

From the Desk of the Superintendent Dr. Thomas Palmer:

Dear Peru School Community,

The Peru Central School District was sighted on the Governor's Failure list to submit the 2020-2021 Reopening Plan to the New York State Department of Health. Peru community members want to understand why and what does it mean for the district. I have shared a news clip from the New York Governor Andrew Cuomo for you to peruse.

I have closing comments at the end of the article I feel are pertinent to our school community and will answer the questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Thomas Palmer Ed.D.

<https://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/politics/albany/2020/08/10/107-new-york-school-districts-didnt-submit-covid-19-plans-did-they/3337171001/>

107 NY school districts fail to submit COVID-19 reopening plans. Or did they?

ALBANY - New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo vowed to prohibit 107 school districts from opening their doors this fall if they do not submit a COVID-19 reopening plan to the state by Friday, two weeks after the original deadline.

There was just one problem: Dozens of the districts on the list already did submit their plans — or so they thought.

Cuomo's public shaming Monday morning sent school leaders scrambling after they saw their districts named on the delinquent list, despite many believing they had [previously submitted their plans through the state's online portal](#).

By Monday afternoon, it became clear there was widespread confusion about the state's submission process.

Some districts believed their plans were sent to the state Department of Health when [in actuality they were sent to Empire State Development](#), which is overseeing businesses. Others apparently submitted

their plans directly to the state Education Department rather than using a form that included the Department of Health.

And others were at a total loss, claiming they correctly submitted their plans to the Health Department and ended up on the list anyway.

"I'm really surprised that they published it so quickly before they got some of his stuff untangled, because obviously it makes school districts look like you know we're slow on the uptake in complying with all this, which is certainly not the case in Nyack," said James Montesano, superintendent of the Nyack school system in Rockland County.

Schools need plans to reopen

New York is [allowing schools to reopen to in-person learning in September](#) after switching to an online model in March amid the worst of the COVID-19 outbreak, which hammered New York worse than any other state in the early days of the pandemic.

But each district was required to craft a reopening plan by July 31 that laid out the various health and safety protocols meant to slow the spread of the virus once children return to the classroom. Those plans must be approved by the Health Department.

The confusion came to a head Monday morning, when [Cuomo held a conference call with members of the media](#).

On the call, Cuomo fumed that more than 100 of the state's roughly 700 school districts had not submitted their reopening plans by the original deadline. So he issued an ultimatum: The delinquent schools had until Friday to submit their plans or else they would not be permitted to reopen for in-person learning at all this year.

"For those 107 school districts, how you didn't submit a plan is beyond me," Cuomo said. "But they didn't submit a plan to DOH or SED. If they don't submit a plan by this Friday, they can't open."

List of delinquent schools spurs confusion

Within an hour of his call, Cuomo's press office released [a list of the 107 districts](#) the administration considered delinquent. That's when superintendents across the state saw their districts listed despite believing they had already submitted their plans and met the state's requirements.

Dozens of districts said they had submitted their plans on July 31 and still ended up on the list. Their fully formed plans could be found on many of their school websites.

Among them were Webster and Victor schools in the Rochester area, as well as Oriskany, Utica, Richfield Springs, Owen D. Young, Central Valley and Waterville in the Mohawk Valley; Bedford, Nyack, Hendrick Hudson, Beacon and Garrison in the Hudson Valley; and Spencer Van Etten, Newark Valley, Corning, Elmira and Odessa-Montour in the Southern Tier.

Timothy Terranova, superintendent of Victor Central Schools, said he submitted the school system's plan on July 31 as required.

"I called the state and they said they are getting swamped by districts in the same situation," he wrote in an email. "Not sure if it was a glitch on the state's part or the health department had another form somewhere that wasn't kept track of by the state."

It was a similar story for the Odessa-Montour Central School District in Schuyler County.

"The problem is not on our side," Superintendent Christopher Wood said. "We submitted everything on July 31 and uploaded it to our website on the same day. It must be a mistake on their end."

