

**LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS**

Bill Number: HB 184

49th Legislature, 2nd Session, 2010

Tracking Number: .180820.1

Short Title: Outdoor Classroom Program

Sponsor(s): Representative Jimmie C. Hall and Others

Analyst: James Ball

Date: January 29, 2010

FOR THE LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE

Bill Summary:

HB 184 makes an appropriation to support a statewide Outdoor Classroom Program (OCP) that is intended to encourage participation and improve performance in math and science. The bill also allows the State Parks Division (SPD) to determine locations that are most suitable for OCPs, from among state parks or other federal, state, local and privately managed areas.

Fiscal Impact:

\$100,000 is appropriated from the General Fund to the SPD of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD) for FY 11.

Unexpended or unencumbered funds revert to the General Fund.

HB 3a, the Education Appropriation Act, includes a \$100,000 appropriation to support the OCP.

Substantive Issues:

The OCP seeks to impact New Mexico youth academically, socially, and personally, by connecting classroom learning with engaging, standards-based field experiences at outdoor sites, such as state parks, national monuments, and wildlife refuges.

Background:

In 2005, the Legislature passed SJM 24, *Improve Education and State Parks Relationship*, requesting PED and SPD to prepare a study outlining opportunities for increased partnerships between the two agencies to improve and expand outdoor education programs. As cited in the analysis by the Public Education Department (PED) the report produced through this partnership, "*Making New Mexico Schools Work Outdoors*," referenced research indicating that outdoor, interactive education increases student test scores, reduces discipline problems, builds citizenry skills and stewardship ethics, and increases teacher job satisfaction. The OCP that grew out of this collaboration has four components:

- teacher training institutes;
- hands-on resources for teachers;

- transportation funding; and
- service learning projects.

The Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) received a staff report on the OCP in the 2007 interim. Among other issues raised in the report, LESC staff indicated that SPD would implement new recordkeeping procedures to provide more data about the effectiveness of the program. LESC staff also reported that reports and studies done elsewhere suggest positive relationships between outdoor education programs in general and student achievement, particularly for at-risk students.

During the 2009 interim, the SPD reported that in fewer than three years the OCP has so far:

- served over 70,000 New Mexico students from 54 public school districts and three Bureau of Indian Affairs schools;
- developed and implemented four standards-based curricula based on New Mexico content standards designed specifically to integrate outdoor learning;
- provided OCP training for over 300 teachers; and
- completed an independent assessment of the program.

Related Bill(s):

HB 3a *Education Appropriation Act*