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LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS
56th Legislature, 2nd Session, 2024

Bill Number	<u>HM4</u>	Sponsor	<u>Garratt</u>
Tracking Number	<u>.227246.1</u>	Committee Referrals	<u>HEC</u>
Short Title	<u>LESC Middle School Study</u>		
Analyst	<u>Hathaway</u>	Original Date	<u>1/26/2024</u>
		Last Updated	<u></u>

BILL SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

House Memorial 4 (HM4) requests the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) study the structure, curriculum, funding, and design of middle schools and make recommendations to the Legislature and the governor on methods and means of enhancing the quality of middle school education in New Mexico that equitably serves all students in New Mexico.

LESC is requested to work with a representative group of youth, including youth that reflect New Mexico's student demographics and the student groups named in the *Martinez-Yazzie* consolidated lawsuit, teacher preparation program leaders, middle school teachers and educational leaders, school counselors and other instructional support providers, school safety and school resource officers, higher education institutions, health professionals, community members, and the Public Education Department (PED) in its middle school study.

The memorial requests that LESC submit a copy of its research findings and recommendations to the governor and the Legislature, and to publish its report by December 31, 2024.

FISCAL IMPACT

Legislative memorials do not carry appropriations.

SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

Role of Middle School. Research shows middle school students—typically grades six through eight—are experiencing a particularly important time in adolescent development with specific needs that differ from both their younger and older peers. Middle school students experience rapid physical growth, changes in brain development, and growth in self-identity. All of these simultaneous changes means middle school students may benefit from school designs that support developmental needs, foster safe and inclusive school environments, encourage positive relationships with peers and adults, and provide access to mental health and social-emotional learning supports.

Secondary School Redesign and Middle School Outcomes. In recent years, LESC has prioritized the issue of secondary school redesign with a focus on middle and high school students. This work has been spurred by data that shows several concerning outcomes begin to emerge in middle school years: lower student achievement rates, increased rates of chronic absence, and decreased school engagement all begin to develop in middle school. For example, national survey results show that in sixth grade, about 67 percent of students are engaged in school, but this begins to drop over middle school to 54 percent in seventh grade, 45 percent in eighth grade, and ultimately, 34 percent in 12th grade.

Further, mathematics and English language arts achievement levels also begin to decline in middle school. For example, according to data from the 2022-2023 school year, proficiency rates in mathematics peak in fifth and sixth grade (34 percent and 31 percent, respectively), but begin to fall in later grades with 24 percent proficiency in seventh grade, 18 percent proficiency in eighth grade, and 15 percent proficiency in 11th grade.

Implications of Studying Middle School. HM4 requests LESC study the structure, curriculum, funding, and design of middle schools. Given outcome data that shows concerning trends in attendance, achievement, and engagement that begin to emerge in middle school years, full study of these issues could allow the Legislature to better understand policy and budget options to support this crucial time in students' academic journeys.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

LESC would be requested to work with a representative group of youth (including youth that reflect New Mexico's student demographics and the student groups named in the *Martinez-Yazzie* consolidated lawsuit), teacher preparation program leaders, middle school teachers and educational leaders, school counselors and other instructional support providers, school safety and school resource officers, higher education institutions, health professionals, community members, and PED in its middle school study. LESC is also requested to make a report of its findings. The LESC would need to provide staff, and associated work time, to complete the study.

LESC Function. The LESC is established in state statute (Section 2-10 NMSA 1978), with a statutory purpose to conduct a continuing study of all education in New Mexico, recommend changes in laws relating to education, and to make a full report of its findings and recommendations. Given its purpose and current staffing, it is expected that the requests in HM4 could be feasibly adopted into the LESC research agenda during the 2024 interim.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- LESC Files

JKH/mca