

**LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS**

Bill Number: SM 71

50th Legislature, 1st Session, 2011

Tracking Number: .186285.4

Short Title: Northwest Quadrant Public School Access Study

Sponsor(s): Senators Lynda M. Lovejoy and John Pinto

Analyst: Pamela Herman

Date: March 10, 2011

Bill Summary:

SM 71 requests the Public Education Department (PED) to:

- complete a study of the issue of public education access for students in the northwest quadrant of the state;
- resolve these issues; and
- report its findings and recommendations to the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) by August 1, 2011.

SM 71 resolves that copies of the memorial be transmitted to PED and the director of the LESC.

Fiscal Impact:

Legislative memorials do not contain an appropriation.

Fiscal Issues:

PED does not provide an estimate for the cost of completing the study requested in SM 71.

Substantive Issues:

Because the northwest quadrant of New Mexico comprises a very large area with a very sparse population, students must often be transported over great distances to attend public school. On occasion, circumstances arise where, as SM 71 states, “problems [are] created by school boundaries that do not take into account where students live.” The memorial requests that PED complete its study of, and resolve, these issues.

The PED bill analysis of SM 71 repeats some information presented in SM 71 regarding access to public education by students in Bloomfield, New Mexico:

- the Gallup-McKinley County School District (Gallup-McKinley) is one of the largest in New Mexico, bordering six others, including Bloomfield and Grants-Cibola County (Grants-Cibola);

- Gallup-McKinley recently built the Tse' Yi' Gai High School in the community of Pueblo Pintado, which has capacity for additional students and which is about 20 miles from the town of Bloomfield; and
- students in the Bloomfield School District who currently attend high school 40 miles from their homes have requested transfers to Tse' Yi' Gai, which is only 20 miles from their homes; but the Bloomfield School District has not approved the transfers.

A different educational access issue in the northwest quadrant was the subject of a work group convened in 2009 in response to HM 75, *Study Education Access in Ramah*. A work group was convened by PED in 2009 and presented a report to the LESC in the 2010 interim on the issues.

- According to PED:
 - the task force studied the consequences of and solutions to the convergence of two school districts' boundaries – Gallup-McKinley and Grants-Cibola – and the federally-funded Pine Hill Schools operated by the Ramah Navajo School Board on the Ramah Navajo Reservation; and
 - the study reviewed the history of the operation of schools in the area; inter-district transportation and attendance policies; agreements or lack of agreements among the agencies; and the impact of these factors on local communities and students.
- The PED work group report to the LESC:
 - proposed that the issues presented by the situation in the Ramah area might be solved by a memorandum of agreement with a public school district to allow the Ramah Navajo School Board to use state funds to provide educational services to Ramah students; but
 - did not offer an opinion as to the legality of such an arrangement under state law.

Related Bills:

SJM 35 *Study Indian Education Impact Aid Money*
 SM 52 *Indian Education Act Effectiveness*