning this school year has been difficult for some.

"Now we are trying to get [some students] back in the flow of coming to school every day, back into a routine, and coming back into school

to learn rather than just [learning] online," he said.

"We have very good teachers and administrators," said Dominguez. "The challenges are keeping students involved in the classes. Some students are going online. Some students are doing well... some are not, so we have to check on them and have them come back. We have to make sure all the students enrolled are actively participating in their classes."

When thinking about himself as a leader to his students, Dominguez said that he tries to be as visible as possible. He aims to talk to as many students as possible, ask them how they are doing, and create bonds so that he can

help them avoid problems before they occur.

In addition to his new role, Dominguez is also the school's head football coach and he helped lead the team to an impressive 7-3 record this season, and an appearance in the state tournament.

Dominguez was born and raised in Cuba and graduated from Cuba High School in 1996. He married his wife two years ago, he enjoys working out, being outdoors, attending church, and visiting the mountains.

He is looking forward to a successful school year. 🐏



Capstone designed to help students plan for their future

An alternative for state standardized testing, Capstone projects allow students an alternative method for graduating students.

Daniel Delgado, a science teacher at Cuba High School, is one of the program-leads for the Capstone project. Delgado noted that the state of New Mexico developed the Capstone projects program as an alternative way to develop an understanding for seniors.

"Instead of doing lots of state tests, it's a way for students to demonstrate understanding at the end of their school year," said Delgado. "It's a project. They have options. They can do a research project; they can do an experiment and write about it or they can do a service project."

"There are four of us running the project, one from every department. We have someone from history, science, math, and English. Each one of us is teaching the kids in the classroom about the different parts we're assigned," Delgado explained.

Delgado went on to say that even though the project is different from standard testing, it is much more

challenging than your everyday class. Capstone projects require students to demonstrate everything they have learned during their time in high school.

"This is much like a college program," said Delgado, "When you finish your degree, you have to write a project. It's like the senior project. I think it's getting them ready for college. It's a great opportunity for the kids to put everything together and see what they've learned."

June Vigil leads the Capstone

project for 8th grade students at Cuba Middle School, where the program

looks slightly different. This program is much more about helping students focus in on future career goals.

"[We are] trying to get them to get career-oriented instead of a means to an end," she said, "We've done a lot of invest inventories that show them things they like to do and how that could be pursued as a career."

"I have one [student] that wants to be an environmental scientist, and after researching, she wants to be a restorative envi-

ronmental scientist. We're looking at what she needs to look at in terms of

GPA, ACT, SAT, FAFSA, what schools (state schools, out-of-state schools)," said Vigil. "I have another gentleman that wants to join the Air Force and become an engineer. We're looking at what that entails."

Vigil explained the goal is to work with students to do research and look at the pros and cons of their goals and career aspirations, so they are not surprised when they join the workforce.

Both Vigil and Delgado believe in the strength of a Capstone project as opposed to standardized tests that are often "written back east" without any local elements. These projects are portfolio-style and online, and they allow students to base their long-term success on their career goals and intensive research rather than just a one-time test that could be influenced by any number of external factors. 🐉

“
It's a great opportunity for the kids to put everything together and see what they've learned.
”

- Daniel Delgado



Karate Club at Cuba Middle School

Richard Armentrout, a math teacher at Cuba Middle School, is also a Martial Arts Club instructor.

Armentrout explained the Martial Arts Club began in Fall 2019 with Cuba Middle School students in 6th, 7th, and 8th Grades.

"[The program] has gone relatively well, even considering the [pandemic]," he said. "[Our club] fluctuates between 11 to 13 [participants]. [The students] are learning some basic karate and some

kung fu."

The students are learning all the terminology associated with martial arts in addition to the techniques. Armentrout said the club struggled during the pandemic because they could not practice in person but interacted periodically via Zoom. He said the number of participants is still low, but he is working to increase interest in the club.

He said he is trying to get a program started at the high school and

hopefully there is enough interest for it.

