



LFC Requester: Liu

**PUBLIC EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
BILL ANALYSIS
2025 REGULAR SESSION**

SECTION I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Check all that apply:

Original Amendment
Correction Substitute

Date Prepared: 01/24 /25

Bill No: SB60

Agency Name and Code: PED - 924

Sponsor: Padilla

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HIGH SCHOOL WATER

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Title: PROJECT

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SECTION II: FISCAL IMPACT

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

APPROPRIATION (dollars in thousands)

Appropriation		Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
FY26	FY27		
1,2500	None	N/A	GFA

REVENUE (dollars in thousands)

Estimated Revenue			Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
FY26	FY27	FY28		
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	NFA

ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL OPERATING BUDGET IMPACT (dollars in thousands)

	FY26	FY27	FY28	3 Year Total Cost	Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
Total	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	NFA

Duplicates/Relates to Appropriation in the [General Appropriation Act](#): None.

SECTION III: NARRATIVE

BILL SUMMARY

Synopsis: Senate Bill 60 (SB60) would create a six-year pilot project, the "High School Water Management and Conservation Project," to study the feasibility of offering practical environmental education to high school students and the outcomes from offering such education. The duties charged to PED under the project include the development of academic content and performance standards and a model course for the high school curriculum, selection of five diverse school districts to pilot the project, awarding of financial assistance grants to participating school districts, relevant and data collection. The bill would authorize PED to work with the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED), as well as state postsecondary educational institutions and municipalities to identify state and local water management and conservation issues to be incorporated into the implementation of the project.

The bill does not provide an effective date. Laws go into effect 90 days after the adjournment of the Legislature enacting them, unless a later date is specified. If enacted, this bill would become effective June 20, 2025.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

The bill appropriates \$1.25 million from the General Fund is allocated to the Public Education Department (PED) for expenditure in fiscal years 2026 through 2031 to administer the high school water management and conservation project. Any unexpended or unencumbered funds remaining at the end of fiscal year 2031 will revert to the general fund.

In a similarly structured project, the OpenSciEd program, PED expended approximately \$3.5 million to field test materials and provide data through a national field test program. The funding for the project is not solely for PED's administrative and operational costs in creating and administering the project, but also for financial assistant grants to participating school districts. While the pilot project is limited in scope and duration, the \$1.25 million allocated will likely fall short of covering the six-year period, and PED may require additional funding to fully implement the program as mandated in SB60. For example, creating the content and standards alone would cost approximately \$600,000.

As noted, while the bill allocates funding to PED for use in creating and administering the funding, and for distribution to participating school districts in the form of assistance grants, there is no allocation to NMED, any of the postsecondary educational institutions, or the municipalities with which PED is authorized to collaborate. The participation and expertise of NMED, at the least, would be essential to the development of an efficient and effective program and curriculum. It should further be noted that NMED, [their analysis of SB60, indicated that they would require funding for an additional FTE, at a total cost of \\$140 thousand, per year, in order to adequately support PED in the creation and execution of this pilot.](#)

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

The study of water resource management and conservation is of importance to a state like New Mexico, whose arid climate makes water conservation an important community concern. However, the duties assigned to the department in the bill are significant and, given the effective

date and requirement to begin expenditure of allocated funds in FY26, rather immediate. While the NM STEM-Ready! Science Standards include water resource education, the bill's directive to "develop content and performance standards" would at least require their update, and possibly the development of additional science standards for the required model curriculum. Those standards must include a focus on experiential and practical learning that would likely necessitate fieldwork by students and faculty that the current funding proposal may not adequately address. PED currently also oversees programming for outdoor education; it is uncertain if current or currently proposed PED funding for outdoor learning would cover costs associated with this program, while maintaining those other programs that funding currently supports.

The high school curriculum required by the bill must be offered as a sequence of multidisciplinary courses that combines pedagogical approaches, as well as meet the requirements for at least two units required for graduation. This requirement is unlikely to be met by current courses, necessitating the development of new and additional course offerings.

The selection of at least five school districts from different regions of the state and from rural communities, small cities, and large cities would require the development of selection criteria, and possibly a competitive application process. It should be noted while it is within PED's authority under SB60 to include historically defined Indian-impacted school districts in those selected for the project, the bill does not authorize collaboration or consultation with any of the state's tribal entities in the identification of statewide and local water resource management and conservation issues, and their voices would be of value in the administration of this project.

PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

None.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

PED would be required to:

1. develop academic content and performance standards and a model curriculum for a high school elective course in water management and conservation that:
 - a. focuses on practical and experiential learning;
 - b. is offered as a sequence of courses;
 - c. is multidisciplinary and combines pedagogical approaches; and
 - d. meets the requirements of two or more units required for graduation;
2. select the diverse school districts across various regions of the state, including rural and urban areas, to participate in the project.
3. award financial assistance grants to participating school districts to be expended for personnel, supplies and equipment and other expenses reasonably related to the cost of providing the water management and conservation coursework; and
4. collect data regarding:
 - a. student participation in the water management and conservation courses offered;
 - b. students' performances in the courses taken; and
 - c. students' post-graduation plans.
5. Provide annual reports to the Legislative Education Study Committee by December 31 of each year of the project and a final report to that committee by June 30, 2031.

Creating the content standards would take at least 12 months. Implementing the provisions of the

bill may require an additional FTE, estimated at \$110,000 per year for at least the life of the pilot project, and for longer, if the project is permanently adopted by the Legislature.

CONFLICT, DUPLICATION, COMPANIONSHIP, RELATIONSHIP

None.

TECHNICAL ISSUES

None.

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

None.

ALTERNATIVES

None.

WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ENACTING THIS BILL

None.

AMENDMENTS

The sponsors of the bill may want to consider amending the pilot project so that it also fits within existing frameworks for a career-technical education (CTE) pathway, given recent emphasis on expanding postsecondary options for high school students and graduates beyond college, to include more of a focus on CTE.