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LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS
57th Legislature, 1st Session, 2025

Bill Number	<u>SB60</u>	Sponsor	<u>Padilla</u>
Tracking Number	<u>.228785.1</u>	Committee Referrals	<u>SEC/SCONC/SFC</u>
Short Title	<u>High School Water Management Pilot Project</u>		
Analyst	<u>Hicks</u>	Original Date	<u>1/27/2025</u>
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BILL SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

Senate Bill 60 (SB60) would create a six-year pilot project to be administered by the Public Education Department (PED) to implement the High School Water Management and Conservation Project, examine the feasibility of practical environmental education, and assess the pilot program's outcomes. The department would be directed to create academic content and performance standards and model curriculum for a high school elective course in water management and conservation. PED would be charged with selecting at least five school districts to participate in the pilot. PED would also be responsible for making financial assistance grant awards to participating school districts for personnel, supplies, and other course-related expenses. The bill also authorizes PED to collaborate with the Department of Environment (NMED), state postsecondary educational institutions, counties, and municipal governments to develop and implement the pilot project, including through the provision of apprenticeships, post-graduation employment, and other educational opportunities. PED would be required to collect data on student participation and performance in the elective courses and students' post-graduation plans, as well as submit annual reports to LESC.

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill appropriates \$1.25 million from the general fund to PED for expenditure in FY26 through FY31. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of FY31 shall revert to the general fund.

Fiscal impacts for PED and participating school districts could be significant, but SB60 does provide funding to support creation and implementation of the pilot program.

According to NMED, SB60 does not include funding to support NMED operations in support of the pilot project and would likely result in the agency having to absorb the cost of its participation.

SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

SB60 would direct PED to develop academic content and performance standards and curriculum that focus on practical and experiential learning opportunities for water conservation and management. In addition, these standards and curriculum would need to be delivered as a sequence of courses that satisfies the requirements of two or more units required for high school graduation, is multidisciplinary in scope, and combines multiple instructional approaches. The bill instructs the department to make reasonable efforts to select school districts representative of different regions and community sizes in New Mexico. After review of the New Mexico Career Clusters Guide and PED's STARS manual, it is unclear whether PED has existing courses that would satisfy the requirements of SB60. As a result, it is possible the department would need to update their course offerings to comply with the provisions of SB60.

High Quality Instructional Materials. PED has not historically designed curriculum. Instead, PED's Instructional Materials Bureau vets instructional materials through a rigorous review process called the Summer Review Institute. At the institute, New Mexico educators review content for alignment with state standards and assess materials' rigor. Reviews are conducted by subject area every six years. However, school districts and charter schools are not required to follow the state adoption cycle; some design their own cycles. Instructional materials funding allocated through the state equalization guarantee, the state's public school funding formula, does not have to be spent on items on the PED adoption list. While the department does not typically create curriculum, PED does provide a [science instructional scope](#) to help educators design science lessons informed by students' learning needs, culture, and language.

New Mexico STEM Ready! Science Standards. PED's existing STEM Ready! science standards include [New Mexico specific standards](#) emphasizing student understanding of human impacts on water systems and the broader ecosystem, water scarcity, and the water usage impacts of various technologies. PED's set of science standards define what content knowledge and skills New Mexico students should be able to demonstrate by the end of each grade or course. The existing standards do reference water resource education, though SB60 would likely require updating to the STEM Ready! science standards to include a greater emphasis on this topic as proposed by the pilot project outlined in SB60.

50-Year Water Plan. New Mexico's [50-Year Water Action Plan](#) projects the state will have 25 percent less water in rivers and aquifers over the next 50 years, resulting in a shortage of approximately 750 thousand acre feet (244.5 billion gallons) of water for the myriad water demands in the state in that same time period. To support greater awareness of projected water shortages and conservation methods to address them, the 50-year action plan calls for the development of a statewide water education campaign for public schools and the broader public. SB60, while not appearing to be directly associated with this education campaign, aligns with the overarching goal of increased awareness of impending water challenges.

Legislative and Executive Support for Environmental Education. In recent years, the Legislature and the executive branch have increased both financial and programmatic support for outdoor and environmental learning initiatives. Following the publication of the [2021 Cradle to Career New Mexico report](#), PED established the Outdoor Learning Initiative to support greater student engagement with outdoor learning and environmental stewardship. In FY23, the Legislature earmarked \$500 thousand for outdoor classroom initiatives, an amount that was followed by \$250 thousand in FY24 and \$500 thousand in FY25. Both the LESC and Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) FY26 recommendations for public school support include \$500

thousand for outdoor classroom initiative funding. This funding, however, has historically been used to support outdoor classrooms specifically, which PED describes as an external shelter designed for classroom learning. Many academic subjects can be taught in outdoor classrooms.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

SB60 would have administrative implications for PED and the school districts selected to participate in the pilot project. PED would be required to dedicate agency resources to either amend existing academic content and performance standards or add new ones, possibly update its STARS manual, establish criteria for grant awards, and support data collection and reporting efforts. Participating school districts would need to accommodate the new elective courses in their roster of course offerings, identify existing staff to teach the courses, or recruit additional personnel to support the pilot project.

Should PED coordinate with NMED, postsecondary educational institutions, counties, and municipalities, SB60 would likely have administrative implications for all these entities.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

Tribal Water Rights. SB60 does not include language addressing tribal water rights and the role of tribes, nations, and pueblos in water conservation and management. Development of curriculum and standards responsive to New Mexico's context would likely necessitate PED consultation with tribes, nations, and pueblos in addition to the other entities named in the bill.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- LESC Files
- New Mexico Independent Community Colleges (NMICC)
- New Mexico Environment Department (NMED)

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