

# UNSEEN = UNSAFE



**Ruidoso Public  
Schools**

**ABQ Public Schools**

**Bernalillo Public  
Schools**

Please join **Organizing Parents Education Network (OPEN)** in our efforts to ban covering classroom door windows

## **OPEN Organizing Parents Education Network**

Please join Organizing Parents Education Network (OPEN) in our efforts to advocate rule making to end the covering of classroom door windows. Door windows ensure necessary visibility and safety for school children so parents, principals, and other staff can see in. Anything can happen behind doors with covered windows including restraint, seclusion, and potentially abusive behavior. This unnecessarily puts all students at risk, but particularly very young children and those with disabilities who may be less inclined or capable of reporting what is happening in the classroom. Seen = Safe. Join us in keeping our children safe!

## **SEEN = SAFE**

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## **FAQs: Why NM should act to prohibit covering classroom door windows**

Q: What are you talking about?

A: Classroom doors are built with narrow windows for the specific purpose of ensuring visibility into classrooms. Yet, all across New Mexico, in most of our 89 school districts and many charter schools, teachers/staff permanently cover the window in classroom doors with materials which prevent seeing into the classrooms where students are. Windows are covered by construction paper, cardboard, electric tape, posters, curtains, etc.

Q: Isn't the covering of classroom door windows needed for security?

A: No. Best practice for safety of children in public schools is visibility. Even in the very rare, temporary situation of a campus intruder, safety recommendations do not focus on covering classroom door windows.

Q: Isn't the covering of classroom door windows effective to be sure students inside the classroom are paying attention and not distracted by people passing/looking in from outside?

A: We are not aware of data to support this justification. Even if true, it is not a good trade off. When children inside classrooms are not visible, they are not safe.

Q: Isn't the covering of classroom door windows just a harmless way to add decoration?

A: No. There is nothing about this practice that is harmless, particularly when the classrooms house young children and children with disabilities who are not capable of reporting on what occurs inside a classroom.

Q: Are there any other concerns?

A: Placing flammable materials on door windows may be a fire hazard and is generally discouraged by fire codes.

## Why should local school boards act to prohibit covering classroom door windows?

### 1. School boards have the power under state law to establish policy.

\*“Local school board” means the policy-setting body of a school board. NMSA 22-1-2(H)

\*A local school board shall have the following powers or duties:

(A) subject to the rules of the department, develop educational policies for the school district. . . .

NMSA 22-5-4(A).

### 2. To date, NMPED and the State have declined to take action, leaving a vacuum.

For 30 or more years, the practice of covering classroom door windows (the “sight glass”) has existed in various schools of the State’s 89 school districts without any regulation or monitoring by the State. Based on photographs and in-person observations, we know that classroom door windows across New Mexico are covered by: construction paper, wrapping paper, cardboard, cloth curtains, paper curtains, masking or electrical tape, posters, student artwork, and other materials which block the view to inside the classroom.

In March 2019, OPEN (Organizing Parents Education Network), a group of parents/grandparents and professionals concerned about systemic dysfunction in delivery of special education, petitioned NMPED to enact rulemaking to prohibit schools from covering classroom door windows. In September 2019, NMPED refused to act, stating:

Regarding OPEN’s request that NMPED consider revising rule to mandate that all classroom windows in SPED [sic] classrooms be uncovered, the department will not bring this forward for potential rule development at this point in time. We believe this discussion is better taken at the community level where districts/charters can hear from their stakeholders and determine what specific actions may be appropriate regarding district policies and procedures.

- 9/13/2019 letter from Katarina Sandoval for NMPED.

In 2021, legislation was introduced (SB 319a) which included a prohibition against covering classroom door windows. The bill (which addressed other safety issues as well) did not pass, in part based on opposition from the New Mexico Superintendents’ Association during committee hearing(s).

### 3. Safety of students is a universal priority.

This state and our school districts are spending millions of dollars seeking to assure student safety through school hardening and other dedicated measures. *See, generally*, “School Safety in New Mexico and the United States: A Landscape Analysis,” (NM LESC report

6/27/2024) at

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/ALESC%20062624%20Item%209%20.1%20-%20School%20Safety%20LESC%20Report.pdf>

Whether costly school hardening measures are effective is debatable.

Whether ensuring visibility of students inside their classrooms makes students safer is a certainty.

And, a mandate to ban the covering of classroom door windows is *free*.

