LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS
57th Legislature, 1st Session, 2025

Bill Number   HB195/aHEC   **Sponsor**   Garratt

Tracking Number   .229319.2   **Committee Referrals**   HEC/HAFC

Short Title   School Nurse Salary Tiers & Minimums

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BILL SUMMARY

Synopsis of HEC Amendment

The House and Education Committee Amendment to HB195 (HB195/aHEC) adds language which makes an appropriation of $250 thousand from the general fund to the Public Education Department (PED) for expenditure in fiscal year 2026 (FY26) to increase school nurse minimum nurse salaries.

Synopsis of Original Bill

House Bill 195 (HB195) would create program units for level 2 and level 3 school nurses certified by the National Board for Certification of School Nurses (NBCSN). While three levels of licensure for school nurses exist in Public Education Department (PED) administrative rule, HB195 would codify a three-tier licensure system for nurses in state law, establish new criteria for licensure advancement, and tie minimum nurse salaries at each licensure tier to minimum teacher salaries.

The number of program units would be calculated by multiplying th e number of eligible school nurses by 1.5.

PED approval of the units would be contingent on verification by local education agencies (LEAs) that all employed nationally certified school nurses (NCSNs) and are receiving a one-time salary differential equal to or greater than the amount generated by the units multiplied by the program unit value.

FISCAL IMPACT

HB195/aHEC appropriates $250 thousand from the general fund to PED for expenditure in FY26 to increase school nurse minimum nurse salaries as proposed in the bill. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of FY26 shall revert to the general fund.

HB195/aHEC proposes establishing additional program units for school nurses who are nationally certified school nurses. The program multiplier would be 1.5, the same multiplier currently legislated for school personnel who are National Board Certified teachers.

According to the National Board for Certification of School Nurses (NBCSN), there are presently 66 individuals in New Mexico certified by NBCSN. It's uncertain whether they are all presently working in public schools. However, assuming they are, at the FY25 unit value of $6,553.75, LESC analysis estimates the annual cost of implementing the additional program units proposed in HB195/aHEC would be about $650 thousand (1.5 × $6,553.75 × 66). However, if this differential motivated additional school nurses to seek NBCSN certification, the cost would increase. Likewise, the actual cost would vary based on the unit value of the fiscal year of implementation.

Table 1: Estimated Cost of Implementing NCSN Salary Differential

	FY25 Unit Value	Salary Differential Multiplier	Estimated Stipend Amount	Estimated FTE	Estimated Cost
NCSN Salary Differential	$6,554	1.5	$9,831	66	$648,846

Source: NBCSN Data and LESC Files

HB195/aHEC would also tie minimum salaries for school nurses at each proposed license level to those of the state's three tiers of teacher licensure. State law establishes the following minimum annual salaries for teachers: $50 thousand for level 1 teachers, $60 thousand for level 2 teachers, and $70 thousand for level three teachers.

Because the newly proposed school nurse licensure levels are based on a combination of education, years of experience, and demonstration of competency, estimating the cost of tying minimum school nurse salaries to minimum teacher salaries is challenging. PED does not currently report these data. Based on FY23 school district and charter school average salary data from PED, adjusted for across-the-board school personnel salary increases appropriated by the Legislature for FY24 and FY25, an estimated 90 percent of school nurses in FY25 were paid an annual salary above $70 thousand (the minimum salary for a level 3 teacher). Implementation of HB195/aHEC would not result in salary increases for these school nurses.

For a low-cost estimate, if only school nurses making below $50 thousand would need to be brought up to the level 1 teacher minimum of $50 thousand, the estimated cost to LEAs of implementing HB195/aHEC would be about $467 thousand, including benefits. Alternatively, for a high-cost estimate, if all school nurses making below $70 thousand were eligible for a level 3 school nurse license, implementation of HB195/aHEC could cost LEAs as much as $1.3 million, including benefits. It is, however, unlikely all these school nurses would qualify for a level 3 license.

