

NEW MEXICO HIGHER EDUCATION DEPARTMENT



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GOVERNOR

Dear Chairman Smith and Director Abbey,

The Department first wants to recognize the admirable work of the Legislative Finance Committee staff and our appreciation for the collaborative efforts working with Higher Education Department (HED) staff in generating this report. We appreciate the opportunity to respond with the Department's perspective on the recommendations contained within this report.

Student success is the primary lens through which all HED's work is focused, and our comments are based on that focus. The Department is well aware that student preparedness, persistence, and completion are key to improving New Mexicans' health outcomes through higher education's preparation of the nursing workforce. The problems of preparation, recruitment, and retention are not limited to health care and are broadly experienced in all of New Mexico's academic and workforce needs. HED remains committed to improving student outcomes through its work in incentivizing student outcomes in the funding formula; continued refinement of a common course numbering system; cross-institutional efficiencies, and other initiatives. We have reviewed the report in its entirety and are enthusiastic about opportunities to partner with other entities in responding to recommendations – our responses are limited to those within the immediate purview of the Department's activities.

HED Responses to Agency-Specific Recommendations:

Expanding Targeted Financial Aid for Nursing

New Mexico's Nursing Loan for Service, Nurse Educator Loan for Service, and Health Professional Loan Repayment Programs have been extremely successful in supporting students and professionals as they train, enter, and practice in the workforce. While it is true that post-degree loan repayment programs require less administration, and have higher service completion rates, loan-for-service programs remain an important component of supporting students to degree completion, especially for low income and rural students. With the rare exception of the Nurse Educator Loan for Service program, demand for New Mexico's nursing and other healthcare financial aid programs have always exceeded available appropriations. While the Department welcomes additional nursing appropriations, we caution that additional funding should be carefully balanced with other priorities in the state budget without reducing other critical student financial aid programs.

Modify administrative rules for Instruction and General (I&G)-related Research and Public Service Projects (RPSPs)

As the report correctly notes, there are numerous RPSP lines within the General Appropriation Act (GAA) that may be better incorporated into the Instruction and General line appropriations to HEIs – this category is not limited to Nurse Expansion RPSPs. While this would simplify comprehensive funding recommendations, and allow institutions more flexibility in how those funds are spent, it removes the incentive for institutions to develop meaningful RPSP performance measures and for HED to review projects for their programmatic and budgetary impact to the state. This could be alleviated by a stronger involvement of entities such as the Healthcare Workforce Committee (HCWC) and the New Mexico Nursing Education Consortium (NMNEC) as data-sharing partners in evaluating statewide needs and impacts. HED recommends that any changes to the RPSP submission process, and review of projects as candidates for incorporation into I&G appropriations, be examined carefully

with ample opportunity for stakeholder input. Moreover, the process should be comprehensive across all I&G related projects and institutions and not limited to any one particular set of programs.

Leverage data matches with the Department of Workforce Solutions

HED concurs with this recommendation and is already actively enhancing its data-matching abilities with DWS to identify workforce outcomes for not only nursing but in other high-need and/or high-demand areas. Collaborative analysis and sharing of mutually-gathered data will assist the Department and other stakeholders in identifying specific gaps – geographically, programmatic, and otherwise – and assist the Department and its partners in targeting its activities to those areas most in need. The appropriation recently received by HED for Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) development will considerably accelerate these efforts.

Development of performance metrics tying appropriations to in-state and regional retention

HED recognizes the importance of useful quantitative and qualitative performance measures for all recipients of state appropriations. These measures should be meaningful and within the immediate control of the agency or institution responsible. Nurse Expansion and/or other RPSPs that are incorporated into the I&G lines of the state budget could require additional performance measures within the framework of the General Appropriation Act.

The problem of placement and retention of qualified health practitioners in rural and/or underserved areas remains a challenge. HED welcomes the opportunities for new data sharing agreements and partnerships to address this challenge and accomplish the goals of a healthier New Mexico through measurable and attainable goals set for every stakeholder.

In conclusion, HED again thanks the Legislative Finance Committee staff for the opportunity to collaborate and comment on the recommendations of this report. The state's efforts in expanding the nursing workforce have been successful in no small part due to the support of the Legislature and its collaborative efforts with all of the dedicated advocates and professionals who contributed to this report. We recognize that the time has come to re-examine and revise our efforts in the interest of enhanced nursing workforce development and placement, increased efficiencies, and broader positive health impacts. Enacting some of these changes may be technically and perhaps politically challenging and will require care and time in development. We look forward to our continued collaboration in developing a deliberative process that is not only best for the health and well-being of the people of New Mexico, but also serves as a model to the rest of the nation.