Classes are held for half an hour on Fridays. 🐏

CUBA INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT



(Photo courtesy of New Mexico Public Education Department)

Cuba bus drivers featured in TIME Magazine

Bus drivers and the entire transportation team at Cuba Independent School District were nationally recognized when they were featured in TIME Magazine in an article titled, "From Teachers to Custodians, Meet the Educators Who Saves A Pandemic School Year," published September 2, 2021.

The TIME magazine article can be accessed at <https://bit.ly/CubaTimeMagazine> or scan the QR code here. 🐏



CUBA HIGH SCHOOL TUTORING

WHEN: Tuesdays and Thursdays
3:45 - 5 PM

WHERE: Cuba High School

Transportation: Students will be able to ride the activity bus. Drop off points are Ojo Encino Chapter House, Torreon Store, and Counselor Store.



NMASBO
NEW MEXICO ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BUSINESS OFFICIALS

High School Scholarships

NMASBO awards six \$1,500 scholarships (a minimum of one from each region) to deserving New Mexico high school seniors across the state every year. All the regional applicants must demonstrate to the committee financial need and purpose for the scholarship.

In 2022, the Scholarship Committee will select one applicant from the scholarship pool to receive the 12th Annual Joni Heinsohn Memorial Scholarship for \$2,500. This applicant must meet the same criteria in the guidelines and application. The applicant who demonstrates to the committee the most need and purpose for the memorial scholarship will be selected.

www.nmasbo.org



Heleen Archuleta was Sen. Lujan's guest for President Biden's first joint address, participates in panel discussion



CUBA, N.M. – U.S. Sen. Ben Ray Lujan (D-N.M.) invited Cuba High School 10th grader, Heleen Archuleta, to join him as a virtual guest during U.S. President Joe Biden's first joint address to the U.S. Congress, as well as the rare opportunity to participate in a panel discussion with the senator and others on technology access equality for students.

On April 27, Sen. Lujan announced he invited Archuleta, a Navajo Nation tribal member, to be his virtual guest for the joint address and she gladly accepted.

Archuleta has been distance learning since April 2020. During her panel discussion with the senator, she spoke about the need for Wi-Fi on school buses because of the long travel time and commutes for those who live within his congressional district, as well as access to technology while remote learning from home.

According to an April 27 press release from Sen. Lujan's office, "Under the American Rescue Plan, New Mexico schools will receive \$979 million to address learning loss, provide edu-

cation technology, implement public health measures, and meet other critical needs... [Sen. Lujan] recently introduced bipartisan legislation to expand eligibility for the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) E-Rate program to reimburse schools that equip school buses with Wi-Fi technology. This proposal would make Ms. Archuleta's two-hour commute to and from school prime time for completing homework assignments and doing research."

With dreams of becoming a nurse

technician, Archuleta is doing all she can to assure proper technology access for herself and all her fellow students so that no student lacks access to any aspect of their education.

Dr. Karen Sanchez-Griego, superintendent, commended Archuleta for her great advocacy.

"She did an amazing job," said Griego. "Thank you to her and also to Ms. Anna Brown for working with her in preparation of the questions. [Ms. Brown] did a wonderful job supporting her." 🐏

SLOW THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

cdc.gov/coronavirus



Wear a cloth face covering in public spaces



Stay at least 6 feet from other people



Frequently wash your hands

Extra precautions being taken to keep students, staff safe

May 10, 2021

CUBA, N.M. – As COVID-19 variants become a point of concern for many across the world, Cuba Independent School District is prepared for a new normal for students this school year.

Arsenio Jaquez, principal of Cuba Middle School, said that the most important thing is safety, and they made some noticeable changes at his school.

“We marked the hallways... they’re striped... kind of like a highway. They have one way that you walk, so kids cannot just run into each other,” he said. “The cafeterias have been set up for social distancing, and they have plexiglass between the seating. The students were all issued masks and they have to wear masks at all times.”

