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LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS
54th Legislature, 2nd Session, 2020

Bill Number SB252 **Sponsor** Campos

Tracking Number .217050.1 **Committee Referrals** SEC/SFC

Short Title Expand School Food Programs

Analyst Porter **Original Date** 2/11/2020
Last Updated _____

BILL SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

Senate Bill 252 (SB252) appropriates \$100 thousand from the general fund to the Public Education Department (PED) for expenditure in FY21 to expand school food programs to provide meals with local ingredients to low-income families during non-school hours.

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill appropriates \$100 thousand from the general fund to PED for expenditure in FY21. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of FY21 shall revert to the general fund.

SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

According to the annual “Map the Meal Gap” study produced by Feeding America, a national hunger-relief organization, New Mexico is ranked first in the nation for childhood hunger and sixth in the nation for hunger in the general population. Approximately 330 thousand, or one-in-six, people in New Mexico currently experience food insecurity. Research has shown food insecurity can hamper children’s ability to focus, impacting math and reading scores, increasing their absenteeism, and reducing their chances of graduation.

Many schools that serve a large population of high-needs students have begun transitioning to the community school model, a model that transforms the school into the hub of the community. A 2019 LESC report on community schools explains effective community schools rely on a combination of federal, state, and local funding to offer integrated student supports and family and community engagement to combat the impacts of poverty. For example, during the 2017-2018 school year, 95 percent of community schools in Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) addressed food insecurity on their own or with the help of the Roadrunner Food Bank, a local nonprofit organization that seeks to end hunger in New Mexico. Further, 13 APS community schools offered Homework Diner, a weekly program that runs from October to April in which students and parents can meet with teachers in their school cafeteria for a hot meal and receive additional instructional

support. According to officials at Manzano Mesa Elementary School, a high-performing APS community school, student attendance, homework performance, and classroom behavior have improved due to student and parent involvement in the Homework Diner.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

PED would be required to administer the funds, though it's unclear how the department will choose to do so. PED may choose to create a new grant program for schools to offer meals to low income families, or may allocate the funds to community schools to offer programs similar to APS's Homework Diner.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

The House Appropriations and Finance Committee Substitute for House Bills 2 and 3 (HB2/HAFCS) contains an appropriation of \$200 thousand for PED for its New Mexico-grown fresh fruits and vegetables program. School districts and charter schools must apply for the New Mexico-grown fruits and vegetable award, and then request reimbursement of funds up to the amount awarded to them. PED has awarded the entirety of the New Mexico-grown fruits and vegetables appropriation since FY15, but school districts and charter schools have historically not requested reimbursement for the full award with the exception of FY18. Because funds are allocated at the school district level, it is unclear exactly how many students have been impacted by the program; however, it is likely that the program does not reach all schools. HB2/HAFCS also includes \$4 million to support community school services statewide.

New Mexico has made a commitment to providing meals to students who cannot pay, as stated in the 2017 New Mexico Hunger-Free Students' Bill of Rights. A section of this law instructs schools to provide meals to students when requested, but a student's family will incur debt for unpaid meals. When a student has requested, but not paid for, five or more meals, school administrators are instructed to check state lists to determine if a student is categorically eligible for free meals; make at least two attempts (not including the application in the school enrollment packet) to reach the student's parent or guardian to have the parent or guardian fill out a meal application; and contact the parent or guardian to offer assistance with a meal application, determine if there is another cause for the student to have insufficient funds, and offer any other assistance that is appropriate.

The Farm to School program at the Department of Health coordinates efforts to bring local ingredients to New Mexico schools. This program brings local or regionally produced foods into kindergarten through 12th grade school cafeterias and classrooms and conducts hands on learning activities such as school gardening, farm visits, and culinary classes. The program incentivizes the purchase of locally-grown fresh fruits and vegetables for meal and snack programs.

RELATED BILLS

Relates to SM10, Donating School Meals to Students, which requests PED to convene a working group to study food waste and insecurity in schools.

Relates to HB10, No Reduced School Meal Copayments, which would eliminate reduced-price copayments for school breakfast and lunch programs.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- LESC Files