

**LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS**

Bill Number: HB 44a

49th Legislature, 2nd Session, 2010

Tracking Number: .180731.1

Short Title: Health Education Required for Graduation

Sponsor(s): Representative Mary Helen García

Analyst: Pamela Herman

Date: February 17, 2010

AS AMENDED

The Senate Education Committee amendments:

- **delete a change in graduation requirements for students entering ninth grade in school year 2012-2013 to add one-half unit in health education and to reduce to seven from seven and one-half the required electives; and**
- **add a requirement that, for students entering eighth grade in school year 2012-2013, a course in health education is required prior to graduation. Each school district:**
 - **may require health education either in middle school or high school; and**
 - **must submit to the Public Education Department, by the beginning of school year 2011-2012, a health education implementation plan for school years 2012- 2013 and subsequent school years, including:**
 - **the grade in which health education will be required; and**
 - **how the course aligns with department content and performance standards.**

Original Bill Summary:

HB 44 amends the *Public School Code* to require that, for students entering 9th grade beginning in school year 2012-2013, high school graduation requirements are changed by:

- adding one-half unit in health education; and
- reducing to seven from seven and one-half the required elective units.

The total units required for high school graduation in statute is unchanged at 24 units.

Fiscal Impact:

HB 44 does not contain an appropriation.

Fiscal Issues:

- In a survey conducted by the Public Education Department (PED), some school administrators expressed a concern that a health education graduation requirement might be an unfunded or underfunded mandate on school districts, or might compete for district

resources with existing elective courses such as art, music, or career and technical education, thus reducing student choice.

- According to PED:
 - in order to reduce or eliminate a fiscal impact, the required half-unit in health education replaces a one-half elective unit;
 - placing the requirement in statute will not affect the 34 school districts that already require health education for graduation; and
 - health education is currently offered as an online course through IDEAL-NM, so school districts need not necessarily hire staff to teach the course. However, courses provided through IDEAL-NM are not without costs to school districts.

Substantive Issues:

Current health education requirements in law

- Health education is not currently a required course for high school graduation.
- However, in 2005, legislation was enacted requiring that, in grades 9 through 12, instruction that meets academic content and performance standards be provided in health education. According to PED:
 - in 34 school districts, health education is a local graduation requirement; and
 - in other districts, instruction in health is integrated into other high school courses such as science and physical education.
- The 2005 legislation also mandated that in all first, second, and third grade classes, and in 4th through 8th grades, instruction that meets state academic content and performance standards be provided in health education.

The need for a required high school health education course

- According to the 2007 New Mexico Youth Risk and Resilience Survey (NMYRRS), cited by PED, New Mexico ranks first in the nation for certain health-related risks among youth, including use of alcohol and marijuana before age 13; having been in a physical fight; skipping school due to unsafe feelings at or traveling to and from school; having seriously considered suicide; or having made a suicide attempt.
- PED also cites a correlation drawn from the 2007 NMYRRS between self-reported student academic success and avoidance of risky behaviors.
- PED states that health education is the content area where students acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes to achieve health; and the department cites a statement by the Joint Committee on National Health Education Standards that students who have good health knowledge, skills, and attitude have better health status, and they are better prepared as adults to contribute to national competitiveness.
- Also according to PED, research and experts in the field, including the National Centers for Disease Control, state that integrating health education into existing courses is not as

effective as offering it as a stand-alone course, taught by licensed health educators, with some focus on developing the skills required to reduce behaviors with health risks.

- The PED analysis of HB 44 cites seven studies conducted during 2008 and 2009 in response to legislative memorials or other initiatives that recommend making health education a graduation requirement:
 - SB 129 (2008), *Healthy New Mexico Task Force*;
 - HM 16 (2009), *Adolescent Preventative Health & Well-being*;
 - HM 53 (2009), *Prevention of Teen Dating Violence*;
 - SM 71 (2009), *Evaluate Drug Policy Approaches*;
 - HJM 31 (2009), *Study Effects of Bullying* (did not pass but the study was conducted by PED, the Children, Youth and Families Department, and the Department of Health);
 - The Campaign for Health Kids Task Force draft action plan for combating obesity and overweight; and
 - CS/HM 127 (2009), *Study Health Education School Requirement*. The study presented to the Legislature indicated that, of those surveyed:
 - 88.9 percent of 427 parents surveyed favored a health education graduation requirement; and 70 percent said the best option was to replace an elective requirement with health education;
 - 75.7 percent of 360 current students surveyed said that a .5 health education unit should be required for graduation;
 - 96 percent of 146 current state university students said that all high school students should take at least one health education class; and
 - 26.7 percent of 30 school administrators responding to a survey said that health education should be a state-mandated graduation requirement.

Issues raised by school administrators regarding requiring health education for high school graduation

In a survey of school administrators conducted by the CS/HM 127 (2009) Task Force, some questioned whether there were enough teachers with a health education endorsement, particularly in rural areas. PED states that:

- there were 236 licensed teachers with health education endorsements assigned to teach health education in 134 school districts in New Mexico, according to data from the Student Teacher Accountability Reporting System (STARS) for the 120th day of school year 2008-2009; and
- there were 1,600 individuals who held a PED health education licensure endorsement as of November 2009; however, PED does not indicate where these teachers are located.

Health education requirements in other states

According to the Higher Education Department bill analysis of HB 44, requiring a half-unit of health education would put New Mexico near the middle nationally in regards to the amount of health education required:

- 23 states do not have any health education requirements;

- 5 states require a half-unit of health education;
- 17 states require more than a half-unit of health education; and
- 6 states offer varied options for health and physical education.

Related Bill(s):

None