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LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS
57th Legislature, 2nd Session, 2026

Bill Number	<u>HB159</u>	Sponsor	<u>Lujan/Borrego</u>
Tracking Number	<u>.233298.1</u>	Committee Referrals	<u>HEC/HAFCS</u>
Short Title	<u>K-12 Student Mental Health Platform</u>		
Analyst	<u>Hicks</u>	Original Date	<u>2/3/2026</u>
		Last Updated	<u></u>

BILL SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

House Bill 159 (HB159) would appropriate \$1 million from the general fund to the Public Education Department (PED) in FY27 and FY28 to establish a pilot program to allow kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) students and their families to access a free, comprehensive, evidence-based mental health support platform offering mental health education, self-management resources, and care navigation supports. The bill further directs PED to use the proposed appropriation to contract for services to support the pilot program and submit a report to LESC.

HB159 does not contain an effective date and, as a result, would go into effect 90 days after the Legislature adjourns if enacted, or May 20, 2026.

FISCAL IMPACT

HB159 would appropriate \$1 million from the general fund to PED for expenditure in FY27 and FY28. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of FY28 shall revert to the general fund.

The House Appropriations and Finance Committee Substitute for House Bills 2 and 3 (HB2/HAFCS) does not include specific funding for a K-12 student mental health platform pilot program.

SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

Mental and Behavioral Health Access. HB159's requirement for PED to identify and offer a free, comprehensive mental health platform could potentially improve access to behavioral health supports in a large and predominantly rural state like New Mexico. The majority of the behavioral health workforce in New Mexico schools is comprised of school counselors, followed by school social workers. According to the most recent available data included in a December 2025 [LESC brief](#) on behavioral health services offered within schools, the ratios of students to school counselors, psychologists, and social workers in New Mexico are all higher than nationally

recommended ratios, meaning New Mexico's counselors, psychologists, and social workers tend to have larger caseloads than recommended. At the same time, [May 2025 data](#) from the National Center for Education Statistics shows 76 percent of surveyed public schools agree the Covid-19 pandemic has had a lingering impact on the behavioral health of students. In the same dataset, 70 percent of schools surveyed also reported a need for more mental health support.

According to [2026 data](#) from Rural Health Information Hub, a federally-funded clearinghouse on rural health issues, 27 of New Mexico's 33 counties are classified as areas with mental health professional shortages. Of the six that are not classified as areas with shortages, Bernalillo County is classified as having a partial shortage, and Santa Fe, Los Alamos, Valencia, San Miguel, and Harding counties are not classified as having any shortages.

Youth Behavioral Health. HB159 would provide funding to support digital behavioral health programming resources in New Mexico K-12 schools. The [American Medical Association](#), a national professional association of physicians and medical students, defines behavioral health as mental health, substance use disorders, life stressors and crises, and stress-related symptoms. While at times used interchangeably with mental health, the term behavioral health corresponds to a broader range of both physical and psychological conditions. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), the federal government organization responsible for public health, children who are mentally healthy have improved quality of life; can function well at home, in school, and in their communities; and are better able to cope with challenges. Student mental health is a key contributor to a student's academic success. [Research](#) has found that mental health conditions like anxiety and depression are linked to reduced academic performance. Beyond the classroom, students struggling with their mental health are more likely to contemplate or engage in suicide or self-harm, experience disciplinary issues, and be chronically absent from school.

Nationally, the rate of children aged three to 17 experiencing anxiety or depression has been increasing in recent years. According to findings published in the [2022 KIDS COUNT Data Book](#) by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, this percentage increased from 9 percent to 12 percent between 2016 and 2020. According to [Mental Health America](#), a national nonprofit focused on promoting mental health and wellbeing, New Mexico ranked 47th out of the 50 states in terms of youth mental illness prevalence and access to care in 2025, where lower rankings indicate greater prevalence of mental illness and less access to care.

Since the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, educators nationwide have drawn attention to the increase in student behavior issues when compared to pre-pandemic levels. Many point to the toll pandemic disruptions took on students' development of interpersonal skills. In a [2022 EAB \(formerly known as the Education Advisory Board\) survey of educators](#), 84 percent of respondents believed students are lagging behind in the development of both self-regulation and relationship-building skills. EAB survey results also depicted a sharp increase in the amount of physical violence seen in schools since 2018, when 15 percent of respondents observed frequent physical fights between students and 7 percent observed physical violence against teachers. In 2022, those percentages increased to 34 percent and 13 percent, respectively.

Youth Suicide in New Mexico. According to [Department of Health \(DOH\)](#), youth between the ages of 10-24 saw the largest increase in suicide deaths between 1999 and 2017. In 2021, the most recent data available, DOH reported 20.1 suicide deaths per 100,000 people in the 10-24 age group. Additionally, the [New Mexico Children's Cabinet](#) reported 14.8 percent of New Mexico high school students seriously considered suicide in 2023, down from 18.8 percent in 2019.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

PED would be required to issue an RFP, evaluate proposals, and distribute the funding appropriated by HB159. Additionally, PED staff would need to produce a report to LESC on the impact of the pilot program, requiring staff time and resources.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

Panorama School Climate Survey. Since 2023, PED has contracted with Panorama Education, a K-12 education software company, to measure school climate perceptions statewide. School districts and charter schools across New Mexico use the Panorama Education School Climate and Culture Survey to assess student, staff, and family perceptions of their school climate and culture, as well as the individual factors influencing these overall perceptions. Survey information and Panorama’s activity “[playbook](#)” and resources can help school leaders support identified student needs.

Students at participating schools are asked to complete two sets of survey questions covering various aspects of their educational experience. Students answer 26 questions during their session. Survey results are broken down to measure students’ perceptions of their school environment as well as their views on their own abilities. The surveys and their subcategories are designated as follows:

- Student Supports and Environment
 - School safety: student perceptions of their physical and psychological safety.
 - School climate: student perceptions of the overall social and learning environment.
- Student Well-Being and Competency
 - Self-management: how well students believe they manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors.
 - Sense of belonging: the degree to which students feel valued as part of the school community.
 - Self-efficacy: how much students believe they can succeed in their academic endeavors.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- LESC Files
- Health Care Authority (HCA)
- Regional Education Cooperatives (RECs)
- Public Education Department (PED)

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