

**LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE  
BILL ANALYSIS**

**Bill No:** SB 639

**49th Legislature, 1st Session, 2009**

**Short Title:** School-Parent Communication Days

**Sponsor(s):** Senator Linda M. Lopez

**Analyst:** Dorinda Fox

**Date:** March 6, 2009

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**Bill Summary:**

SB 639 makes an appropriation and amends the *Public School Code* relating to the minimum requirements of school district budgets to require:

- one full day at the beginning of each 90-day period in a school year to be devoted to communication among parents, administrators, teachers, and students; and
- the Public Education Department (PED), by rule, to establish requirements for the two additional days.

**Fiscal Impact:**

\$28.0 million is appropriated from the General Fund to PED for expenditure in FY 10 to provide salaries for the two additional days in the school year required by SB 639.

Unexpended or unencumbered funds revert to the General Fund.

**Fiscal Issues:**

In 2008, the Legislature appropriated \$14.0 million to fund an additional instructional day in the State Equalization Guarantee (public school funding formula). According to staff of the Legislative Education Study Committee, the cost estimate for the additional instructional day considered total program costs, school transportation, and food service costs.

**Issues:**

The intent of SB 639 appears to be to increase parental involvement in schools for the benefit of students' education. According to the PED analysis, researchers associated with the National Network of Partnership Schools have spent the last five years studying the impact of different family and community connections on student achievement. These studies show enhanced student performance when parents are active participants with schools in the educational process. Over 25 years of research have confirmed that students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background, are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores and enroll in more challenging academic programs; be promoted; pass their classes and earn credits; attend school regularly; have better social skills; show improved behavior; adapt well to school; and graduate and go on to postsecondary education.

According to PED, as many as 40 different state and federal programs in New Mexico require parental involvement. PED states that schools and districts continue to struggle with how to meaningfully engage parents and families to meet even minimum requirements for parental involvement. A healthy and successful education system should see parents as partners. The PED continues to work with its partners to increase the amount and quality of parental involvement in schools. Further, part of the focus of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* and PED is the requirement for parental involvement at each school site throughout the state.

The PED analysis also reports that SB 639 duplicates portions of the existing *Public School Code*, i.e., 33 hours of the full-day kindergarten program may be used for home visits by the teacher or for parent-teacher conferences; and 22 hours of grades 1 through 5 programs may be used for home visits by the teacher or for parent-teacher conferences. In addition, the *Public School Code* does not require parent-teacher conferences beyond the fifth grade.

### **Background:**

In 2006, the Legislature appropriated \$750,000 to PED to be expended over a two-year period for the purpose of training and involvement of parents in their children's education. This was a special appropriation to spur the continuance of education reforms in New Mexico. PED used those funds to:

- create parent involvement materials in Spanish and English;
- provide parent training targeting grades K-6;
- produce a film; and
- carry out a media campaign to achieve parental involvement on a number of levels.

PED also established the Family/Parent Advisory Council, which includes representatives from as many as 30 statewide parent engagement organizations and parents; the council meets monthly to guide policy and future parent involvement activities.

A 2009 evaluation report of New Mexico's progress regarding parental involvement in schools was released by Appleseed, a private national nonprofit organization, at the beginning of this legislative session. The Appleseed report acknowledged some of the steps the Legislature has taken to improve parental involvement, as follows:

- high school reform legislation enacted in 2003 included the creation of school councils involving parents;
- the *Indian Education Act* mandates parental involvement in its program planning and budgeting process;
- New Mexico law provides for significant parental involvement pertaining to curriculum selection; PED invites parental input when the state compiles the list of available instructional materials for use in public schools; and local school boards are required to provide notice inviting parental views before the selection of instructional materials from the state list is made; and

- among other requirements, providers of pre-kindergarten services who apply for funding through the *Pre-Kindergarten Act*, enacted in 2005, must describe their plan for communicating with and involving parents.

The Appleseed report makes these recommendations for PED and school districts:

- PED to promote model parent involvement programs to school districts;
- schools to take responsibility and work more with parent groups; and
- PED to improve the information it provides by linking the Resources for Parents website directly to school, district; and performance data; providing more material in languages other than English; decreasing internet reliance to make more information available in print; and removing from “parent involvement” sites the documents that are intended primarily for educators and administrators.

The Appleseed report also recommends that the Legislature appropriate more funds to support parental involvement efforts.

**Related Bills:**

None as of March 6, 2009.