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LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS
54th Legislature, 1st Session, 2019

Bill Number	<u>SB391/SECS</u>	Sponsor	<u>SEC</u>
Tracking Number	<u>.213654.1</u>	Committee Referrals	<u>SEC/SFC; HEC/HSEIC</u>
Short Title	<u>High School G.E.D. External Diploma</u>		
Analyst	<u>Force</u>	Original Date	<u>2/4/19</u>
		Last Updated	<u>3/6/19</u>

BILL SUMMARY

Synopsis of SEC Committee Substitute

The Senate Education Committee Substitute for SB391 (SB391/SECS) would amend Section 22-2-8.8 NMSA 1978 to require the Public Education Department (PED) to authorize an external diploma program for adults who have not graduated from high school but want to enroll in a program that documents their educational experience through college and career readiness standards; assesses high school-level skills in applied life and work contexts; and prepares them to enter college or the workforce, upgrade skills, advance to a better job, or move from one work field to another. Successful completion of the program would result in a diploma issued to the student by PED, rather than a high school equivalency credential.

FISCAL IMPACT

SB391/SECS does not contain an appropriation.

The House Appropriations and Finance Committee Substitute for HB2 (HB2/HAFCS) includes \$7.3 million for the Higher Education Department (HED) for adult basic education services, materials, and high school equivalency tests, an increase of \$2 million over FY19.

SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

According to the Uniform Statute and Rule Construction Act, the “age of majority” begins on the first instant of a person’s 18th birthday, meaning the external diploma program is for individuals 18 years and older, rather than 16, as is the case for completing assessments for the high school equivalency credential.

Currently, the only pathways to a diploma or a high school equivalency credential are through attendance at public secondary schools or through successful completion of requirements for a high school equivalency credential. Two high school equivalency credentials are available currently in New Mexico, the GED, through the GED Testing Services of Pearson Publishing; or HiSET, published by Educational Testing Services. SB391/SECS would add a third option, whichever external diploma program the HED decides to certify. Neither GED nor HiSet require a review program to undergo assessment. The GED examination costs \$20 per module, while

HiSet costs \$10.75 for online assessments and \$15 for paper tests. The NEDP costs \$125 for unlimited student access to online materials, to be borne by the student. The initial implementation start-up costs for NEDP at a given institution are approximately \$5,000.

HED indicates one such program is the National External Diploma Program (NEDP), published by the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS). The NEDP has been recognized by the United States Department of Education since 1979 as an alternative high school completion for adults who have been in the workforce. The objective of NEDP is to provide adults with an assessment and credentialing process that is an alternative to traditional diploma programs and enables adults to earn a regular high school diploma rather than an equivalency credential.

The NEDP was created in 1975 to address an apparent disconnect between adult education classes and adult responsibilities. Many students found adult education class content unrelated to real life, and the testing format too limited. According to CASAS, the NEDP is a flexible, performance-based option for adults to earn a high school diploma through a web-based, self-directed program that offers the flexibility to complete the program at home, on their own time. This flexibility permits students to earn their diploma while still maintaining a full-time job, caring for family, or managing other commitments. On average, students complete the program in four to 12 months.

Successful candidates must demonstrate their high school level abilities in the academic content areas of communication and media literacy, applied math or numeracy, and information and communication technology. They must also demonstrate life skills competency in civic literacy and community participation, consumer awareness and financial literacy, cultural literacy, geography and history, health literacy, science, and the 21st century workplace. Students may demonstrate their competency in these areas by applying their skills to simulated academic, workplace, and life contexts. In addition to mastering all 10 of these content areas on the NEDP generalized assessment, students must also complete college and career competency by demonstrating a job skill, specialized skill, or advanced academic skill.

The New Mexico Independent Community Colleges indicate member colleges provide ABE programs to prepare students for high school equivalency examinations, and suggest that ABE programs throughout the state would have to be updated to prepare students for the program.

The CASAS website indicates that currently there are 85 NEDP-participating agencies in nine states, California, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Maryland, Michigan, New York, Rhode Island, Virginia, and West Virginia.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

HED notes that responsibility for the implementation of Section 22-2-8.8 NMSA 1978 was transferred from PED to HED via a memorandum of understanding between the two agencies in 2015.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- LESC files
- Higher Education Department (HED)
- New Mexico Independent Community Colleges (NMICC)