

**LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS**

Bill Number: SJM 4a

52nd Legislature, 2nd Session, 2016

Tracking Number: .202739.2

Short Title: Importance of Environmental Education

Sponsor(s): Senator Michael S. Sanchez

Analyst: Christina McCorquodale

Date: February 4, 2016

AS AMENDED

Senate Conservation Committee Amendment:

- adds “and the New Mexico Department of Agriculture” as a lead agency together with the Department of Game and Fish;
- adds “the New Mexico Department of Environment; the Cultural Affairs Department; and the Cooperative Extension Service of New Mexico State University” as agencies to collaborate with the Department of Game and Fish and the New Mexico Department of Agriculture to conduct a feasibility study;
- eliminates an entire section that requests the Public Education Department to provide a link on its website to the New Mexico Environmental Literacy Plan; and
- includes the New Mexico Department of Environment; the Cultural Affairs Department; and the Cooperative Extension Service of New Mexico State University as recipients of the joint memorial.

Original Bill Summary:

SJM 4 requests:

- the governor to declare a week in April “Environmental Education Week” and encourage all kindergarten through 12th grade teachers to teach class outdoors for at least one hour that week;
- the Public Education Department (PED) to provide a link on its website to the New Mexico environmental literacy plan as a resource for teachers; and
- the Department of Game and Fish (DGF), as lead agency, to collaborate with other state agencies to conduct a feasibility study for a grant program to increase environmental education opportunities for students in kindergarten through 12th grade, the findings of which are to be reported to appropriate interim committees by November 1, 2016.

Fiscal Impact:

SJM 4 does not include an appropriation. State agencies would be expected to absorb the cost of the proposed feasibility study within existing resources. The following agencies are requested to participate: DGF; the State Parks Division; the Forestry Division of the Energy, Minerals and

Natural Resources Department; the State Land Office; the Department of Health; PED; and the Children, Youth and Families Department.

Substantive Issues:

The New Mexico environmental literacy plan referred to in SJM 4 was developed by Environmental Education Association of New Mexico (EEANM) in consultation with more than 300 teachers and non-formal educators to provide guidelines for teaching quality environmental education outdoors which leads to an environmentally literate community.

Because New Mexico has a rich cultural history of environmental stewardship, environmental education provides an effective means to teach common core state standards and next generation science standards, and increase student achievement in all fields of study, especially science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Environmental education also provides a theme for interdisciplinary, project- and place-based learning that supports critical thinking skills, student engagement in learning, and stronger connection to the land of New Mexico. School gardens and wildlife habitats provide school-based laboratories for science education, generate community support for school sites, and increase nutritional knowledge for a healthy lifestyle.

According to EEANM, children spend more time indoors than ever before. However, research and literature indicate being in nature is important for all children, especially for children raised in highly industrialized urban environments. Environmental education increases student focus and reduces symptoms of attention deficit disorder (ADD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The effects of “nature deficit disorder,” which occurs when children are disconnected from nature and from exploring their community outdoors, are reflected in increasing child obesity rates and declining academic scores.

Related Bills:

HJM 3aa *Environmental Education Week* (Identical)