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**2025 LEGISLATIVE SESSION
AGENCY BILL ANALYSIS**

Section I: General

Chamber: Senate

Category: Bill

Number: 344

Type: Introduced

Date (of THIS analysis): 2/11/2025

Sponsor(s): William Soules

Short Title: K-4 VISION AND HEARING SCREENING

Reviewing Agency: Agency 665 - Department of Health

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Section II: Fiscal Impact

APPROPRIATION (dollars in thousands)

Appropriation Contained		Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
FY 25	FY 26		
	\$2,000.0	Non-recurring	General Fund

2 million appropriated to PED for expenditure in FY26.

REVENUE (dollars in thousands)

Estimated Revenue			Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
FY 25	FY 26	FY 27		
\$0	\$0	\$0	N/A	N/A

ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL OPERATING BUDGET IMPACT (dollars in thousands)

	FY 25	FY 26	FY 27	3 Year Total Cost	Recurring or Non- recurring	Fund Affected
Total	\$0	\$ 2,940 to \$12,250	\$0	\$0	N/A	N/A

New Mexico public schools have a requirement for school vision screenings defined under statute, **NMSA § 22.13.30** and NM Administrative Code **NMAC 7-30-11-8**, for students enrolled in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, first grade, and third grade, as well as new and transfer students in these grades, unless a parent or guardian prohibits the screening.

The NMDOH has the authority to convene the NM School Vision Screening Council, which makes recommendations to the Secretary of Health for the school vision screening standards that are published in the NMDOH School Health Manual. Additionally, the NM Save Our Children’s Sight Fund is under the authority of the NMDOH. SB344 directs the appropriation to the NMPED which would need to establish an administrative infrastructure to support the appropriation that the NMDOH already has established.

Based on the number of students in New Mexico's kindergarten through fourth grade, which is approximately 98,000 students, the estimated cost for vision and hearing screenings can be calculated as follows:

Vision Screening: At an estimated \$10 to \$50 per student= \$980,000 to \$4,900,000.

Hearing Screening: At an estimated cost of \$20 to \$75 per student, = \$1,960,000 to \$7,350,000.

<https://health.costhelper.com/hearing-test.html>

<https://www.vsp.com/eyewear-wellness/in-the-community/eyes-of-hope-gift-certificates>

Section III: Relationship to other legislation

Duplicates: None

Conflicts with: None

Companion to: None

Relates to: None

Duplicates/Relates to an Appropriation in the General Appropriation Act: None

Section IV: Narrative

1. BILL SUMMARY

a) Synopsis

Senate bill 344 (SB344) proposes a non-recurring general fund appropriation of two million dollars (\$2,000,000) from the general fund to the NM Public Education Department

(NMPED) for expenditure in fiscal year 2026 to provide vision and hearing screening for kindergarten through fourth grade students. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of fiscal year 2026 would revert to the general fund.

Is this an amendment or substitution? Yes No

Is there an emergency clause? Yes No

b) Significant Issues

Current literature and research support the importance of early detection and treatment of vision and hearing problems. Finding these issues early is vital because if undetected, they can significantly impact a child's ability to learn and develop. Vision disorders and hearing loss, if left untreated, can lead to delays in language, and cognitive and social-emotional development. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and Prevent Blindness Org. both emphasize the importance of early vision screenings for children from kindergarten through fourth grade to detect conditions like amblyopia and strabismus early using evidence-based tools and procedures, conducted by trained and certified screeners. (National Center for Children's Vision and Eye Health at Prevent Blindness. (2020). Children's vision and eye health: A snapshot of current national issues (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: National Center for Children's Vision and Eye Health at Prevent Blindness. <https://preventblindness.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Snapshot-Report-2020condensedF.pdf>).

The American Academy of Audiology endorses detection of hearing loss in early childhood and school-aged populations using evidence-based hearing screening methods. Childhood hearing loss is associated with speech and language delays, low literacy, decreased educational attainment, higher likelihood of school dropout, and restricted employment opportunities. Early diagnosis and treatment is also highly effective in many cases, potentially significantly altering the child's trajectory and confidence as a learner. Hearing screenings are essential for the early identification of hearing deficits that could potentially affect language development and academic performance. Approximately 15.2% of children and adolescents (12-19 years of age) have some degree of hearing loss. Even a mild degree of hearing loss can detrimentally impact cognitive development, academic achievement, and social engagement (Wu HC, Neeff M, Lin FR. Prevalence of Hearing Loss Among US Adolescents. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2025;8(2):e2458854. [Prevalence of Hearing Loss Among US Adolescents - PubMed](#)).

New Mexico public schools have a requirement for school vision screenings defined under statute, **NMSA § 22.13.30** and NM Administrative Code **NMAC 7-30-11-8**, for students enrolled in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, first grade, and third grade, as well as new and transfer students in these grades, unless a parent or guardian prohibits the screening.

