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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

SPONSOR HAFC ORIGINAL DATE 2/12/18 CS/CS/332/HRCS/
 LAST UPDATED _____ HB HAFC

SHORT TITLE School Absence Notices by Text SB _____

ANALYST Liu

ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL OPERATING BUDGET IMPACT (dollars in thousands)

	FY18	FY19	FY20	3 Year Total Cost	Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
Total		Indeterminate, but Minimal			Recurring	Public School Budgets

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

Relates to HB 22, HB 57

Relates to Appropriation in HAFC Substitute for HB 2 et al.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

LFC Files

No Responses Received From

Public Education Department (PED)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

House Appropriations and Finance Committee substitute for House Rules and Order of Business Committee substitute for House Bill 332 adds new material to the Public School Code, requiring every high school to send text message notifications to parents, that have not opted out of receiving notifications, about state and district- or charter-required tests at least two days in advance. Parents must also be notified if their student's grade point average (GPA) falls below 2.0 on a 4.0 scale or 75 percent on a 100 percent scale.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

The bill does not contain an appropriation but requires all high schools to notify parents by text message about required school-wide tests and low GPAs. In FY16, New Mexico public schools spent nearly \$2.6 billion in total on operations, including \$20.2 million on communication services. Median spending for school districts and charter schools on communication services was \$18.7 thousand, which includes services provided by persons or businesses to assist in transmitting and receiving messages or information. Two school districts and three charter

schools did not report expenditures in this category. Fiscal impacts of this bill are dependent on how high schools currently choose to notify parents about tests and GPA. Costs are difficult to estimate given the diverse telecommunications offerings throughout New Mexico and unknown levels of equipment or software capabilities currently installed in public schools for parental notification systems. Further, offerings from telecommunications providers across the state are unregulated, so costs can vary even in the same geographic region.

Large school districts operate at a scale that makes private equipment and software feasible and some currently use text messaging systems to communicate with parents. In these cases, the fiscal impacts of this bill are negligible. Schools located in less populated areas will generally have fewer options, although some programs are available online (such as Remind, Kaymbu, Class Messenger, Kinvoled, Class Dojo, etc.) for teachers to implement provisions of the bill at the classroom level. Costs of using these platforms will vary by provider and features of each program.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

Provisions of this bill allow parents the ability to opt out of texting notification. The bill does not specify other communication channels in addition to texting when communicating to parents regarding tests and GPAs. This bill's reach is limited to parents who currently have access to texting capabilities. According to a related Regional Education Cooperatives Association analysis, many schools already have systems or equipment in place for communicating with parents via text; however, not all school districts may have the equipment to efficiently communicate this information with all parents.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

The administrative burden of this bill is dependent on current school equipment and procedures for notifying parents of high schools students about testing dates and low GPAs. Provisions of the bill apply to approximately 98.2 thousand high school students and will require 216 high schools to notify parents about upcoming tests and low GPAs. Typically, state-, school-district-, and charter-school-required assessments occur only a few times each year, and GPAs are typically computed at specific reporting periods, so administrative burdens of this bill appear to be minimal.

Limited data is available on statewide student GPAs, which will impact the reporting burden on high schools without automated messaging systems. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, findings from the 2011 longitudinal High School Transcript Study suggest average GPAs have increased over time. Between 1990 and 2009, overall high school student GPAs in the United States increased from 2.68 to 3.00. Assuming GPAs have maintained this trend, the number of student GPAs below 2.00 is not expected to be substantial.

RELATIONSHIP

This bill relates to House Bill 22, which requires schools to notify parents by text message about student absences, low GPA, and tests, and House Bill 57, which limits the time during a school year and school day that schools may administer tests to students. The House Appropriations and Finance Committee substitute for House Bill 2 et al. includes a nonrecurring, FY19 special appropriation of \$300 thousand for purchasing equipment or software related to automatic

messaging systems at schools notifying parents about students absences and tests.

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

Research on intensive parental notifications indicate some text messaging interventions may have positive benefits; however, these studies included notifications about information with higher frequency than notifications required in this bill. Few, if any studies, looked at text notifications for just periodic testing and low GPA, which are typically reported over longer time intervals than notifications about homework and absences. As such, the effects of these studies may be less relevant to this bill.

A 2017 study by Columbia University found that weekly text message alerts to parents about missing assignments, grades, and class absences reduced student course failures by 38 percent, increased class attendance by 17 percent and improved district retention rates by 2 percentage points. The study found no effects on state test scores, which were newly introduced during the study, but found significant improvements on in-class exam scores. The automated messaging platform used in the study sent over 32 thousand messages to 624 parents in the first year and cost about \$7 per student for implementation and training costs.

A 2016 Education Endowment Foundation study tested the impact of texting parents information about upcoming tests and missing homework and found texting interventions improved secondary math attainment by the equivalent of one extra month of learning and had a small positive effect on attendance in 36 British secondary schools (attendance at British schools is more than 95 percent). No statistically significant effects were found for English or science. The intervention cost approximately \$10 per pupil, or 0.1 percent of annual school spending, annually.

A 2014 study by Brown University and Harvard University found brief, individualized messages from teachers to parents of high school students in a credit recovery program increased the probability of students earning course credit by 6.5 percentage points. This improvement resulted primarily from preventing drop-outs, rather than from reducing failure or dismissal rates. The researchers estimated the cost of implementing this communication policy to be \$13 per student for each course, but noted costs could be reduced by integrating time to write messages into teachers' regular workday, employing parent outreach coordinators, or developing an automated messaging system.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. FERPA gives parents certain rights with respect to their child's education records until the child reaches the age of 18 or attends a school beyond the high school level. Students to whom the rights have transferred are "eligible students." Under FERPA, a school may still disclose information from an eligible student's education record to the parents of the student, without the student's consent, if the student is reported as a dependent of the parent for tax purposes.

The Pew Research Center reported in 2016 that 95 percent of U.S. adults owned a cellphone of

some kind and 77 percent owned smartphones. In 2015, Pew surveys indicated 97 percent of smartphone owners used text messaging, making it the most widely-used basic feature or application. Text message use was relatively consistent by age group, with 100 percent of individuals 18 to 29 years of age using text messages compared with 92 percent of those aged 50 and older.

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