Jaquez also mentioned that there are entrances set up at each of the schools to take student temperatures as they

arrive. If temperatures are too high, students will be escorted to another room so the school nurse can assess them.

In further efforts to ensure all students can return safely to school but still maintain some sense of normalcy, Jaquez said that school schedules are staying the same. However, the most significant changes are happening in how the school is set up to keep students at safe distances from each other while maintaining equal access to proper education. For example, classrooms will be set up according to guidelines, students will only be let into bathrooms in limited numbers and teachers will remain on alert to ensure students are appropriately distanced from each other whether they are in the classrooms or walking through the halls. Even the libraries have been set up with plexiglass to

ensure students can make use of the room while remaining separated and important offices and study rooms that students need access to.

When asked if the school would continue to offer a remote learning option, Jaquez noted that remote learning would still be an option.

“[Students] will also have the opportunity of a hybrid model, so if you want to send your kid for two days a week and then keep them remote for three days, that will be an option as well,” he said.

While all these changes have been a lot of work for the school district, Jaquez says that keeping students safe is far and beyond their top priority.

“The safety of the kids is the most important thing for us to provide a quality education. We need to provide a safe learning environment for our kids. We need to provide a safe work-

ing environment for all the employees there, so that’s why we went through this, through all these changes,” he added.

Jaquez also mentioned they are working to ensure a safe environment on school district transportation and buses. He noted that they were considering taking students’ temperatures before they board the buses, but they were still working on those details as of his statement in May.

“We felt that if we have these changes, parents will feel more comfortable sending their kids to our buildings in order for there to be onsite learning,” said Jaquez. “We feel like remote learning in some cases will benefit the kids, but we want to really encourage all of our students to be onsite, so we just need to take every precaution possible to ensure their safety.” 🦋



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www.cuba.k12.nm.us

School registration was done online for the 2021-2022 School Year

May 20, 2021

CUBA, N.M. – Registration for the 2021-2022 School Year is now closed at Cuba Independent School District and school administrators say this year’s process was easier than ever before.

Joby Wallace, counselor at Cuba High School, said registration for the entire district was done online and it allowed students to register for classes from the comfort and safety of their home. Wallace also helps to coordi-

nate scheduling for the entire school district.

“Registration [was] online, and [students just had] go to the Cuba High School website. There [was] a link that [said] registration for the 10th to 12th grade, so the students [clicked] the link and followed all those instructions,” she said. “They’re very detailed instructions, and [they registered] for the grade level that they’re going to be in for the next school year.”

Wallace also mentioned once the deadline had passed, students would

not be able to register, and that the computer would automatically select their classes and electives for them.

Wallace explained the process is different for all divisions. For example, students in the 9th grade have totally different classes, so their registration process is done separately from the 10th to 12th grade students. The middle school students also registered on their website and similarly with the elementary schools.

Wallace also noted that the final registration deadline was Monday, May

17, and that date was set so the school district could have plenty of time to schedule classes for all students across various schools.

For any students with additional questions or issues, Wallace said that they could reach out to her via email or to Anna Brown. Similarly, if middle school students had problems or concerns, they can contact their counselor, Trish Delgado. 🦋



Exceptional needs students provided extra support during pandemic, new school year

May 10, 2021

CUBA, N.M. – The special education staff at Cuba Schools is working hard to appropriately adjust their services to support all of their exceptional needs students.

Laura Saucedo, special education director, said the needs for students has shifted dramatically throughout the pandemic. As a result, it required special education staff to significantly alter their strategies toward providing quality educational services to those in need. Saucedo noted once the pandemic was underway, many parents were reluctant to continue with their programs, but their staff worked tire-

lessly to overcome these hesitations for the sake of the students and continue to provide needed services such as occupational, physical, speech and recreational therapy, as well as psychological and social work services.

“When either the school got closed down or the parent didn’t feel comfortable to send their child, we would, of course, use Zoom and many times we had to work with the parents so that they would understand how to get onto the Zoom classes, Google classrooms and things like that,” said Saucedo. “The staff had to also work with the parents to make sure that they could help their child to get into the Zooms and so that the teachers and

the staff could provide that service for the students.”

