FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

SPONSOR Brandt/Gurrola **LAST UPDATED** **ORIGINAL DATE** 1/30/25

SHORT TITLE Math Lab Pilot Project **BILL NUMBER** Senate Bill 116

ANALYST Liu

APPROPRIATION*
(dollars in thousands)

FY25	FY26	Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
	$3,000.0	Recurring	General Fund

Parentheses ( ) indicate expenditure decreases.
*Amounts reflect most recent analysis of this legislation.

Relates to Senate Bill 107
Relates to appropriation in the General Appropriation Act

Sources of Information
LFC Files

Agency Analysis Received From
Regional Education Cooperatives (REC)

Agency Analysis was Solicited but Not Received From
Public Education Department (PED)

Because of the short timeframe between the introduction of this bill and its first hearing, LFC has yet to receive analysis from some state, education, or judicial agencies. This analysis could be updated if that analysis is received.

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Senate Bill 116

Senate Bill 116 (SB116) appropriates $3 million from the general fund to the Public Education Department (PED) for a 3-year math lab pilot program that provides students with support and practice in mathematics using hands-on activities and project-based learning. The bill requires PED to provide technical assistance and study outcomes of the pilot program for districts and charters that apply. The bill further requires PED to report findings and recommendations to the governor and LESC.

The effective date of this bill is July 1, 2025.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

The appropriation of $3 million contained in this bill is a recurring expense to the general fund. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of FY28 shall revert to the general fund. Although the bill does not specify future appropriations, establishing a new grant program could create an expectation the program will continue in future fiscal years; therefore, this cost is assumed to be recurring. The bill further authorizes spending on staffing, materials, technology, training, and reporting related to the math lab pilot program, which are recurring operational expenses. The bill requires each annual grant award to be a minimum of $100 thousand for each participating public school, effectively limiting participation to at most 10 schools each year.

The executive, LESC, and LFC budget recommendations for FY26 all include nonrecurring appropriations for a 3-year math initiative through PED, with respective proposals of $15 million, $15.6 million, and $38.4 million. The LESC recommendation further includes a recurring appropriation of $6 million to PED for a science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) initiative. The $3 million appropriation in this bill would be in addition to the appropriations from each recommendation.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

Provisions of this bill would create a 3-year math pilot program to improve K-6 student math performance through project-based learning (PBL) and hands-on activities. Districts or charters may apply to PED for the pilot and selected participants must:

1. Staff the math lab with at least one teacher who is knowledgeable about the academic content and performance standards for elementary mathematics,
2. Focus on small group instruction,
3. Focus on interactive and collaborative learning activities aligned with grade-specific math content and standards, and
4. Provide professional development for math lab teachers.

PBL is a teaching and learning method (generally considered an alternative to traditional teacher-led instruction) that typically provides students with complex tasks, which result in the creation of a new product or presentation of new ideas. PBL often incorporates hands-on activities and real-world scenarios and asks students to conduct their own investigations and study of the issue or task before responding to the problem. Activities are often longer-term projects that are interdisciplinary and student-centered, requiring students to organize their own work and manage their own time. As such, the success of PBL is largely dependent on the design of projects and the autonomy and motivation of students, which generally requires significant planning, time, and resources from schools and educators to implement effectively.

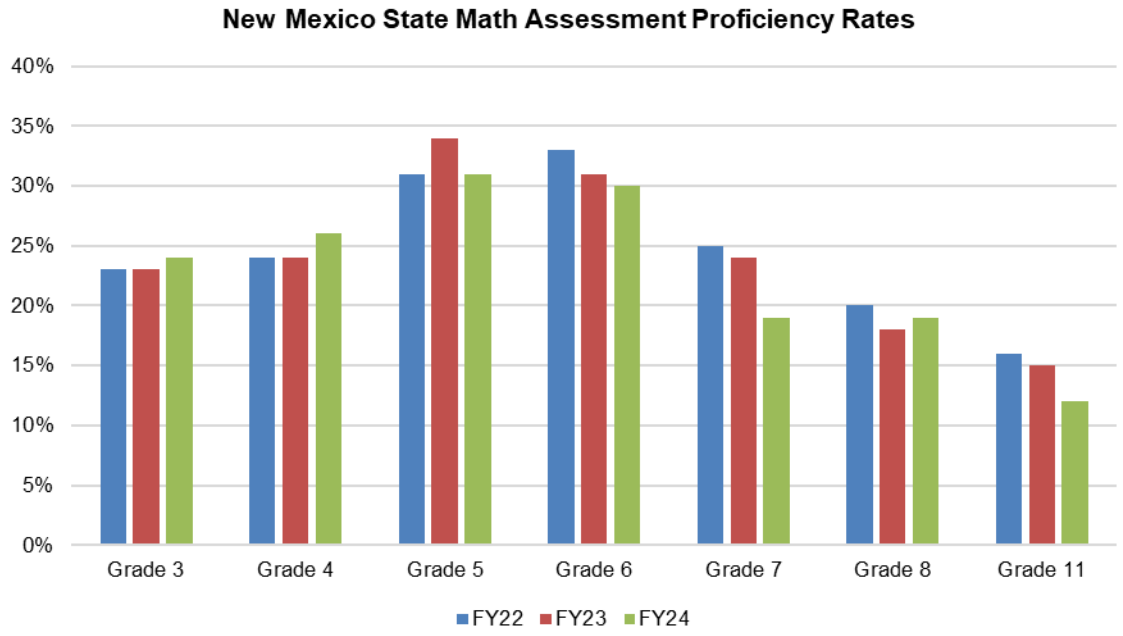
PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

