

A MEMORIAL

REQUESTING THE PUBLIC SCHOOL CAPITAL OUTLAY OVERSIGHT TASK FORCE TO STUDY THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL SIZE AND STUDENT SUCCESS AND TO DETERMINE THE IMPACT OF REDUCING SCHOOL SIZE ON CAPITAL AND OPERATIONAL COSTS.

WHEREAS, some research indicates that schools with a small student population may have a positive effect on graduation rates, student achievement, student engagement and satisfaction among students, parents, principals and teachers; and

WHEREAS, other research indicates that these small-population schools may have either a mixed or negligible effect on school climate and student success; and

WHEREAS, according to data from the public education department, in school year 2008-2009, sixty-one percent of New Mexico ninth graders entered high schools with populations larger than one thousand students, and eighteen percent entered high schools with more than two thousand students; and

WHEREAS, several school districts in New Mexico have embraced the tenets of smaller schools and are implementing a "small learning communities" philosophy in new school design and renovation, especially at the middle school and high school levels, as a way of retaining the economies of scale derived from a larger school setting while at the same time

creating a small school educational and academic environment;
and

WHEREAS, the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation has invested more than two billion dollars (\$2,000,000,000) in grants to make changes in the way schools are organized, including reducing their size, changing the approach to instruction and adjusting the curriculum, with the hope that these schools will operate in a more cost-effective manner;
and

WHEREAS, the foundation discovered that many of the schools in which it had invested showed improvement, but others did not improve student achievement in any significant way because, although they did reduce school size, they did not take steps to improve the school culture, such as allowing the principal to select the team of teachers or change the curriculum; and

WHEREAS, some researchers caution that simply reducing a school's enrollment will not automatically improve academic performance, and they state that the effectiveness of small schools may depend more directly on the school culture that is created within the schools than on their absolute size; and

WHEREAS, the impact of reducing school size on operational costs, such as personnel, maintenance and equipment, is uncertain in New Mexico schools; and

WHEREAS, in some instances, the capital costs of smaller

schools may be reduced through the shared use of community educational resources that support educational programs, including physical education facilities, sports fields, gymnasiums, swimming pools, performing arts facilities, fine arts facilities, libraries and media centers; and

WHEREAS, no complete statewide analysis of existing community educational facilities is currently available;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO that the public school capital outlay oversight task force be requested to study the relationship between school size and student success and to determine the impact of reducing school size on capital and operational costs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the task force consider input from public school personnel and from representatives of educational, community and business organizations and that it make recommendations to the legislative education study committee, the legislative finance committee and the governor before the second session of the forty-ninth legislature; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that, among other issues, the study include a review of current research regarding the impact of smaller schools on educational achievement; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the study include a comparison between building smaller schools or implementing smaller learning communities within a larger school; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the study compare the performance of small schools in New Mexico with the performance of larger schools in New Mexico; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the staff of the legislative council service work in conjunction with the staffs of the public school capital outlay council, the legislative education study committee, the legislative finance committee, the public education department and the office of education accountability to provide technical assistance to the task force; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this memorial be transmitted to the co-chairs of the public school capital outlay oversight task force, the secretaries of public education and finance and administration, the chair of the public school capital outlay council and the directors of the legislative council service, the legislative education study committee, the legislative finance committee and the office of education accountability.