

**LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS**

Bill Number: SB 166

49th Legislature, 2nd Session, 2010

Tracking Number: .180641.1

Short Title: Two Languages for High School Graduation

Sponsor(s): Senator Linda M. Lopez

Analyst: James Ball

Date: February 12, 2010

Bill Summary:

SB 166 amends the *Public School Code* to change the high school graduation requirements for students entering the ninth grade in school year 2010-2011 as follows:

- requires that one, rather than two, science units shall have a laboratory component;
- adds two required units in a language other than English;
- requires three, rather than three and one-half, units in social science; and
- reduces the number of elective credits to six from seven and one-half.

Fiscal Impact:

\$50,000 is appropriated to the Public Education Department (PED) from the General Fund to implement the new graduation requirement for a language other than English.

Unexpended or unencumbered funds revert to the General Fund.

Substantive Issues:

The PED analysis of SB 166 notes that the addition of two years of a language other than English to the graduation requirements would mean that New Mexico high school graduates' preparation would more closely align with some university admission guidelines.

The Higher Education Department analysis of SB 166 confirms PED's analysis, indicating that freshman admission to the University of New Mexico requires two units of a foreign language, both of which must be the same language other than English, or evidence of proficiency in a second language unless the student has a specified combination of class rank and entrance examination scores. New Mexico State University requires one unit of foreign language or fine arts, but students without either of those units are eligible for provisional admission if they have attained a certain grade point average or entrance examination scores.

Technical Issues:

SB 166 may implicate Article 4, Section 16 of the Constitution of the State of New Mexico which requires that "the subject of every bill shall be clearly expressed in its title . . . and if any subject is embraced in any act which is not expressed in its title, only so much of the act as is not so expressed shall be void." Although SB 166 does, as the title suggests, address the issue of

language requirements for high school graduation, the bill also reduces the laboratory component of the science credit requirement and reduces other graduation credits in social science and electives in order to accommodate the new two-credit requirement in a language other than English.

Although SB 166 reduces the social science graduation requirement to three from three and one-half units, the bill leaves in place all of the current course-specific requirements, which are generally taught in courses totaling three and one-half units, as follows:

- one-half in New Mexico history;
- one in United States history and geography;
- one in world history and geography;
- one-half in government; and
- one-half in economics.

Background:

According to PED, research demonstrates that students who speak more than one language do better academically than those who speak only one.

United States Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan recently stated in an interview:

“It is clear that learning a foreign language, any language, whether it is considered critical or traditional, contributes to students’ academic success, helps learners gain a better understanding of their native language, and proves useful in future career pursuits.”

Related Bills:

- HB 20 *Change Math Requirements for Graduation*
- HB 44 *Health Education Required for Graduation*
- HB 53 *Financial Literacy as School Math Requirement*