Table 2: Cost Estimates for Establishing School Nurse Salary Minimums

	Threshold	Estimated FTE Affected	Estimated Cost
Low Estimate	Bringing all school nurse salaries up to at least $50 thousand	25	$467 thousand
High Estimate	Bringing all school nurse salaries up to at least $70 thousand	44	$1.3 million

Source: FY23 PED data and LESC Files

Tying minimum salaries for the proposed school nurse licenses to minimum teacher salaries could cost school districts between $467 thousand and $1.3 million to implement. If school districts employ additional school nurses through private entities, not captured in PED data, costs could be

higher. It should be noted these estimations are based on average school district and charter school salaries for school nurses, rather than on individual salaries, which could mask disparities in school nurse compensation among individuals.

Neither the LESC, Legislative Finance Committee (LFC), or executive recommendations for public school support for FY26 include appropriations for NCSN salary differentials or establishing minimum school nurse salaries.

SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

School Nurse Compensation. Neither New Mexico state law nor PED administrative rule establish salary requirements for school nurses. School nurse compensation is determined by LEAs.

According to PED data, New Mexico public schools employed a total of 531 school nurses in FY23. Excluding likely data input errors (district averages below $20 thousand and above $123 thousand for one FTE), the statewide median annual salary was $74.2 thousand in FY23. However, average school nurse salaries varied substantially across school districts and charter schools.

Table 3: Average School Nurse Salaries in School Districts and Charters Schools by Count
FY23

Average Salary Range	Number of School Districts	Number of Charter Schools	School Nurse FTE
Below $55 thousand	10	4	31
$55 thousand to $65 thousand	6	2	28
$65 thousand to $75 thousand	13	1	221
Over $75 thousand	40	13	243

Source: PED

These data do not include all school districts or charter schools. In some cases, this may be due to LEAs contracting with regional education cooperatives or private entities to hire school nurses. Thus, the total number of school nurses in the state may be higher.

School nurses may be compensated in part by federal funds, such as Medicaid dollars. According to PED data, about 42 percent of school nurse salaries were funded by federal funds in FY23.

Current School Nurse Licensure. New Mexico state law requires instructional support providers, including school nurses, to obtain licensure from PED, but tasks PED with providing a professional licensing framework in which licensees can advance in their careers through the demonstration of increased competencies and the undertaking of increased duties. State law also requires instructional support providers to hold a valid professional license or certificate issued by the respective licensing authority (Section 22-10A-17 NMSA 1978).

PED administrative rule enumerates three types of initial school nurse licenses, reflecting different levels of education and different professional responsibilities. These initial licenses include associate school nurse, professional school nurse, and supervisory school nurse. Initial licenses are three-year licenses.

PED administrative rule also includes pathways for licensees with each initial license type to advance up licensure tiers, based on years of experience. While both associate and professional school nurses can advance to a Level 2 license, only a supervisory school nurse can advance to a level 3 license. Level 2 and level 3 licenses are nine-year licenses.

Table 4: Current New Mexico School Nurse Licensure Requirements

Initial License Type	Education	Nursing License	Advancing From Level 1 to Level 2	Advancing From Level 2 to Level 3
Associate	Associate degree in nursing	Valid registered nurse license	Three school years of service on level 1 license	N/A
Professional	B.A. in nursing or health related field	Valid registered nurse license	Three school years of service on level 1 license	N/A
Supervisory	M.A. in nursing or health related field	Valid registered nurse license	Three school years of service on level 1 license	Three school years of service on level 2 license

Source: NMAC 6.63.2.6

Proposed School Nurse Licensure. HB195/aHEC would simplify the current school nurse licensure system by replacing the existing three initial license types and options for advancement with three licensure levels, mirroring the current teacher licensure system.

