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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

ORIGINAL DATE 02/02/08

SPONSOR Madalena LAST UPDATED _____ HB 390

SHORT TITLE Native American Distance Education Program SB _____

ANALYST Weber

APPROPRIATION (dollars in thousands)

Appropriation		Recurring or Non-Rec	Fund Affected
FY08	FY09		
	\$30.0	Recurring	General Fund

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

LFC Files

Responses Received From

Indian Affairs Department (IAD)

Public Education Department (PED)

Higher Education Department (HED)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

House Bill 390 appropriates \$30 thousand from the general fund to the Indian Affairs Department to plan for and support a distance education program for Native American tribal members and program managers.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

The appropriation of \$30 thousand contained in this bill is a recurring expense to the general fund. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of FY09 shall revert to the general fund.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

The Indian Affairs Department reports.

The bill would support a distance education program for tribal members and program managers

wishing to obtain a post-secondary degree without leaving their tribal communities. Many universities in New Mexico provide distance education programs for their students, but these programs are often held at the university's branch campuses which may not be near enough to a reservation for some tribal members to utilize. The funds would bring the distance education programs out to the reservation to enable tribal members and program managers to take classes and complete requirements for a post-secondary degree within their own tribal communities.

The funding would foremost provide educational opportunities for Native American students unable to attend classes on a university campus. Distance education would also enable these students to be more flexible with their time, which can be helpful if they work full or part time or have responsibilities within their tribal communities. Distance education would also enable these students to substantially save on transportation, housing, and food costs associated with attending on-campus classes.

Additionally, Native American students would be able to access a wide range of educational opportunities through the many distance education programs currently provided in the state. The University of New Mexico ("UNM") has online degree programs for Nursing and Electrical Engineering through their Extended University program. UNM also offers an online certificate in Organization Leadership and Instructional Technologies. The New Mexico State University ("NMSU") offers a number of bachelors and masters programs through their distance learning program. NMSU also has a program called Digital Pathways that provides "community-based distance learning for New Mexico's American Indian Nations."¹ NMSU has partnered with the Pueblos of Acoma, Cochiti, Laguna, Santo Domingo, and Zia as well as the Eight Northern Indian Pueblos to bring education opportunities to the tribes, particularly in subject areas identified as high need for the tribes.² The areas of study being developed within the Digital Pathways program include Tribal Management, criminal justice, and public health.³

It should be noted that distance education programs are most often provided over close-circuit, interactive television or online. Tribes would need to be equipped with this technology, if they are not already, to establish distance education programs within their communities.

The Public Education Department notes the initiative may eventually support PED's implementation of:

- IDEAL-NM, Dual Credit, AP, and online learning.
- Bilingual, CT-WEB and Rural Education Initiatives, and
- The Indian Education Act's distance learning and maintenance of native languages goals.

The Higher Education Department contributes.

This funding could bring existing programs into the community, particularly for individuals pursuing postsecondary education, without having to physically attend a campus, and other opportunities in order to access higher education. It is not clear whether this bill is targeting existing distance education programs or eLearning programs, or whether these programs will target children or adult learners within the tribal communities.

¹ New Mexico State University. "Digital Pathways" website. Retrieved 1/24/08, http://distance.nmsu.edu/digital_pathways/index.html.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., Areas of Study page.

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For example, The Center of Extended Learning at NMSU currently serves American Indian student populations among the 22 Pueblos and Tribes in New Mexico. The central focus is for scholarships for American Indian students that transfer from tribal colleges in New Mexico to NMSU to ensure successful completion of degree programs.

Another program is a partnership with Northern New Mexico College (NNMC) and the Eight Northern Indian Pueblos Council, Inc. (ENIPC) for distance education in the eight pueblo communities (Tesuque, Nambe, Pojoaque, Taos, San Ildefonso, Santa Clara, Ohkay Owingeh, Picuris). An area of need for the partnership was to create education centers in each of the pueblo communities that will serve their residents with distance education (e.g. online courses).

MW/nt