A spokesperson for the Newark Valley Central School District said the plan was submitted on time. Superintendent Ryan Dougherty double-checked with the Department of Health Monday morning, and re-submitted the plans to be sure.

At least two school districts appeared to have submitted plans through the state's online portal for businesses rather than school districts. It was unclear how many others did the same.

When they finished the process, those districts received a confirmation page titled "Business Affirmation." It meant the plan was sent to Empire State Development instead of the Department of Health, which is overseeing the school safety plans.

"That's the ESD Business reopening portal (a dead giveaway is that it identifies businesses and business owners)," [Cuomo senior adviser and spokesman Rich Azzopardi tweeted](#) when a reporter posted a screen grab of the Shenendehowa school system's confirmation.

Submission directions were deep within NY guidance

Cuomo's administration laid out the requirements for the reopening plans in [a 23-page document](#) posted to its website.

The document offered guidance and laid out rules for schools hoping to open their doors in the fall, setting strict standards for social distancing, sanitizing and mask-wearing.

Directions for schools to submit their plans to the state came on page 22 of the document. Each district was required to follow a link on the page to submit a form affirming they had read the state's guidance. The reopening plan was to be attached to that form.

In a statement, Azzopardi called the list of 107 delinquent districts "accurate," placing the blame with school districts he said didn't follow the submission directions.

"Despite clear guidance provided to these schools, which included a link to the DOH portal, some districts in follow-up calls said they filed with the State Education Department – which is not an executive agency – but didn't file with DOH," he said.

"Others filled out an affirmation certifying that they would be abiding by the state's reopening guidance, but didn't actually submit their plan, something many of these districts are now rectifying."

One district acknowledged 'oversight'

While many districts felt they were inaccurately included on the delinquent list, others realized they had missed a step in the submission process.

That was the case for the Arkport Central School District in Steuben County, which acknowledged making an "oversight."

The district sent its plan to the Education Department, which is overseeing academic portions, and not the Health Department, which oversees safety protocols, according to Superintendent Jesse Harper.

"Once it was brought to our attention that an additional step was needed, we were in contact with NYSDOH," Harper said in a statement.. "Earlier this afternoon, we received a confirmation letter from NYSDOH stating that our plan was successfully submitted."

Includes reporting by The Journal News staff writer Sophie Grosserode, Rochester Democrat and Chronicle staff writer Justin Murphy, Times Telegram staff writer Stephanie Sorrell-White, The Spectator

regional editor Chris Potter, Observer-Dispatch staff writer H. Rose Schneider, Press & Sun-Bulletin staff writer Maggie Gilroy and Star-Gazette staff writer Jeff Murray.

Jon Campbell is a New York state government reporter for the USA TODAY Network. He can be reached at JCAMPBELL1@Gannett.com or on Twitter at @JonCampbellGAN.

What is this article referencing? The 2020-2021 reopening plans had to be created and submitted to the New York State Education Department(NYSED), Posted on the District's Website for public view and sent to the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) by July 31, 2020.

Why did Peru not submit the plans? Peru submitted the plans to NYSED and NYSDOH on Friday, July 31, 2020 as well as posting the plan on the district's website. Peru is still investigating why it wasn't received in the NYSDOH, but has submitted the plans again on Monday, August 10, 2020 and today Tuesday, August 11, 2020 for assurance they received the plan. Please check our website: www.perucsd.org as the plan has been on our website under the Reopening Bar since July 31, 2020.

What are the next steps for Peru CSD so this does not happen again in the submission process?

The district will always after submitting any paperwork to any of the State Agencies, it will take a snapshot of the transaction as well as printing out the document and compiling those documents in several places to make assurances the transaction had taken place. Shaming and bullying has no place in education whether it occurs in the classroom or through the political platform politicians push their agendas from. I am in the business of educating children and will make sure the appropriate documentation is sent in a timely manner within the deadlines that were set but when called out for a failure of the system, things need to change and discussions need to occur. I would always check for accuracy of my information before making assumptions and dispelling inaccurate information to the public.

