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

Bill Number	<u>SB7</u>	Sponsor	<u>Ramos/Dow</u>
Tracking Number	<u>.216138.1</u>	Committee Referrals	<u>SEC/SFC</u>
Short Title	<u>Center of Excellence at WNMU</u>		
Analyst	<u>Andrews</u>	Original Date	<u>1/24/2020</u>
		Last Updated	<u>2/19/2020</u>

BILL SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

Senate Bill 7 (SB7) would make an appropriation from the general fund to the board of regents of Western New Mexico University (WNMU) to provide funding for an early childhood education center of excellence program.

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill appropriates \$1 million from the general fund to the board of regents at WNMU for expenditure in FY21. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of FY21 shall revert to the general fund.

SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

SB7 is targeted to expand the existing structure of the early childhood program at WNMU as the center of excellence program for early childhood education to build capacity, as well as support an increased demand in the early childhood development work force. The expansion will include educator preparation, behavioral specialists, developmental psychologists, family counselors, pediatric nurses, and other personnel requiring licensed certifications. According to analysis from the Public Education Department (PED), the center of excellence at WNMU would focus on developing both the early childhood educator workforce, as well as the learning sciences and best practices of early childhood development. Early childhood education programs at WNMU fall under the departmental oversight of the school of education, and include a five-star nationally accredited child development center and state prekindergarten program on campus.

WNMU developed a five-year plan for expanding their early childhood development center and teacher preparation program. According to WNMU, this proposal includes the following expenditures: \$700 thousand for salaries and benefits; \$285 thousand for facilities improvements and expansion; \$10 thousand for professional development, training, and support for birth through kindergarten classroom teachers; and \$5,000 for software, technology, and research resources.

According to WNMU’s analysis, designating the WNMU’s early childhood programs as being center of excellence in early childhood education will allow the university to:

- Expand services provided by the family counseling center supported by the early childhood programs;
- Provide targeted training and education for specializations such as trauma-informed practices, infant mental health, and challenging behaviors; and
- Support an increased demand in the early childhood development workforce, including preparation for teachers, inclusion specialists, developmental specialists, family counselors, play therapists, pediatric nurses, and other qualified personnel and specialists requiring licensed certifications.

Early Childhood Issues. High-quality early childhood education is a cornerstone to closing the achievement gap and ensuring all children are ready for kindergarten. The National Conference of State Legislatures international study of world-class educational systems, *No Time to Lose*, identified four common elements for educational success, the first of which is students come to school ready to learn, with extra support given to struggling students so all students have the opportunity to achieve high standards. The early childhood years provide the foundation for literacy skills and are critical for brain development. When children do not have adequate opportunities to create these connections – or experience adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) – their future educational achievement and life outcomes can be harmed. According to Child Trends, a nonpartisan research center, 18 percent of children in New Mexico experienced three or more ACEs, outpacing the national average of 11 percent. However, research indicates some educational supports, such as trauma-informed instruction and secure attachment relationships, can help ameliorate the negative effects of ACEs. A highly-qualified educator can mitigate negative experiences and provide resources to families. The Legislature has prioritized early childhood education funding even through two economic downturns because some early childhood interventions have proven successful at narrowing the achievement gap between low-income students and their more affluent peers.

New Mexico has a limited educator workforce qualified in early childhood. In FY20, the Early Childhood Education and Care Department is working with the Children, Youth, and Families Department, PED, and the Human Services Department to develop uniform procedures for early childhood programs and their workforce. HB198 could help address New Mexico’s teacher shortage and need for expertise in early childhood education.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

Although WNMU requested funding for an early childhood center of excellence through the research and public service project process, HED did not recommend funding the institute. The project was not funded in either the Legislative Finance Committee’s or executive budget proposal. The project was not funded in the Senate Finance Committee Amendment to the House and Appropriations Finance Committee Substitute for House Bills 2 and 3.

RELATED BILLS

Duplicates HB198, WNMU Early Childhood Ed Program.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- LESC Files
- Public Education Department (PED)
- Western New Mexico University (WNMU)