PBL has been studied extensively with mixed results and a limited understanding of its effects on student learning and achievement. Some studies indicate students exposed to traditional instructional approaches develop stronger procedural knowledge while students exposed to PBL approaches develop stronger conceptual understanding in mathematics. One 2015 study found PBL increased academic achievement in math and reading for middle school students, while another 2019 study found STEM PBLs had no effect on high school math achievement. Several

studies indicate PBL can help close achievement gaps for minority students, while others show mixed effects for at-risk students, suggesting the integration of PBL approaches may be more helpful in overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers to learning than barriers caused by poverty.

Provisions of this bill would require schools to apply to be participants in the math lab pilot. Additionally, participating schools must appropriately staff math lab pilot with qualified educators and focus on evidence-based practices such as providing small-group instruction and grade-level learning activities. To appropriately measure the effectiveness of the math lab pilot, participating schools would need to compare the performance of math lab students to a representatively similar sample of students who were provided with an alternative math learning approach.

Math proficiency rates for New Mexico students have remained relatively flat in recent years on the state standardized assessment. Generally, about a quarter of students in third grade test at a proficient level, which improves to nearly one third by fifth grade. Notably, math proficiency rates begin falling in middle school and drop to approximately one-eighth of students reporting proficiency in math by 11th grade.



Source: PED

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

The bill requires PED to biennially evaluate the math lab pilot program and provide technical assistance through the math and science bureau and the mathematics and science advisory council. PED must also provide annual notice to schools that are not participating in the pilot about the opportunity. The bill further requires PED to make annual school district reports available to the governor and LESC and prepare a final report on the pilot by November 1, 2028.

Participating schools must test students before, during, and after the pilot project and monitor participating students through the remainder of their time in school. Schools must also track annual student demographic and proficiency data, funding levels, changes in student math proficiency among participating school districts and charter schools (and separately the

performance of students participating in math labs), and feedback from teachers, students, and parents on the pilot project's impact.

Provisions of the bill require PED to create a new grant process and determine awards for districts and charters that participate in the program. For new initiatives, PED staff have a short timeline after legislative sessions to create grant program requirements, ready application documents, and eventually review applications and make awards. Simultaneously, school districts and charter schools must decide whether they have the capacity or interest to apply for and implement new program funding as part of the annual budget submission to the department. Most initiatives are funded on a reimbursement basis, requiring schools to float expenses with existing operational revenue. Delays in the reimbursement process often incentivize larger cash reserves and rushed spending practices.

CONFLICT, DUPLICATION, COMPANIONSHIP, RELATIONSHIP

This bill relates to Senate Bill 107, which creates a center of excellence at New Mexico State University for innovation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

The appropriation in this bill also relates to appropriations for math achievement in the General Appropriations Act.

TECHNICAL ISSUES

Provisions of the bill require school districts and charter schools to annually report "changes in math proficiency among participating school districts as measured by standardized assessments in general and in particular students participating in math labs" to PED. This data would most likely reside at PED, rather than at each individual district or charter. While the cross-sharing of information across schools about math performance could be helpful, implementation of data sharing would be more practical from a centralized source. Given some constraints from federal privacy laws on sharing student data, PED may be the more appropriate party to coordinate data sharing on math achievement across participating schools.

SL/sgs/SR