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LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS
54th Legislature, 2nd Session, 2020

Bill Number	<u>HB63</u>	Sponsor	<u>Stapleton/Trujillo, L./Garratt</u>
Tracking Number	<u>.216296.1</u>	Committee Referrals	<u>HEC/HAFC</u>
Short Title	<u>Soft Skill Education Funding</u>		
Analyst	<u>Kennedy</u>	Original Date	<u>1/28/2020</u>
		Last Updated	<u>2/7/2020</u>

BILL SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

House Bill 63 (HB63) would appropriate \$4 million from the general fund to the board of regents of the University of New Mexico (UNM) for the student affairs department to develop an online learning program to teach soft skills to middle and high school students. The platform must be comprehensive, statewide, standards-based, and prepare students for college, career, and workplace success.

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill appropriates \$4 million from the general fund to the board of regents of UNM for expenditure in FY21. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of FY21 shall revert to the general fund.

The House Appropriations and Finance Committee Substitute for House Bills 2 and 3 includes a \$500 thousand appropriation to the University of New Mexico (UNM) for a research and public service project for career soft skills and technical education.

SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

Soft skills, skills that enable individuals to work effectively with others and be professionally successful, are valuable for all students and a critical component of college and career readiness programs. Research shows college and career pathways, such as career and technical education (CTE), have positive effects on graduation, academic performance, acquisition of industry-recognized credentials, and other student outcomes. Stakeholders in New Mexico report difficulty finding qualified local candidates to fill high-demand positions. Effective college and career readiness programs that reflect local workforce needs can help address this gap and keep New Mexico students in the state.

A survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers found that employers consider recent college graduates to be lacking in professionalism, communication skills, career

management, and other workplace competencies. Soft skills training can help students develop good professional habits before they enter the workforce. Other states have required public schools to include soft skills training in their curriculum, in some cases through the adoption of an online program.

In FY19, the Public Education Department (PED) received a \$2 million appropriation to develop a soft skills learning program but made several awards during the 2019-2020 school year that were inconsistent with legislative intent. The FY19 appropriation was intended to pilot a CTE program, including an online learning system to teach soft skills for high school students. However, given a lack of specificity in the General Appropriations Act language, PED awarded those funds alongside funds from another \$3 million appropriation made to PED to administer the CTE pilot project outlined in Laws 2019, Chapter 61.

Analysis from UNM states the appropriation included in HB63 would allow the program to serve nearly 13 thousand students. UNM's analysis further notes staff would be required to purchase an online soft skills learning program and provide professional development to support implementation of the program. UNM staff estimate at least one FTE would be required for effective implementation.

Analysis from the Higher Education Department (HED) notes several workforce and education stakeholders already offer soft skills training and some have invested in online systems that include soft skills training. HED's analysis recommends UNM share strategies with stakeholders to avoid duplicating services that may already be available to public schools without cost.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

HB63 would require the student affairs division of UNM to develop a new or identify an existing online soft skills learning program that satisfies legislative intent. HB63 establishes no reporting requirements or requirements to make school districts and charter schools aware of the platform. Assuming the student affairs division makes the program available to New Mexico public school students, the onus would be on school districts to voluntarily make use of the program.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

The U.S. Department of Education and national CTE organizations recommend public schools provide students the opportunity to cultivate soft skills through work-based learning experiences, such as apprenticeships and internships. Online platforms are not the best means of developing soft skills, as real world experience is more valuable. The Legislature may want to consider amending the CTE pilot program statute (Sections 22-1-12 and 22-1-13 NMSA 1978) to include work-based learning and renew funding for the pilot program.

Definitions of soft skills vary by institution. In 2017, PED adopted standards for soft skills developed by national CTE associations (6.29.3 NMAC). It is unclear if UNM would be bound to this definition. The "career ready practices," or soft skills, identified by New Mexico include:

1. Acting as a responsible and contributing citizen and employee;
2. Applying appropriate academic and technical skills;
3. Attending to personal health and financial well-being;
4. Communicating clearly, effectively, and with reason;
5. Considering the environmental, social, and economic impacts of decisions;
6. Demonstrating creativity and innovation;

7. Employing valid and reliable research strategies;
8. Utilizing critical thinking to make sense of problems and persevere in solving them;
9. Modeling integrity, ethical leadership, and effective management;
10. Planning an education and career path aligned to personal goals;
11. Using technology to enhance productivity; and
12. Working productively in teams while using cultural and global competence.

UNM does not have a “student affairs department,” but rather a division of student affairs that encompasses several departments.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- LESC Files
- Higher Education Department (HED)
- University of New Mexico (UNM)

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