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LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS
53rd Legislature, 2nd Session, 2018

Bill Number	<u>HB30</u>	Sponsor	<u>Rehm</u>
Tracking Number	<u>.209002.2</u>	Committee Referrals	<u>HAFC/HEC</u>
Short Title	<u>Soft Skills Education Programs</u>		
Analyst	<u>Rogne</u>	Original Date	<u>1/23/18</u>
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FOR THE ECONOMIC AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

BILL SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

House Bill 30 (HB30) appropriates \$250 thousand to the Public Education Department (PED) for the development and implementation of soft skills education programs for high school students.

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill appropriates \$250 thousand from the general fund to PED for expenditure in FY19. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of FY19 shall revert to the general fund.

SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

Soft skills, which are sometimes called social and emotional learning, are defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) as “the skills, attitudes, behavior, and knowledge that help youth and adults identify and regulate emotions, develop positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.” Anthony Carnevale, director of Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, defines soft skills as critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and communication. Examples include showing up on time, being prepared and organized, and demonstrating self-motivation and flexibility.

Soft skills are essential for positive life outcomes. Soft skills have an important role in education and the workplace; one study reported that 75 percent of long-term job success depends on soft skills. According to SEL Solutions at American Institutes for Research, soft skills increase students’ capacity to learn and build social-emotional skills, positive attitudes, prosocial behaviors, and academic achievement. Several agencies, such as the National Research Council, the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, and the University of Chicago Consortium have identified social and emotional competencies that contribute to college, career, and civic readiness.

Soft skills may look different in different context and cultures, which is important to note in a majority minority state.

Challenges with Measuring Soft Skills. The new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requirement that state accountability systems must include at least one nonacademic measure is increasing attention on soft skills. However, it is important to note that not one state choose to include soft skills for their nonacademic measure. According to research, it is difficult to determine if these personality attributes can be reliably measured. In addition, research is currently unclear if soft skills are inherent or can be taught, and if so, to what extent. For example, Grover Whitehurst's *Hard Thinking on Soft Skills* laments the lack of consensus of research on soft skills in education, beginning with the lack of consensus on essential soft skills for student success as well as their basic definitions. For this reason, it is important not to include direct measures of soft skills in accountability systems, as researchers caution that existing measures of soft skills are not sophisticated enough to be used for high-stakes purposes.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATION

The bill requires administrative services related to the development and monitoring of the program. PED anticipates that oversight of the soft skills education program would require one-half FTE.

TECHNICAL ISSUES

HB30 does not define soft skills. It may be appropriate to indicate if the appropriation is for a pilot project or a statewide implementation.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

According to PED, the department already supports soft skills initiatives and the allocation of funds to an existing but limited program might be more effective instead of developing a new program.

PED supports Jobs for Americas Graduates (JAG) through an appropriation of federal funds received through the Carl D. Perkins Career Technical Education Act. JAG is a national program that develops soft skills for high-need high school students.

Career Technical Education (CTE) and Career Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) are also supported through an appropriation of federal funds received through the Carl D. Perkins Career Technical Education Act. CTE and CTSOs provide hands-on learning that is aligned to workforce needs. Both CTE and CTSOs operate with active business advisory boards that strive to imbed soft skills into the high school curriculum. Allocating funding specifically to work-based education programs as part of CTE is another way to support the development of soft skills in high school, and would offer additional benefits as CTE students learn technical skills that are applicable to a career or trade.

According to PED, the appropriation is not part of the PED request nor is it included in the executive recommendation.

ALTERNATIVES

An alternative to HB30 would be a pilot soft skills program.

CTE and internship opportunities could be expanded so students could learn soft skills in context.

According to PED, nonprofit providers in the community, such as Junior Achievement and Mission Graduate, also strive to develop soft skills. These programs might be appropriate partners for a statewide soft skills program.

PED currently oversees the dual credit instructional materials appropriation. The appropriation of funds for specific college courses to develop soft skills, delivered through dual credit, is another opportunity to support the development of soft skills without developing a new program.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Would the soft skills education be a stand-alone class or integrated into existing courses (for example, CTE) or into leadership/extracurricular activities?

Would the soft skills education program be elective courses?

Given that soft skills are best taught in context, would CTE or internships be expanded as well?

What is the cost of implementing a soft skills program statewide?

How would soft skills training be evaluated? Existing PED performance goals that might be relevant to this bill include CTE measures of work-based learning experiences and CTSO participation. WorkKeys is a nationally recognized assessment that evaluates applied skills and is provided at no cost by the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- LESC Files
- Higher Education Department
- Public Education Department
- Regional Educational Cooperative #6

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