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FOG statement on PED Listening Tour – February 24, 2022

Public Education Secretary Kurt Steinhaus has embarked on a seven-stop "listening" tour in which he is meeting with school superintendents and charter leaders from around the state. Unfortunately, members of the news media and the public won't have the opportunity to hear what Sec. Steinhaus and those key education leaders have to say because PED has decided the seven regional meetings will be closed to public, and press reporters seeking access also have been told the events will not be live streamed.

FOG urges the secretary to reconsider and for Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, who has supported transparency efforts, to encourage him to do so.

Granted, absent a quorum of elected officials at one of the meetings, there would appear to be no legal requirement that they be open. But that doesn't mean closing them is good public policy. It isn't.

We do know something of the plans for the meetings from a news release issued by PED, which does not mention they are closed. Each of the seven meetings is scheduled to last two hours. Sec. Steinhaus will speak for 30 minutes and then take questions for an hour and a half.

He said in the press release that "my message will be the same at each stop: we have to move the needle on public education in New Mexico..." It's a safe bet that parents and taxpayers all over the state would be very interested in hearing how the secretary and school leaders propose to accomplish that. Secrecy for this kind of discussion only breeds suspicion and cynicism.

Steinhaus also plans to discuss the recent legislative session that saw huge appropriations increases of public dollars for education. Further, PED has recently adopted a new social studies curriculum that has been, at times, controversial. There is a good chance that will come up as well.

The first meeting was Tuesday in Bloomfield. The tour concludes next Wednesday, March 2, in Rio Rancho.

New Mexico's open government laws are premised on a key principle: that the public is entitled to the greatest possible information on the workings of their government. The secretary can and should honor that principle and allow news coverage and public observers. After all, the "P" in PED stands for public.

In sunshine,



Shannon E. Kunkel
Executive Director