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LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS
53rd Legislature, 2nd Session, 2018

Bill Number	<u>HB23/aHLELC</u>	Sponsor	<u>Gentry/Ivey-Soto</u>
Tracking Number	<u>.209184.2</u>	Committee Referrals	<u>HLELC/HEC</u>
Short Title	<u>Additional Graduation Requirements</u>		
Analyst	<u>Rogne</u>	Original Date	<u>1/29/18</u>
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BILL SUMMARY

Synopsis of HLELC Amendment

The House Local Government, Elections, Land Grants & Cultural Affairs Committee amendment to HB23 (HB23/aHLELC) adds language which adds an option for high school students to apply for employment to fulfill the final next step plan requirement. The amendment also makes a technical change to reconcile language so that students must apply, but not commit, to a postsecondary educational institution, internship or apprenticeship, military service, or employment and indicate this on their final next step plan prior to high school graduation.

Synopsis of Original Bill

House Bill 23 (HB23) amends the final next step plan, starting with graduating cohort 2020, to require students to apply to a postsecondary educational institution, an internship or apprenticeship, or military service prior to graduation. Student completion of a final next step plan is not a high school graduation requirement.

FISCAL IMPACT

HB23/aHLELC does not contain an appropriation.

According to the Public Education Department (PED), HB23/aHLELC would require additional resources of school districts and charter schools to implement the bill.

SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

HB23/aHLELC requires students to file an application with a college or show that they have applied for an internship or apprenticeship, employment, or military service as part of their final next step plan. Subsection B of Section 22-13-1.1 NMSA 1978 requires high school students to complete a final next step plan during senior year and prior to graduation. However, a completed next step plan is not a graduation requirement, nor is following through with what is in the next step plan required to graduate. According to PED and representatives from several school districts,

student fulfillment of graduation requirements is under the purview of each school district and charter school.

In practice, schools implement next step plans differently and implementation is largely dependent on resources. Next step plans, which begin at the end of the eighth grade year, and final next step plans, which are completed during the senior year, are meant as a touch point for students and their parents or guardians to plan for the future with the student’s guidance counselor or other school official. The next step plan process tends to be more about the conversation than the document itself. While some districts have the capacity for every student to meet with a counselor or school official, many do not, and many schools do not have the capacity for students to update next step plans annually.

Under current law, final next step plan means “a next step plan that shows the student has committed or intends to commit in the near future to a four-year college or university, a two-year college, a trade or vocational program, an internship or apprenticeship, military service or a job” according to paragraph 5 of Subsection P of Section 22-13-1.1 NMSA 1978. Local school boards are currently responsible for ensuring high school students have the opportunity to develop next step plans and are informed about curricular options and post-high-school opportunities. Under HB23/aHLELC, local school boards would also be responsible for ensuring students are informed about the financial benefits of graduating from college and the availability of financial aid.

Several media outlets are reporting that this bill requires students to apply to college, an internship or apprenticeship, employment, or military service to graduate high school (for example: <https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/01/health/new-mexico-graduation-trnd/index.html>; <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2018/01/31/new-mexico-high-school-college-plans-proposal/1085156001/>; <http://www.newsweek.com/new-mexico-bill-require-students-apply-college-797095>); however, this is incorrect. **Although HB23/aHLELC modifies the final next step plan to require students to apply to college, an internship or apprenticeship, employment, or military service, student completion of final next step plans is not required to receive a New Mexico Diploma of Excellence.**

HB23/aHLELC could lead to an increase in the number of New Mexico high school students enrolling in postsecondary education if students were able to have meaningful conversations with guidance counselors or other school officials as part of their final next step plan. Research has demonstrated that behavioral “nudges,” such as the requirement in HB23/aHLELC, can be an effective and low-cost method to influence students to apply to college. In addition, the act of applying to college itself can increase students’ likelihood of enrollment. According to *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*, the requirement of completing a college application to graduate from high school, combined with the requirement to take the SAT or ACT, increased the number of San Marcos High School students enrolling in Texas colleges by 11 percent. The mere act of applying and being accepted to college may change the way students perceive their qualifications as well as the value of college itself. Though there is a large body of research about raising students’ post-high-school aspirations, this was the only study LESC staff was able to find on the relationship between applying to college and the likelihood of enrollment.

Preparing students for postsecondary education is increasingly important as two-thirds of jobs created by 2022 will require some form of postsecondary education. In 2016, through executive order, Governor Martinez announced the long-term “Route to 66” goal of having two-thirds of New Mexicans with some form of postsecondary credential by 2030. The state’s postsecondary

attainment rate for 2014, the latest information available, was 43.6 percent including certificates but only 33.4 excluding certificates.

