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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

SPONSOR Papen ORIGINAL DATE 1/31/19
LAST UPDATED 2/04/19 HB _____
SHORT TITLE Science Early Education Pilot Project SB 267
ANALYST Gaussoin

APPROPRIATION (dollars in thousands)

Appropriation		Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
FY19	FY20		
	\$750.0	Nonrecurring	General Fund

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

LFC Files

Responses Received From

Regional Education Cooperatives (REC)

Responses Not Received From

Public Education Department (PED)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

Senate Bill 267 creates a five-year pilot of hands-on, age-appropriate physics education for students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades in no fewer than 10 schools. It includes a longitudinal study of the impact of early science education on the students, including on their overall academic achievement. It creates a science early education fund and provides for the Public Education Department (PED) to award grants from the fund to school districts. School districts would be required to provide half the funds for their projects.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

The bill appropriates \$750 thousand from the general fund to a new science early education fund and allows the department to seek public and private grants, gifts, and donations for the fund.

Although the fund would be subject to appropriation by the Legislature, the bill does not prohibit the use of the fund for administrative costs. However, if the fund is used exclusively for school grants and the department approves grants for the minimum of 10 schools, each classroom would receive an average of \$10 thousand a year. The bill requires that school districts contract with an organization that provides professional development and materials for teachers.

The New Mexico Science Teachers Association, in a hearing before the Legislative Education Study Committee in October 2018, reported the cost of a classroom physics education activity kit is \$4,486. The association recommended the state appropriate \$5 million for professional development to prepare administrators and teachers statewide for the implementation of the NM STEM Ready science standards during the 2019-2020 school year.

The appropriation contained in this bill is a nonrecurring expense to the general fund. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of FY25 shall revert to the general fund.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

The bill allows for the department to develop the criteria for selecting projects that provide sequenced instruction in the foundational concepts of physics starting in the sixth grade. Under the bill, the department would be required to select no fewer than 10 schools for the pilot and to select schools, to the extent possible, “distinct from one another” in demographics and settings.

While the bill calls for evaluations of three cohorts of participating students and lists academic performance, high school course selection, and post-graduate interests among the outcomes to be measured, it does not say whether the department or the school districts would be responsible for the evaluations. The bill says student progress “shall be measured” through standardized assessments, longitudinal evaluations, declarations of interest on student “next step” plans before high school graduation, and other evaluation tools. The department is required to analyze the findings and report to the governor and the Legislature on whether physics should be adopted as a mandatory or elective course for sixth through eighth grades.

The bill states the purpose of the pilot project is to demonstrate that early science education improves overall academic performance and encourages interest in careers in science and mathematics.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

PED would be required to create and develop criteria for the grant program, process and assess applications, evaluate results, and prepare reports to the Legislature and governor. The department did not provide an agency analysis of the bill. The bill is silent on what entity would be responsible for the longitudinal tracking of the cohorts and, therefore, who would absorb those costs.

CONFLICT, DUPLICATION, COMPANIONSHIP, RELATIONSHIP

The bill is similar to House Bill 310 and Senate Bill 161 from the 2015 legislative session. Each of those bills passed their respective chambers and died on adjournment.

TECHNICAL ISSUES

The bill is unclear on who would be responsible for tracking student outcomes through high school graduation.