Saucedo also mentioned the special education staff conducted many home visits with families during the pandemic, which provided an additional challenge in terms of keeping all parties safe.

Along with traditional students, the exceptional needs students will also have the option of continuing to rely on remote learning where needed, but with that comes additional challenges. Before COVID-19, each student’s individual needs had to be determined to put proper educational plans in place. Now in the age of the pandemic, that is even more true.

“We have to look at individual needs,” explained Saucedo. “It’s not just a blanket thing for special education students. For some students, it’s best if they come in-person, especially for the therapies that are difficult to do on Zoom.”

She explained that it will take a great deal of planning to determine which students will require Zoom-style learning and what teachers will be available to facilitate that learning.

Currently, there are 95 students in the special education program between pre-K to 12th grade, with eight staff members. Saucedo said they are ready to provide much-needed support to their students. 🐏

CTE program adapted to remote learning, built garage models

May 7, 2021

CUBA, N.M. – When schools across New Mexico closed last spring due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Career and Technical Education (CTE) program adapted quickly to remote learning despite difficulty.

Richard Prudencio, the CTE instructor at Cuba High School, explained CTE instruction is usually hands-on with equipment and field-work but that had to change quickly. They adjusted to a virtual format that was not ideal, but it had to work.

“My students started working on garage models which were perfect for Project Based Learning (PBL) along

with Google classroom assignments in construction and carpentry,” he said. “For the CTE program, at least some face-to-face instruction is ideal or even necessary for knowledge and skill development, and hand-on practice.”

“That task was not easy,” he added.

Prior to the pandemic, Prudencio explained Cuba Schools already adapted teaching some aspects of remote learning through E-Days to provide equitable access to more learners.

“The pandemic’s impact on the CTE program led me to rethink how I will deliver instruction for construction and carpentry classes with the help of technology,” Prudencio said. 🐏



Internship program at Cuba Schools helps student gain work experience

May 11, 2021

CUBA, N.M. – For students planning their future careers, Cuba Schools is coordinating internships of all kinds to give them a jump start.

Jeanette Marie Paiz, a retired educator and the current internship coordinator for Cuba Schools, said for the past 30 years, the program has been pushing students to go to college, and she shared that this internship program has made a significant impact on this mission.

“[Students are] coming out of college and high school without any type of real experience,” she said. “Academically, they’ve done really well, and they’ve graduated but they don’t have any real work experience.”

Paiz noted when talking to employers and universities, they frequently look for students with two to three years’ worth of job experience, but very rarely do the average students have that.

“That is why mentorships and internships are so important because they do need the academics, but they also need the experience, and through internships, they find if it’s really something that they want to do or something that they’d have interest in,” she explained.

While Paiz noted that internships have been a bit difficult to coordinate during the pandemic, they have been able to coordinate virtual internships for their students as well. Some of the internships they have been able

to coordinate included mental health and community health work, including mentorships in the medical field, building a summer program through the University of New Mexico (UNM) and filmmaking workshops.

“They can see what the professional world looks like... We were able to get some kids to work with the fire department, we had some students placed at a physical therapy clinic, we had some at Rio Rancho Regional Hospital through UNM, but when COVID-19 came, we had to pull everybody out... we had to move everything to virtual,” she said.

Paiz hopes to get the internships back to in-person this fall, so they can return to their college readiness plans.

Elvira Sanchez, a junior at Cuba High School, said she participated in the mental health internship with Paiz and that it helped her solidify some of her future career plans.

“We [met] to discuss mental health and how it [effected] people, espe-

cially during COVID-19. We [got] on Zoom with our friends, and we [did] activities or [made] arts and crafts just to help with our own mental health as well,” said Sanchez. “We made a PowerPoint discussing mental health with COVID and things to help with mental health... We had lots of fun.”

