

APS campuses open for full in-person learning today

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Classrooms across Albuquerque Public Schools have been prepared for students' return. Some classes that require close contact will have plexiglass dividers. (Roberto E. Rosales/Albuquerque Journal)

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Highland High School band director Josephine Gonzales knows there will be hurdles when students return to school today. But that hasn't tempered her noticeable excitement.

It may be April but the teacher of nine years has first-day-of-school feelings on steroids.



Wilson Middle School staff distanced desks last week to prepare for the reopening of Albuquerque Public Schools campuses. All APS schools will resume in-person learning Monday. (Roberto E. Rosales/Albuquerque Journal)

“We usually have band camp for three weeks before the first day of school. And so on a normal school year, the first day of school I already have a relationship with my students who are coming on. Whereas for this one, I have students who I’ve been teaching since August that I literally have never seen their faces,” Gonzales said.

Albuquerque Public Schools campuses are reopening Monday after the 2020-21 school year has been mostly virtual during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although there are just 37 instructional days left in the school year, Gonzales is ready to use that time to tackle lessons that are harder to translate on a screen, such as marching and flag tossing.

“I can do so much with seven weeks,” she said.

Still, Gonzales admits it’s “dizzying” to think about teaching some students online and others in-person as families were given the choice to remain virtual or return to school.

“I think all of the teachers are really concerned about ‘How do I teach in person and online at the same time?’” Gonzales said, adding that she has to create at

least two lesson plans to make it work. Roughly 60% of her class was expected to be at school Monday.

For instance, due to safety precautions, students will have to play instruments outside, where there isn't functional Wi-Fi, Gonzales says. And the band teacher has to figure out ways to give the in-person students a chance to practice while teaching the students at home.

She plans to give remote learners an assignment to work on individually while the on-campus group plays music.

But not all educators are excited for school to resume now.

Albuquerque Teachers Federation President Ellen Bernstein said feedback from teachers has been mixed.

"People are over the moon excited, and people are also so scared ... and everything in between," Bernstein said.

Bernstein said one teacher she has spoken to is "terrified" about in-person school resuming because of her multiple underlying conditions, but the teacher can't afford to quit her job.

Others have told the union leader they want to wait two weeks after their final dose of the vaccine before returning, which high-risk employees are allowed to do.

Bernstein echoed Gonzales, saying many teachers are bracing for a struggle teaching some kids in person and the rest online.

Unlike other districts, APS never launched a hybrid of in-person and online learning that would have brought back students for part of the week.

"I guess the only consistent thing is that the educators have been asked to consistently change," Bernstein said.

Gonzales said she's learned to be more flexible.

"My outlook on so many different aspects of the job have evolved enormously," she said.

And while the district has an agreement with the union that ensures it will provide needed supplies, Bernstein said teachers are also concerned about getting the extension cords, headphones and other necessary equipment in time for the first day back.

Gonzales also said that Wi-Fi at school could be an issue because of the number of students who are online at once.

But the way she sees it, problems can be forecast and plans can be drafted but many hurdles can't be addressed until educators are in the thick of it.

"I'm actually more excited than anything, to be totally honest," Gonzales said.