Student Advisement. In FY17, the student to guidance counselor ratio was 247:1; it is important to note this ratio includes guidance counselors, social workers, and psychologists. It is not clear how many of these individuals provide college and career guidance. According to representatives from several school districts, a lack of counselors prevents the current next step plan and final next step plan requirements from being fully implemented. College advisement is especially crucial for first generation and low-income students.

FAFSA. PED noted that the implied and explicit educational outcome of HB23/aHLELC is to increase the number of New Mexico graduates who have taken concrete steps toward post-high-school training, a major component of which is increasing the number of students enrolling in postsecondary programs. The Free Application for Federal Financial Aid (FAFSA) in New Mexico is a major benchmark of eventual postsecondary enrollment for all students and in particular low-income students. Research has documented the effect of FAFSA completion on not only initial college enrollment, but also on college persistence. The FAFSA connects students with money for college through the largest provider of student federal aid in the nation. Despite the need and importance of the FAFSA in the college going process, many students do not complete this step. A 2006 study by the American Council on Education Center for Policy Analysis found that over 67 percent of low-income students do not complete the FAFSA.

Postsecondary Readiness. Requiring students to apply to college does not address college-readiness or completion. It is important to ensure students are prepared for success; currently, 39.1 percent of New Mexico high school graduates (graduated in FY16) enrolled in remedial coursework as first time freshman at New Mexico public postsecondary institutions.

The Higher Education Department (HED) also noted that under HB23/aHLELC students may apply to college as part of their final next step plan because it would be the least binding option. This could increase the number of applications received by New Mexico's public higher education institutions, especially those that do not have an application fee. It is unknown if an increase in applications would result in an increase in matriculation. If there is an increase in matriculation, the number of students eligible for the legislative lottery scholarship may increase.

Internships or Apprenticeships. HB23/aHLELC does not address the quality or availability of internships and apprenticeships available to high school graduates. Apprenticeships are most often part of Career Technical Education (CTE) programs, and may only be available to select students who took CTE dual credit coursework that articulated into a certificate or degree. Successful implementation of HB23/aHLELC may require significant buy-in from the business community to provide high quality opportunities for recent graduates.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

HB23/aHLELC requires the secretary of PED to promulgate rules to implement this requirement beginning with students entering 11th grade in the 2018-2019 school year.

According to PED, oversight of student fulfillment of graduation requirements will remain the purview of school districts and charter schools. However, there may be additional systemic support required of PED in order to support school administrators and counselors in the implementation and tracking these additional next step plan requirements.

TECHNICAL ISSUES

On page 3, lines 14-15, the bill states that the next step plan should now include “the financial benefits of graduating from a college and the availability of financial aid.” According to PED, research shows that the benefits of graduating from college vary greatly between majors and degrees obtained; in addition a key component of a successfully completed next step plan is that a student identifies a career goal. PED recommends that page 3, lines 14-15 be amended to the following: “an analysis of the availability of financial aid and the cost of degree completion and the financial benefits of graduating from a college with a degree in the student’s area of career interest.”

PED proposes an amendment to include FAFSA submission as part of the revised next step plan graduation requirements. The following language for page 2, lines 12-17 is proposed: “For students entering the eleventh grade beginning in the 2018-2019 school year, the secretary shall promulgate rules that provide that the plan shall require a student to submit the Free Application for Federal Financial Aid (FAFSA) and file an application with a college or show the student has applied for an internship or apprenticeship, employment, or military service.”

OTHER SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

HB23/aHLELC makes no mention of what happens if a student fails to produce a final next step plan.

The New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired noted that blind students often require additional time to be ready for postgraduate placements to learn the compensatory skills of blindness. The sponsor may wish to require postsecondary institutions to waive application fees.

HED noted that currently some higher education institutions charge an application fee, while others do not. HB23/aHLELC will require all students to pay a college application fee, for those institutions that require it, unless the institution waives it.

According to PED, requiring this for graduating cohort of 2020 does not comply with Section 22-13-1.1 NMSA 1978, which does not allow for graduation requirements to change when a freshmen class has started high school. This may need to begin with graduation cohort of 2021 or 2022.

ALTERNATIVES

The nonprofit CareerWise Colorado places students in paid 2 to 3 days a week apprenticeships while receiving 2-3 days of hands-on work experience and 2 to 3 days of classroom learning each week. An alternative to HB23/aHLELC could be partnering with CareerWise Colorado to establish a similar program in New Mexico, or establishing an independent program that provides work-based learning opportunities for students to develop post-high-school goals and to prepare for life after high school.

An alternative to HB23/aHLELC would be expanding CTE programs in New Mexico.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- LESC Files
- University of New Mexico
- New Mexico State University
- Regional Educational Cooperative #6
- Higher Education Department
- New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired
- Public Education Department

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