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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

SPONSOR Miera ORIGINAL DATE 02/20/09
LAST UPDATED _____ HB 619
SHORT TITLE College Course Cut Scores SB _____
ANALYST Williams

ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL OPERATING BUDGET IMPACT (dollars in thousands)

	FY09	FY10	FY11	3 Year Total Cost	Recurring or Non-Rec	Fund Affected
Total		\$.01		\$.01	Non- recurring	General Fund

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

LFC Files

Responses Received From

Higher Education Department (HED)

Public Education Department (PED)

Department of Finance and Administration

New Mexico Independent Community College (NMICC)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

House Bill 619 authorizes the Higher Education Department to establish uniform and consistent cut scores for college course placement, effective by January 1, 2010. The Department is directed to collaborate with public, post-secondary institutions. The Department cannot establish admission standards.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

This bill does not contain an appropriation, but would have an additional operating budget impact associated with the process of establishing and maintaining the common scores.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

HED supports this legislation and notes this bill is consistent with the Department's strategic plan and legislative agenda.

PED discuss varying communication and expectations of students about being ready for college.

PED discusses the scores required for placement in credit courses are referred to as “cut scores”. The developmental (remedial and noncredit) courses at the state’s public, postsecondary institutions are already aligned.

As part of the Alignment Task Force, HED and PED are currently working with community colleges and four-year institutions to develop a matrix of placement cut scores for college-level introductory algebra and English courses. According to HED, cut scores were found to be widely divergent (within the same institution and with branch campuses having different and, sometimes higher, cut scores, than their main campus). Working with the Achieve Alignment Institute, Achieve has urged New Mexico to set common cut-scores. Achieve research shows that students are better able to prepare for college when a state has consistent and common placement scores.

As well, NMHED is currently working with all two-year and four-year institutions and with College Board and ACT to review actually performance of freshmen students in first year courses.

According to HED, students who are inaccurately placed or who are accurately placed but transfer to an institution using a different placement cutoff score would be more likely to experience a detrimental mismatch between their skills and abilities and course content.

New Mexico Independent Community College chief academic officers are actively working with HED staff and other to identify appropriate cut scores for placement into entry college-level courses in math and English. NMICC notes “providing HED with specific legal authority to establish such scores raises some concern at the institutional level about possible future incursions into their authority over academic matters.”

PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

According to PED, an agreement on cut scores may impact the Public School Support Measure for percent of recent New Mexico high school graduates who take remedial courses in higher education at two-year and four-year schools along with implementation of the P-20 alignment initiative.

HED discusses establishment of a standard placement cutoff score would help increase student success by:

- Setting clear college-level performance expectations that could be communicated to aspiring students;
- Increasing the accuracy with which students are placed in postsecondary courses appropriate to their skill level;
- Ensuring consistent placement standards from institution to institution, and
- Providing comparable and timely data on student outcomes that can be used in evaluating and improving current educational policies and practices.

**ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS CONFLICT, DUPLICATION,
COMPANIONSHIP, RELATIONSHIP**

According to DFA, the administrative impact of this legislation would be most significant in the first half of FY10, then a maintenance of effort and oversight would take place beginning January 1, 2010.

This bill would require colleges and universities to reassess their use of cut scores for placement of students into college-level coursework.

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

PED notes the bill does not address the fact that colleges and universities use a variety of different placement tests, which could impact the time and cost of identifying common cut scores.

According to NMICC, “community colleges support the underlying objective of this proposal which is to ensure that students and their parents clearly understand the level of academic preparation required for entry into regular college-level courses. It should be possible to achieve this objective through the ongoing efforts without the necessity of a legislative mandate which could raise issues over executive branch interference with the authority of institutional governing boards in matters of academic standards.”

Further, “some community colleges are very concerned that this legislation not result in a mandate that a single placement tool must be used by all institutions. Rather, a cross-walk of equivalent scores should be established so that multiple placement tools could be used depending on internal institutional evaluations of their effectiveness with their students.”

AW/mc