Beyond changing the licensure structure, other substantive changes HB195/aHEC would make to school nurse licensure include:

- Narrowing allowable associate and bachelor's degrees from nursing or health related fields to only nursing;

- Widening allowable post-baccalaureate degrees from those in nursing or health related fields to those in any field;

- Allowing applicants with no years of nursing experience, but who hold a post-baccalaureate degree or are certified by NBCSN, to apply for a level 3 school nurse license;

- Providing opportunities for licensure advancement based on a combination of education and demonstration of competency, rather than solely on years of experience;

- Requiring level 1 school nurses to complete a formal mentoring program; and

- Requiring all school nurses to demonstrate competency annually.

If passed, registered nurses with fewer than three years of nursing experience, and holding an associate or bachelor's degree in nursing, would be eligible for a level 1 provisional school nurse license. Over the course of this three-year, nonrenewable license, school nurses would be required to complete a formal mentorship program and demonstrate satisfactory progress and competence annually.

A registered nurse with an associate or bachelor's degree in nursing would be eligible to apply for a level 2 school nurse licensure if they:

a) Hold a level one license or have at least three years of registered nurse experience; and
b) Demonstrate essential competencies as required by the department.

A registered nurse would be eligible to apply for a level 3 school nurse license if they:
a) Hold a post-baccalaureate degree or are certified by NBCSN; or

b) Have worked on a level 2 school nurse license for a least three years; and
c) Demonstrate nursing leadership competencies as required by the department.

The sponsor may wish to specify that post-baccalaureate degrees included in eligibility for a level 3 license must be issued by an accredited educational institution.

HB195/aHEC specified demonstrations of competency for licensure purposes must be verified by the local superintendent through a highly objective uniform statewide standard of evaluation for school nurses, however, it's unclear whether superintendents or a different staff member would be responsible for evaluating competency.

Table 5: HB195/aHEC Proposed School Nurse Licensure Levels and Requirements

	Education	Nursing License	Experience	License Length	Competency
Level 1	Associate or B.A. degree in nursing	Valid registered nurse license	Fewer than three years nursing experience	Three-years, Nonrenewable	Enrollment in mentoring program and annual intensive performance evaluations
Level 2	Associate or B.A. degree in nursing	Valid registered nurse license	Has a level 1 license or at least three years of registered nursing experience	Nine years, renewable	Demonstrate department-required competency
Level 3	Holds a post-baccalaureate degree or is certified by NBCSN	Valid registered nurse license	Has been a level 2 school nurse for at least three years or meets education requirement	Nine years, renewable	Demonstrates nursing leadership competency

Note: Level 1 licenses may only be granted to applicants of at least 18 years of age. Level 1 licenses may only be renewed in "exigent circumstances defined by rule."

Source: LESC Files

Reciprocity. PED administrative rule currently makes the following provisions for school nurse licensure reciprocity:

- Required degrees may be issued from a regionally accredited college or university or from an institution accredited by the national league of nursing; and

- Required registered nurse licenses may be issued by the New Mexico board of or from another state based on current compact state license according to New Mexico nursing board rule.

HB195/aHEC would not establish reciprocity requirements for school nurse licenses. In the proposed requirements for level 2 school nurse licensure, HB195/aHEC allows for reciprocity as provided by PED administrative rule. Reciprocity is not explicitly referenced in the proposed licensure requirements for level 1 or level 3 school nurse licenses. However, there is no language in the bill prohibiting PED from establishing rules to guide reciprocity for these licenses.

Evaluation and Termination. HB195/aHEC would require level 1 school nurses to be evaluated annually by a level 3 school nurse. Level 1 school nurses who fail to demonstrate satisfactory progress and competency annually may be terminated, as provided in Section 22-10A-24 NMSA 1978.

Level 2 and level 3 school nurses would also be evaluated annually, and all who fail to demonstrate competency in a given year would be required to participate in professional development and mentorship during the following school year. If by the end of that school year the school nurse

failed to demonstrate competency, the school district would be permitted not to contract with that school nurse.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

PED would be required to promulgate administrative rule to guide school nurse mentorship, evaluation, licensure requirements, and competencies.

School districts would be required to provide mentorship for all level 1 school nurses. School districts would be required to annually evaluate school nurses and to provide professional development and mentorship when school nurses do not demonstrate essential competencies.