The NMDOH has the authority to convene the NM School Vision Screening Council, which makes recommendations to the Secretary of Health for the school vision screening standards that are published in the NMDOH School Health Manual. Additionally, the NM Save Our Children's Sight Fund is under the authority of the NMDOH. SB344 directs the appropriation to the NMPED which would need to establish an administrative infrastructure to support the appropriation that the NMDOH already has established.

Currently there is no requirement for school hearing screening even though it is well supported and recommended. The prevalence of hearing loss among adolescents is on an upward trajectory (Wu et al., 2025). Hearing and vision impairments affect 1.5 and 2.2

billion people globally, and unaddressed impairments cost over \$980 and \$24.8 billion annually and are four times more prevalent in low- and middle-income countries. This highlights the need for screenings in schools to ensure early detection and intervention (Oosthuizen, I., Frisby, C., Chadha, S., Manchiaiah, V., & Swanepoel, W. (2023). Combined hearing and vision screening programs: A scoping review. *Frontiers in public health*, 11, 1119851. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2023.1119851>).

SB344 may limit the positive impact of a comprehensive vision and hearing screening program by limiting grade levels to only kindergarten to fourth grades.

2. PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

- Does this bill impact the current delivery of NMDOH services or operations?

Yes No

The NMDOH currently has the authority under NMSA § 22.13.30 and NM Administrative Code NMAC 7-30-11-8 to create the rules and recommendations for school vision screening.

- Is this proposal related to the NMDOH Strategic Plan? Yes No

Goal 1: We expand equitable access to services for all New Mexicans

Goal 2: We ensure safety in New Mexico healthcare environments

Goal 3: We improve health status for all New Mexicans

Goal 4: We support each other by promoting an environment of mutual respect, trust, open communication, and needed resources for staff to serve New Mexicans and to grow and reach their professional goals

3. FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

- If there is an appropriation, is it included in the Executive Budget Request?

Yes No N/A

- If there is an appropriation, is it included in the LFC Budget Request?

Yes No N/A

- Does this bill have a fiscal impact on NMDOH? Yes No

The 2 million dollar appropriation is for the NM PED. Cost to DOH is not funded in this bill.

4. ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

Will this bill have an administrative impact on NMDOH? Yes No

Rules might have to be rewritten if vision screening moves from NMDOH to NMPED. Currently, school vision screenings for the target population are required and defined under statute NMSA § 22.13.30 and NM Administrative Code NMAC 7-30-11-8 for students enrolled in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, first grade, and third grade, as well as new and transfer students in these grades, unless a parent or guardian prohibits the screening.

The NMDOH has the authority to convene the NM School Vision Screening Council in which makes the recommendations to the Secretary of Health for the school vision screening standards that are published in the NMDOH School Health Manual. Additionally, the NM Save Our Children's Sight Fund is under the authority of the NM DOH. SB 344 directs the appropriation to the NMPED who would need to establish an administrative infrastructure to support the appropriation that the NMDOH already has established.

5. DUPLICATION, CONFLICT, COMPANIONSHIP OR RELATIONSHIP

None

6. TECHNICAL ISSUES

Are there technical issues with the bill? Yes No

- SB344 does not indicate if the NM PED would oversee and administer the vision and hearing program, but rather states to provide vision and hearing screening for kindergarten through fourth grade students.
- SB344 does not provide for a reoccurring appropriation. Programmatic cost to sustain both a hearing and vision program over time are not addressed.

7. LEGAL/REGULATORY ISSUES (OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES)

- Will administrative rules need to be updated or new rules written? Yes No
- Have there been changes in federal/state/local laws and regulations that make this legislation necessary (or unnecessary)? Yes No
- Does this bill conflict with federal grant requirements or associated regulations?
 Yes No
- Are there any legal problems or conflicts with existing laws, regulations, policies, or programs? Yes No

8. DISPARITIES ISSUES

School vision screening programs were initially enacted to identify amblyopia, which is a common childhood vision condition that if corrected early could prevent vision blindness and vision deficits that impact learning. Hearing screenings have been less prioritized due to a lack of awareness about the impact on language development and academic performance but are vital due to the rising prevalence of premature hearing loss.

9. HEALTH IMPACT(S)

Early detection of vision and hearing issue through screening programs has the potential to have positive health impacts by allowing for early correction and treatment. Screening and identification in the early years has positive impacts on language development and academic performance as well as health.

10. ALTERNATIVES

None.

11. WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ENACTING THIS BILL?

If SB 344 is not enacted, a non-recurring general fund appropriation of two million dollars (\$2,000,000) will not be made from the general fund to the NM Public Education Department (NMPED) for expenditure in fiscal year 2026 to provide vision and hearing screening for kindergarten through fourth grade students.

12. AMENDMENTS

None.