**4. Students are unsafe and at risk without formal policy to prohibit the covering of sight glass in classroom doors. UNSEEN = UNSAFE**

In the rare instances where school personnel have abused and sexually abused minor students, some instances of abuse have occurred inside classrooms where classroom door windows were covered, blocking the view inside. In some of these instances, the employee abused multiple victims over multiple school years. Ongoing abuse was not suspected because covering of classroom door windows was the norm and an accepted feature of the campus culture. There was nothing “suspicious” when teachers/staff were given discretion by the District/principal to permanently cover the sight glass in classroom doors and it was routine across the campus.

Some groups of students are at particular risk for harm: students with disabilities (particularly those who may have impaired communication such as students who are nonspeaking or students with autism) and young elementary school-aged students. When these students are hurt while inside their classrooms, their natural allies (parents, the principal, other teachers and staff) may have no way to discover what has happened. Unobstructed views through sight glass in classroom doors discourages illegal and inappropriate educator conduct because the classroom is not hidden. Visibility of classroom activity enhances all students’ safety and is particularly important for our most vulnerable students.

Data: **89 NMIPRA requests sent in June 2024** with 3 document requests:

- “1) written school district policy on whether and when windows in classroom doors can be covered;
- 2) any memos or written guidance provided to employees by administration at any time from July 1, 2023 through May 31, 2024 about whether or when windows in classroom doors can be covered;
- 3) all pages of current District Safe Schools Plan (SSP) which mention the windows in classroom doors and whether these windows can be covered.”

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**as of 7-12-24, 51 responses and ALL 51 Districts had no written policy**

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Among the 51 Districts with no written policy on covering classroom door windows, some Districts’ responses referenced less formal guidance:

- \* Albuquerque. - explicitly encourages door decorating contest for each October
- \* Aztec - Elementary school staff handbook instructs there should be no paper on doors/windows
- \* Clovis - Employee Handbook under Fire Code section instructs “Windows beside classroom doors and in doors cannot be covered.”
- \* Cuba - District received guidance from POMS (NMPSIA safety audit) to stop allowing covering of classroom door windows
- \* Des Moines - current Administration’s expectation is to never cover windows unless during a safety drill or active shooter
- \* Hatch Valley - spring 2024 fire drill instruction include “Please uncover door windows unless we are in lockdown.”
- \* Las Cruces - District received guidance from NMPSIA/POMS
- \* Mora - “law enforcement and fire marshal advised. . . keep them uncovered for safety reasons”
- \* Raton - District has received conflicting guidance from law enforcement, insurance
- \* Ruidoso - multiple internal District documents give guidance to *not cover* door windows
- \* T or C - draft document for SY24/25 on “Visibility through classrooms” instructs that windows only to be covered for lock down drills, emergency or at direction of Administration

**IS THERE FORMAL WRITTEN SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICY TO PROHIBIT COVERING CLASSROOM DOOR WINDOWS???**

| District              | Comments   | No response | No policy |
|-----------------------|--|-------------|-----------|
| 1. Alamogordo         |  |             | X         |
| 2. Albuquerque        | Door "decorating" contest  |             | X         |
| 3. Animas             |  |             | X         |
| 4. Artesia            |  |             | X         |
| 5. Aztec              | ES staff Handbook -no paper on door/windows                                      |             | X         |
| 6. Belen              |  | X           |           |
| 7. Bernalillo         |  |             | X         |
| 8. Bloomfield         |  |             | X         |
| 9. Capitan            |  |             | X         |
| 10. Carlsbad          |  | X           |           |
| 11. Carrizozo         |  |             | X         |
| 12. Central Consolid. |  |             | X         |
| 13. Chama             |  |             | X         |
| 14. Cimarron          |  |             | X         |
| 15. Clayton           |  |             | X         |
| 16. Cloudcroft        |  |             | X         |
| 17. Clovis            | EE handbk: "Windows beside classrm doors and in doors cannot be covered."        |             | X         |
| 18. Cobre             |  | X           |           |
| 19. Corona            |  |             | X         |
| 20. Cuba              | Guidance rec'd from Poms & Assoc.  |             | X         |
| 21. Deming            |  | X           |           |
| 22. Des Moines        | "expectation is never cover windows unless in safety drill or active shooter. ." |             | X         |
| 23. Dexter            |  |             | X         |
| 24. Dora              |  | X           |           |
| 25. Dulce             |  | X           |           |







