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LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS
53rd Legislature, 1st Session, 2017

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| Bill Number | <u>HM9</u> | Sponsor | <u>Sariñana</u> |
| Tracking Number | <u>.205510.1</u> | Committee Referrals | <u>HEC</u> |
| Short Title | <u>Middle School Student Preparedness</u> | | |
| Analyst | <u>Bedeaux</u> | Original Date | <u>2/7/17</u> |
| | | Last Updated | <u></u> |

BILL SUMMARY

Synopsis of Memorial

House Memorial 9 (HM9) requests the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) convene a study group with the Public Education Department (PED) and the Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) to examine the issues of middle school student preparedness for high school and teacher turnover. LESC is requested to present its findings to LFC by October 1, 2017.

FISCAL IMPACT

Memorials do not contain appropriations.

SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

HM9 requests the study of whether middle school students are prepared for high school. It also requests the study of teacher turnover in New Mexico. In a 2015 program evaluation, LFC reported that middle schools are more likely than elementary and high schools to receive D and F grades. The report also states many middle schools have inadequate social-emotional supports for students.

Academic Readiness. Current state and federal standards place emphasis on the career and college readiness of high school students. The current school grading system measures high school student participation and performance in college entrance exams, dual credit, and vocational certification as evidence of career and college readiness. By contrast, the school grades assigned to middle schools and elementary schools do not assess students' preparedness for high school. Student preparedness for high school is difficult to gauge using current measures. National assessments such as ACT, PSAT, SAT, and AP offer reasonable metrics for examining college preparedness since they are widely used and accepted as valid. There is currently not a tool for assessing how prepared students are for high school. Such a tool would also need to include social and emotional development.

Researchers at the Mathematics Diagnostic Testing Project (MDTP) at the University of California San Diego addressed the academic portion of this problem by developing a series of

tests to assess students' readiness for high school mathematics courses. The tests are aligned to California's Common Core state standards and can determine whether students are prepared for any number of subjects. One of the tests assesses general high school mathematics readiness by examining the student's acquisition of essential standards from grades 3 through 8.

Social-Emotional Readiness. Subject acquisition is only one piece of the readiness puzzle. In a set of standards that ensure preschools are preparing students for kindergarten, PED laid out criteria for social and emotional development. The department heeded policy counsel from New Mexico PreK, which explained that while a grasp of a set of skills like the alphabet or counting to 10 may constitute academic readiness, children's school success also hinges on a series of other readiness factors conditions like social and emotional development, physical wellbeing, and motor development.

To some extent, the same is true of middle school students. Developmentally, middle school students are undergoing what is typically one of the most challenging periods of adolescent life. Even during their transition to high school, middle school students experience emotional and social changes that can impact their readiness. Indeed, high school itself may exacerbate emotional and social maldevelopments, which can contribute to the risk of truancy, dropping out, alcohol or drug use, depression, and even suicide.

New Mexico PreK's policy brief also posits that readiness, be it academic, social, or emotional, requires cooperation between families, schools, and services. Each element of a student's life can play a role in that student's readiness for high school. A work group on high school readiness could study all of these factors together to determine whether each has adequate support. Effective policy solutions may include ensuring teachers are comprehensively trained; alleviating the stigma of school counseling; or providing additional services to struggling students. Efforts should be aimed at avoiding the need for retention, and only using it as a last resort.

Teacher Turnover. HM9 also addresses the issue of teacher turnover. It posits that ninth grade teachers may be frustrated with unprepared students, which could have an impact on teacher turnover. If ninth grade teachers cannot compensate for the lost time in middle school, it can show up on their evaluations. Poor evaluation results can be challenging, especially if teachers feel that they did all they could with the circumstances they were given.

Teacher turnover is caused by a great number of factors. Research shows the most common reasons for dissatisfaction with teaching are low salaries, inadequate administrative support, lack of student motivation, and student discipline problems. Unprepared students may fall behind and become disinterested, engage in disruptive behaviors, and require discipline. Conversely, research suggests that a student who is motivated to learn can overcome a lack of preparedness by remaining engaged in class and asking for constant clarification. It remains unclear how often any of these behaviors occur, and whether they are the result of a lack of high school readiness.

ALTERNATIVES

The Legislature may want to consider convening two separate work groups, one to study middle school preparation, and another to study teacher turnover. Due to the complicated nature of teacher turnover, a cursory glance at the topic as a part of a high school readiness work group is likely not enough to fully understand it.

RELATED BILLS

- Related to HB135, Early Childhood Teacher Development, and SB324, Early Childhood Educator Development, both of which appropriate \$2 million to the Children, Youth and Families Department for the professional development of early childhood educators.
- Related to HB125 and SB34, Teacher & Principal Evaluation System, both of which require the department to convene a council to create an educator-developed teacher evaluation system.
- Related to HB158, Teacher Evaluation Pilot Project, which authorizes the creation of a pilot project for a fair and equitable teacher evaluation system.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- LESC Files
- Legislative Finance Committee
- University of California San Diego
- PED and New Mexico PreK
- American Educational Research Association
- Journal of Educational Research

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