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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

SPONSOR: Lopez DATE TYPED: 2/25/03 HB _____

SHORT TITLE: Experimental Community Learning Center SB 636

ANALYST: Dunbar

APPROPRIATION

Appropriation Contained		Estimated Additional Impact		Recurring or Non-Rec	Fund Affected
FY03	FY04	FY03	FY04		
	\$250.0			Recurring	GF

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

Relates to: SB582, HB104, SB404

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Responses Received From
 Department of Health (DOH)
 New Mexico State Department of Education (NMSDE)
 New Department of Game and Fish (NMGF)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

Senate Bill 636 appropriates \$250,000 from the general fund to the Department of Health (DOH) for expenditure in fiscal year 2004 for an experiential community learning center that provides academic mentoring, substance abuse prevention, experiential education, wilderness adventure and parental support for students twelve to seventeen years of age in a school district with a student enrollment in excess of sixty thousand students.

Significant Issues

Positive youth development has been proven to decrease problem behavior such as substance abuse, teen pregnancy and violence, as well as promoting positive outcomes. Goals of positive youth development include youth being intellectually reflective, en route to a lifetime of mean-

ingful work, good citizens, caring, ethical, and healthy (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). Youth development programs are developmentally appropriate and foster the above competencies in addition to skill building for decision making, problem solving, conflict resolution, critical thinking and leadership to meet the challenges they will face as they mature. These programs approach youth as resources to be developed rather than problems to be fixed. They expose youth to opportunities, services and supports in their communities.

In order to be effective, programs must be evidence-based and evaluated. Programs that involve interactive teaching where students can actually practice newly acquired skills (e.g., role play) are beneficial. These programs can take place in any environment, so this type of programming is transferable. For instance, social skills can be taught via in-school curricula, individual therapy, and after-school mentoring.

DOH notes that SB 636 recommends specific evidence-based strategies or interventions that are endorsed by the National Dropout Prevention Center: family involvement, early childhood education, reading/writing programs, mentoring/tutoring, service-learning programs, and alternative schooling.

Only one school district in New Mexico, the Albuquerque Public Schools, meets the criteria in SB636 for a student enrollment in excess of 60,000 students.

A study by the Dropout Prevention Network (2002) indicates that students that have opportunities to participate in innovative programs focused on their specific needs, accompanied by supportive adults and family members, are more likely to remain in school and complete their educational programs.

The legislation provides funding for experiential learning programs that can:

- Create a supportive environment that promotes engaged learning;
- Motivate students to learn;
- Provide students with leadership opportunities;
- Assist students in exploring career opportunities;
- Encourage students to set goals;
- Improve self-esteem and coping skills; and
- Help students become productive New Mexico citizens.

NMSDE states that Rogers and Freiberg in their 1994 book, *Freedom to Learn*, note that a key distinction of experiential learning is that it addresses the needs and wants of the learner. The qualities of experiential learning include personal involvement, self-initiation, evaluated by the learner and capable of pervasive effects on the learner. Experiential learning is equivalent to personal change and growth.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

The appropriation of \$250.0 contained in this bill is a recurring expense to the general fund. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of FY 04 shall revert to the general fund.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

The DOH could manage the additional appropriation with current staff.

RELATIONSHIP

Relates to:

- SB582, which would support Rio Grande High School Cluster dropout prevention programs, including mentorship and student leadership programs, through the SDE at a cost of \$350,000.
- HB104, which would establish a dropout prevention pilot project through the SDE at a cost of \$246,000.
- SB 404, which would establish dropout prevention programs at Bernalillo, Valley, Los Lunas, Rio Grande and West Mesa high schools in Bernalillo, Sandoval and Valencia counties through the SDE at a cost of \$1,000,000.

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

The effectiveness of alternative approaches to youth development and substance abuse prevention depends on the nature of the alternatives offered. If the alternative activity offered is not attractive or appropriate to the target group, it will not garner participation. Recently, prevention specialists have involved youth in the development of alternatives programs.

Mentoring programs provide youth with structured time with adults and are related to reductions in substance use and increases in positivism toward others, the future, and school. Also, participation in these programs is related to increased school attendance. The more highly involved the mentor, the greater the positive results. Provision of organized recreation/cultural activities by community agencies can decrease substance use and delinquency by providing both drug-free alternatives and monitoring and supervision of children.

Research shows that educational approaches targeting the family (parents and children) and school-based approaches involving parents or complementing student-focused curricula with parent-focused curricula can be effective in preventing adolescent substance use. These programs have been shown to decrease parental stress, family conflict, and substance abuse, and improve parent-child bonding and cohesion, and attitudes toward and acceptance of children. For children and youth, positive outcomes have included increases in pro-social behavior and decreases in hyperactivity, social withdrawal, aggression, and delinquency.

Youth development programs, such as the experiential community-learning center proposed in SB 636, contribute to dropout prevention effectiveness. The dropout issue is a critical educational and public health issue for the State of New Mexico. Dropout prevention strategies are currently being funded and evaluated in three New Mexico school districts through a federal grant administered by the Department of Health.

According to the National Dropout Prevention Center, effective dropout prevention strategies include the following: family involvement, early childhood education, reading/writing programs, mentoring/tutoring, service-learning programs, alternative schooling, out-of-school experiences, career education/workforce readiness, and violence prevention/conflict resolution. In addition, systemic changes to the educational environment need to occur such as: professional develop-

ment for teaching staff, meeting students individual learning needs (Learning Styles/Multiple Intelligences), using the best technologies to meet student's learning needs (Instructional Technologies), individualized instruction, continual improvement of school policies and continuous planning (Systemic Renewal), as well as increased community collaboration. The experiential community-learning center outlined in SB 636 fits within the effective strategies guidelines. Dropout prevention strategies must be carried out over many years to be effective.

Currently, the DOH is administering a pilot dropout prevention program in three high schools (Belen, Cuba and Espanola) funded through the SDE via a joint powers agreement (JPA). These three schools are within the "ten public high schools with the highest dropout rates." The program uses a case management model. The case manager at each high school works individually with students with high rates of absenteeism and falling grades by addressing complex personal, family and academic issues. The goal of the program is to keep at-risk students in school and ultimately have them graduate. It is critical that all dropout prevention programs evaluate the success of their strategies and their ability to address public health indicators. The PASS program includes an evaluation component that will inform future best practices in dropout prevention for all NM schools.

BD/yr