School districts would be required to report the number of nationally certified school nurses employed and receiving a salary differential. PED would be required to verify this information.

TECHNICAL ISSUES

The sponsor may wish to specify which board(s) of nursing PED would accept registered nurse licenses from. For example, PED administrative rule specifies the registered nurse license must be issued by the New Mexico board of nursing or any successor licensing board for nurses or from another state based on current compact state license.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

National Board for Certification of School Nurses (NBCSN). NBCSN administers the nationally certified school nurse credential. To become a nationally certified school nurse, a registered nurse must demonstrate a high level of education, clinical experience, and knowledge. To be eligible, an applicant must:
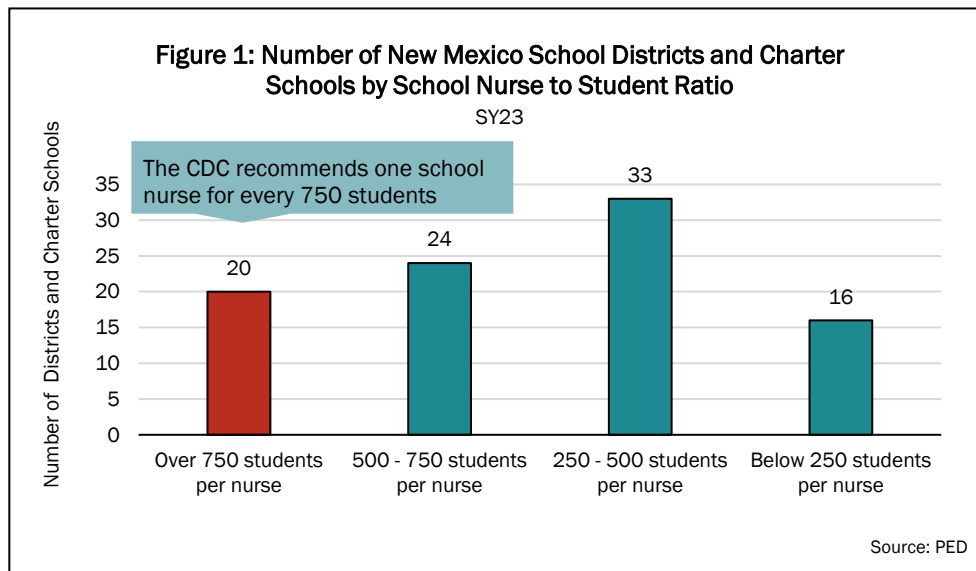
- Be a current registered nurse in the United States;
- Hold a bachelor's degree or higher in nursing from an accredited higher education institution;
- Hold a master's degree in education with a concentration in school nursing or school health services from an NBCSN approved institution;
- Document at least one thousand hours of practice as a school nurse; and
- Pass the NBCSN exam.

According to NBCSN, there are currently 66 nationally certified school nurses in New Mexico, up from 54 nationally certified school nurses in 2022.

Supply and Demand of School Nurses. According to the SY24 New Mexico Annual School Health Services Report, funded by the New Mexico Department of Health, at least 27 percent of school districts in New Mexico do not have a school nurse and at least one in three school districts have only one or a part-time school nurse.

According to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the recommended ratio for school nurses is at least one nurse for every 750 students. LESC staff analysis of FY23 PED school personnel and school enrollment data found 20 school districts and charter schools

with nurse case load above this recommended amount. 11 school districts reported having no school nurse.

Figure 1: Number of New Mexico School Districts and Charter Schools by School Nurse to Student Ratio
SY23

The CDC recommends one school nurse for every 750 students

Source: PED

[According](#) to the New Mexico Workforce Solutions Department (WSD), the worst labor shortage in the state is healthcare workers, with a strong need for nurses. The New Mexico Health Care Workforce Committee 2024 Annual [Report](#), produced by the University of New Mexico, found an average of two thousand online job postings for registered nurses per month since 2012. In the last half of 2023, there was an average of 6,000 job postings. According to the same report, all New Mexican counties are below the recommended benchmark for registered nurse and clinical nurse specialists, with the exception of Bernalillo County, which is above the benchmark.

