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**LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE**  
**BILL ANALYSIS**  
**56th Legislature, 1st Session, 2023**

<b>Bill Number</b>	<u>SB289</u>	<b>Sponsor</b>	<u>Gonzales/Correa Hemphill</u>
<b>Tracking Number</b>	<u>.224077.1</u>	<b>Committee Referrals</b>	<u>SEC/SFC</u>
<b>Short Title</b>	<u>K-12 Outdoor Education Program</u>		
<b>Analyst</b>	<u>Andrews</u>	<b>Original Date</b>	<u>2/8/2023</u>
		<b>Last Updated</b>	<u>3/13/2023</u>

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**BILL SUMMARY**

Synopsis of Bill

Senate Bill 289 (SB289) requires the Public Education Department (PED) to establish an outdoor and environmental education program for all public schools. SB289 requires PED to update academic standards across all subject areas to include outdoor and environmental education and to develop a scope and sequence to integrate outdoor and environmental education for kindergarten through twelfth grade.

This bill also requires PED to coordinate with school districts and institutions of higher education (IHEs) to integrate outdoor and environmental education into curricula for professional development for teachers in all grades and in teacher preparation programs. Finally, SB289 encourages informal education resources – such as zoos, nature centers, wildlife rehabilitation centers, museums, parks, water treatment facilities and others – to develop complementary outdoor and environmental education programs.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

This bill does not contain an appropriation.

The Senate Finance Committee amendment to House Appropriations and Finance Committee Substitute for House Bills 2 and 3 (HB2/HAFCS/aSFC) includes \$250 thousand from the public education reform fund for outdoor classroom initiatives for expenditure in FY24. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of FY24 shall revert to the public education reform fund.

In 2022, the Public Education Department (PED) received \$500 thousand for outdoor classroom initiatives through the General Appropriation Act. Since that time, PED has hired an Outdoor Learning Specialist in its Math & Science Bureau, and has another Outdoor Learning Specialist position that is vacant at the time of this analysis.

## SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

Outdoor learning, or outdoor education, [refers](#) to a broad, interdisciplinary set of activities that include discovery, experimentation, learning about and connecting to the outdoors and natural world, and engaging in environmental and recreational activities in an outdoor setting.

Numerous studies show the importance and benefits of outdoor activity. A recent meta-analysis of 296 previous studies regarding the relationship between nature contact and children’s health concluded, “current literature supports a positive relationship between nature contact and children’s health, especially for physical activity and mental health, both public health priorities. The evidence supports pediatricians advocating for equitable nature contact for children in places where they live, play, and learn.”

The Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) notes research supports positive outcomes of outdoor education for elementary, middle school, and high school students, including benefits to educational outcomes, child development, student engagement, and student health. Evidence suggests that school performance increases when students have outdoor learning experiences. In addition to improved educational outcomes on standardized tests, students demonstrate improved in-school behavior, attendance, and attitudes toward education. Outdoor education also supports social emotional and intellectual development, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Outdoor education is healthy and fun for students and provides opportunities to engage with nature and their community.

## ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

SB289 would have significant administrative implications for PED, including:

- Developing a scope and sequence to integrate outdoor environmental education across subject areas for kindergarten through twelfth grade;
- Updating all academic content and performance standards in administrative rule to include outdoor and environmental education; and
- Coordinating with school districts and IHEs to integrate outdoor and environmental education into curricula for professional development for teachers in all grades and in teacher preparation programs.

It is important to note scope and sequence documents are typically developed at the local level (see **Other Significant Issues**). In addition, updating all academic content and performance standards in administrative rule means all standards will have to go through the formal rulemaking process, a significant and timely undertaking. Lastly, the requirement in SB289 for PED to coordinate with IHEs to integrate specific curricula into teacher preparation programs is not currently a typical practice at PED.

## OTHER SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

SB289 requires PED to develop a scope and sequence to integrate outdoor and environmental education for kindergarten through twelfth grade. While PED likely has capacity to do this work with its current budgeted positions, it is important to note that while PED has authored [New Mexico Instructional Scope \(NMIS\)](#) documents for core subjects, NMIS documents are not the same as a scope and sequence. PED [defines](#) the NMIS as a” teacher-influenced tool designed to provide instructional planning at the programmatic level for districts and instructional level for

teachers” and [defines](#) a scope and sequence as “K-12 learning objectives aligned to district, state, and national expectations. Scope indicates the depth to which the standards should be taught, and sequence suggest the order.”

Scope and sequence documents are developed by school districts and charter schools at the local level, and should be aligned to the NMIS. In the [NMIS foreword](#) PED acknowledges that “district leadership, along with their principals, teachers, and other educational professionals play a critical role in the development of pacing guides and in sequencing standards in a way that is specific to their local community’s context.” PED recommends that school districts rely on the NMIS in the development of local scope and sequence documents.

#### **SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

- LESC Files
- Children, Youth, and Families Department
- Early Childhood Education and Care Department

**MCA/tb/cf/mb/cf/msb/cf/mb**