

Extra payments to APS staff on hold

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Scott Elder, Superintendent for Albuquerque Public Schools

Workers at Albuquerque Public Schools who were banking on extra \$1,000 and \$500 payments promised by the district may be out of luck.

Superintendent, Scott Elder, announced Tuesday that the state constitution prohibits the district from providing employees extra pay for COVID-19-related work they've already done.

"I know this is a disappointment," Elder said in a video posted Tuesday on YouTube. "We are still looking for a way to get you additional pay for the extra time and effort we know the pandemic will cause for you in the coming year."

Elder said State Auditor Brian Colón's office had determined the payments would violate the state constitution's anti-donation clause. That provision prohibits public funds from being gifted to private parties. In this case, paying additional compensation to employees for work they already did and were already compensated for would violate the clause, the Auditor's Office determined.

Colón said APS officials should have looked into the matter before promising "bonuses" to employees.

"I know there are education professionals throughout the district who are going to be disappointed, including my wife," he said. "They should be disappointed the district didn't do its homework."

APS told employees last week that they would receive the extra pay in June from federal COVID-19 stimulus funds allocated to the district.

Full-time employees had been slated to receive \$1,000, and part-time employees \$500 in extra pay, APS spokeswoman Monica Armenta said Tuesday.

APS officials had considered delaying the announcement while they searched for alternatives for paying employees, Elder said.

"However, I don't want you to plan on money that just won't arrive June 25," he said.

Journal city editor Martin Salazar contributed to this story.