Sanchez said the program was helpful for her because it helped her learn how to better deal with her mental health and how to help others, especially during the pandemic. Once she graduates from Cuba High School, she plans to attend UNM in Albuquerque to study nursing and she said this internship helped prepare her for her future studies.

“I think they find out about themselves. They find out about the real world out there,” said Paiz. “I think it’s important for them to have paid internships because that also is a part of the learning experience and part of learning what it’s like to go out there and earn some money.” 🙌

School secretaries helped to keep school running during pandemic, in-person school

May 9, 2021

CUBA, N.M. – Throughout the pandemic, staff members throughout Cuba Schools have been working hard, but the work of school secretaries behind the scenes has gone relatively unnoticed.

Alyssa Romero, the administrative assistant at Cuba Elementary School, has been with the school for four years. She noted that on top of her administrative duties, her primary function has been to keep up excellent customer service, answer phones, greet parents and help assist other staff where needed, as well as being a mother of four children of her own.

In the last year, working through the pandemic has been very challenging for Romero and many others. Romero explained the first month was especially hard, she had to get herself situated, set up and plugged in for work in addition to helping her children get set up with Zoom for their remote classes. Her youngest was attending kindergarten at the time.

In addition, she noted she had to also rely on her husband to help at home and he changed his schedule to do so.

“The most challenging was having to adjust to be the administrative assistant, a mother and a teacher all at the same time,” she said.

Luckily, Romero was able to return to in-person work April 6.

“It’s been a lot of work,” she said. “We were so used to being at home... I’d rather be at the office doing my work and it’s a lot easier there.”

Romero explained she occasionally met with parents or run off copies for a teacher and it was much more challenging to meet those needs from home, especially without personal access to a copy machine and other office equipment.

Angela Crespin, the special education secretary for the school district, said that working through the pandemic was very interesting.

“It was a whole new job, basically because things had to be done so differently, so it was like learning a whole new job,” said Crespin.

Crespin mentioned one positive of working from home, she got to know a lot of the parents and students better.

“We got to talk to them, get to know them, see how things were going at home, so we got to get to know them a

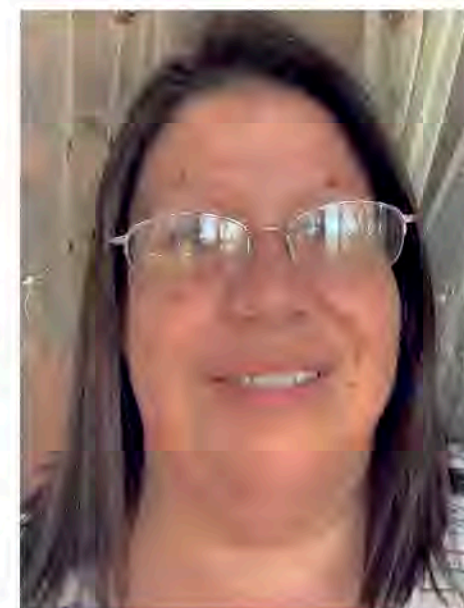
whole lot better,” she said.

Romero was surprised how difficult working from home was, but she also knows working in-person during a world pandemic also comes with its own challenges. She said working in-person right now comes with extra precautions that involve constant hand washing, using Lysol wipes and wearing a mask but all that is much more manageable for her than working from home.

Romero always wanted to find a job where she could work from home but once it started, she quickly realized how difficult it was — especially with four children home with her. She learned how to change her schedule and her routine several times through the pandemic, and she feels this helped her to better manage many things. Above all and most important, she kept everyone at home safe.

For now, Romero appreciates being back in her office and working in-person again.

“I love working at the elementary,” said Romero. “I love my job. I love the kids. I feel we have a great school. When the pandemic hit, all our administrators were in action. We had our ducks in a row, and by the time we had to go remote, we all knew what was happening and where we needed to be and what we needed to do, and how to help the kids, so I was grateful for that... for our school being on top of everything.” 🙌





A challenging year for the Class of 2021

Despite many challenges through the pandemic in School Year 2020-2021, the Cuba High School Class of 2021 had 62 graduates.

