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LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS
53rd Legislature, 1st Session, 2017

Bill Number	<u>SB170</u>	Sponsor	<u>Senator Stewart</u>
Tracking Number	<u>.205414.1</u>	Committee Referrals	<u>SEC/SFC</u>
Short Title	<u>Increase School Student Walking Distance</u>		
Analyst	<u>Herz</u>	Original Date	<u>2/1/17</u>
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BILL SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

Senate Bill 170 (SB170) amends public school transportation statute to increase maximum student walking distances to school for FY17 and FY18, allowing school districts to decrease transportation costs to address district solvency.

The bill contains an emergency clause.

FISCAL IMPACT

SB170 does not appropriate funds. Overall, it is likely that this bill would save school districts money, but accurate estimates cannot be developed given the lack of detailed data on school bus ridership in the state. Urban districts would likely realize more cost savings than rural districts since rural students more frequently reside outside of the distances detailed in the bill.

SB170 could affect school districts' future transportation funding allocations from the state. Annually, the state allocates about \$100 million to school districts to provide transportation. Each school district's portion of the state funding is calculated using a formula determined by the prior year's student ridership and bus mileage. While school districts would likely see a cost savings in FY17 and FY18 due to transporting fewer students, a school district's state transportation allocations in FY19 could be reduced due to decreases in student ridership and bus mileage in FY18.

SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

Currently, school districts must maintain bus routes for students over a certain distance from school, depending on grade level:

- over one mile for kindergarten through sixth graders;
- over one and one-half miles for seventh through ninth graders; and
- over two miles for tenth through 12th graders.

However, school districts must provide student transportation no matter the student's distance from school if the local school board determines that hazardous walking conditions exist in the student's geographic area. Additionally, three- and four-year-olds categorized as developmentally disabled may be transported no matter their distance from school. SB170 increases the maximum distance for each age group by one-half mile, while still excluding students in areas with hazardous walking conditions and developmentally disabled students from the requirement.

It is hard to estimate this bill's effect on student safety in the state. Walking safety levels vary widely depending on location, level of traffic, presence of sidewalks, and many other environmental factors. As such, safety would be more dependent on a student's setting as opposed to distance. Few guidelines for maximum student walking distance to school exist, but many other states set statutory walking distance limits similar to New Mexico's current levels.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

Because SB170 contains an emergency clause, the bill would require school districts to alter bus routes in the middle of the school year. School district administrators set bus routes at the beginning of the year. Making required changes to bus routes and notifying affected students and parents could prove challenging for district administrators, especially in large school districts with many bus routes.

ALTERNATIVES

The sponsor could eliminate the emergency clause in the bill, causing the bill to take effect at the beginning of FY18 and allowing school districts to prepare for the changes to bus routes and student ridership.

RELATED BILLS

Related to SB66, School Fund Transportation Distribution
Related to HB178/aHTPWC, School Funds for Bus Passes for Students

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- LESC Files

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