Figure 2: Need for Registered Nurses and Clinical Nurse Specialists by New Mexico County
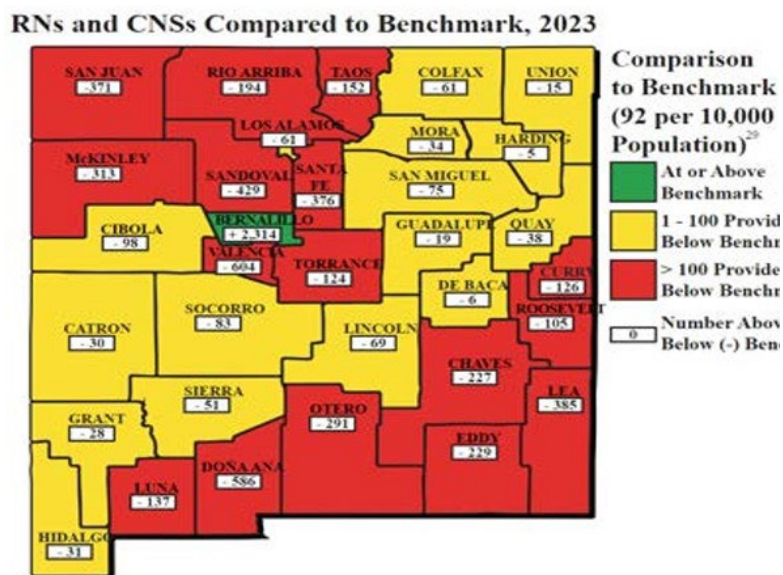
New Mexico higher education institutions [reported](#) graduating 1,142 nurses in 2023, a 5.5 percent decrease from the prior year.

According to the New Mexico Health Care Workforce Committee 2024 Annual [Report](), there were 18 thousand registered nurses working in New Mexico in 2023, with over half located in Albuquerque. The median annual wage for registered nurses in 2023 was $84 thousand, though median annual salaries varied by region.

Table 6: FY23 New Mexico Registered Nurses Employed and Median Wages

		Employed	Annual Median Wage
Metropolitan Area	Albuquerque	18,030	$83,970
	Farmington	10,070	$83,380
	Las Cruces	800	$83,080
	Santa Fe	1,420	$78,420
Workforce Region	Central	10,070	$83,380
	Eastern	1,830	$82,110
	Northern	2,790	$86,050
	Southwestern	2,300	$86,540

Source: Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics and Projections Program

These median salaries are somewhat higher than the FY23 median school nurse salary in New Mexico of $74.2 thousand, which could deter registered nurses from taking positions in schools.

[According]() to the National Association of School Nurses, access to a school nurse, all-day, everyday can improve students' health, safety, and educational achievement. School nurses collaborate with school health services teams to improve the health and well-being of students, reduce absenteeism, and support student academic achievement. School health services teams are critical components of schools. School health services teams:

- Allow students with chronic health conditions to safely attend school;
- Perform routing health and behavior screenings;
- Provide emergency response care; and
- Help schools implement the New Mexico Safe Schools Plan.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

How would this impact other licensed instructional providers for whom there are no state established minimum salaries, for example, licensed practical nurses?

How would this impact school counselors whose level 3 licenses are tied to level 3 minimum teaching salaries, although level 1 and level 2 licenses are not?

Is there a similar level of rigor in proposed requirements for a level 3 school nurse license as compared with a level 3 teaching license?

RELATED BILLS

Relates to House Bill 156, Increase Instructional Salaries, which would increase teacher minimum salaries by $5 thousand at each licensure tier, to $55 thousand for a level 1 teacher, $65 thousand for a level 2 teacher, and $75 thousand for a level 3 teacher.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION
- LESC Files
- New Mexico Board of Nursing (NMBON)
- New Mexico Department of Health (DOH)

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