Anna Brown, the high school student advisor, said last year was especially challenging for students because of the many unexpected variables going on throughout the school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Attendance was an issue," she said. "However, we did pretty well getting people connected and getting people resources."

"We were ultimately able to have graduation in person, which was really nice," added Brown. "We were able to have a lot of kids graduate that were fifth- and sixth-year students... which was a huge relief for them. Brown said that the school year was tricky in many ways, but in the end, they were able to help all their students graduate."

Brown also mentioned that many students worked hard this year to apply for scholarships for studies after

high school.

"We had some kids that worked the scholarship thing like a job, and one student, in particular, got over a million dollars in scholarship offers from various universities and private scholarships," said Brown. "We had a pretty diligent student body in terms of applying for scholarships, which isn't always the case."

Brown said she is tremendously proud of the Class of 2021.

"The fact that they were able to take the different challenges that were thrown at them throughout the school year with different school closures and not being able to have some events that they looked forward to but being able to stay positive... and push through and support each other... and stay focused and cross the finish line. I'm so proud of them, and I have no doubt they'll do great things in life," she said. "It's amazing to have that kind of fortitude and to use it as a driving force in your life to push you past the adversities that you experience." 🐏



CONGRATULATIONS GRADUATES



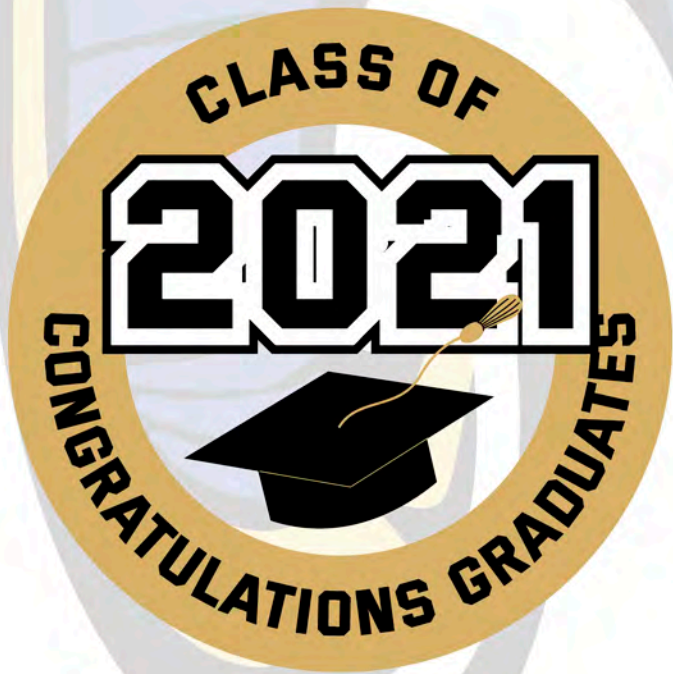
Aragon, Yilthnapah Selina
 Atencio, Sharon Lynn
 Barbone, Teya Melody
 Carabajal, Joseph Dennis
 Casas, Antonio Manuel
 Casas, Carmen Veronica
 Casaus, Kailee Matea
 Cassador, Keilei Ash
 Castillo, Cyliss RayLee
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 Castillo, Felicity Ashanti
 Castillo, Lance Jadon
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Chavez, Shmar Dean
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 Crespin, Victoria Rosa
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 Herrera, Seth
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 Pinto, Kenneth Odale
 Prieto, Adrianna R
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 Roe, Ricquel Gwen
 Saenz, Gabriel Antonio
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 Sala, Raymundo Philbert
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Sandoval, Calena Keira
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 Sandoval, Macolin Tom
 Sandoval, Santiago Richard
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 Toledo, Ilana Evelyn
 Toledo, Sylas
 Tom, Miranda
 Tsosie, Shawn Kanuho
 Velasquez, Emerson Lee
 Werito, Xander Orion
 Willie, Latanian Isacc

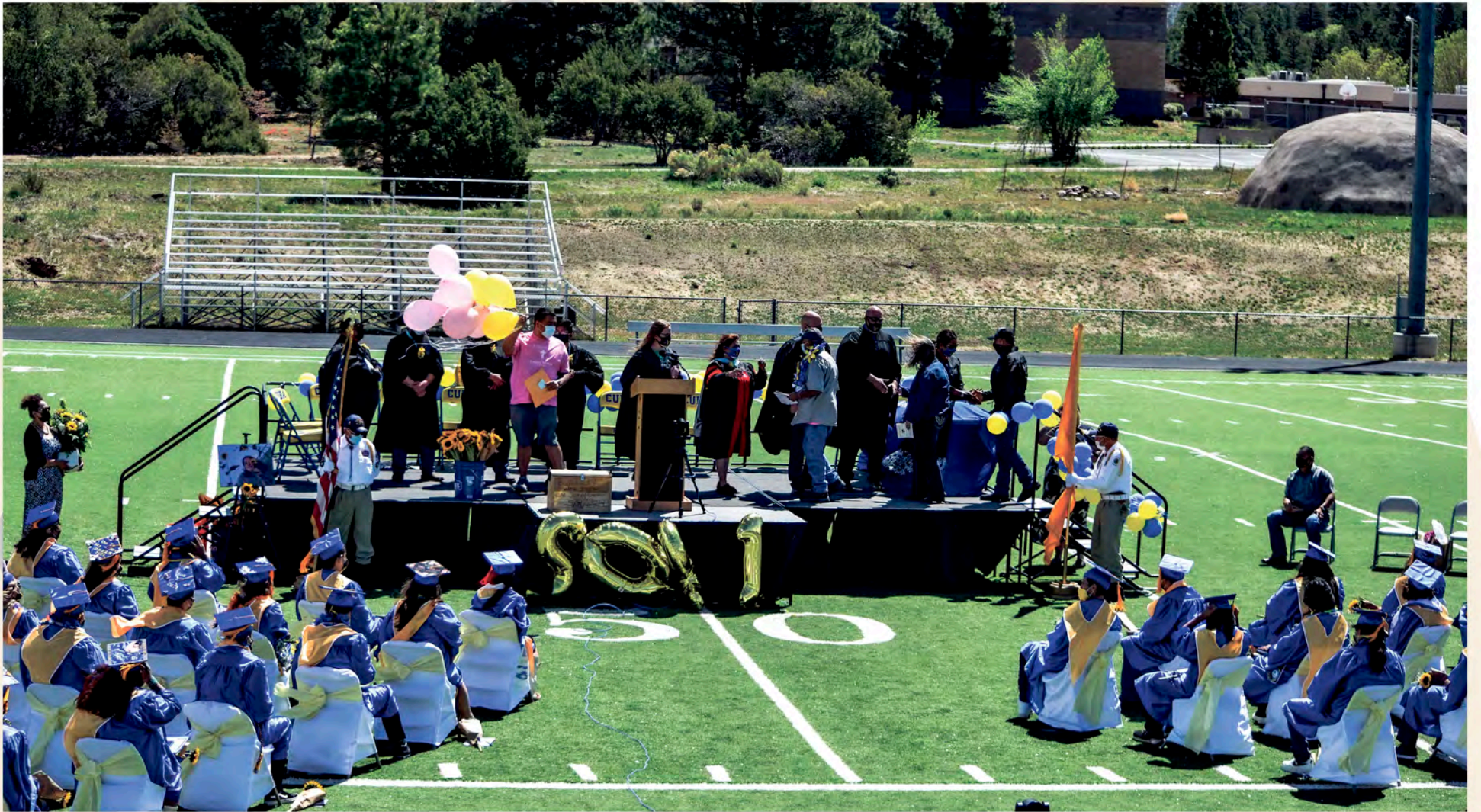
CUBA INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT



Cuba High School



CONGRATULATIONS GRADUATES



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Happy Holidays