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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

SPONSOR	Gonzales/Hemphill	LAST UPDATED	2/28/23
		ORIGINAL DATE	2/9/23
SHORT TITLE	K-12 Outdoor Education Program	BILL NUMBER	Senate Bill 289
ANALYST			Helms

ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL OPERATING BUDGET IMPACT* (dollars in thousands)

	FY23	FY24	FY25	3 Year Total Cost	Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
Total		\$150.00 - \$400.00	\$150.00 - \$400.00	\$300.00 - \$800.00	Recurring	General Fund

Parentheses () indicate expenditure decreases.

*Amounts reflect most recent analysis of this legislation.

Relates to House Bill 2

Sources of Information

LFC Files

Responses Received From

Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD)

Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD)

Public Education Department (PED)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Senate Bill 289

Senate Bill 289 (SB289) adds a new section to the Public School Code to require the Public Education Department (PED) to establish K-12 outdoor education programs, to integrate outdoor and environmental education to academic content, and to provide professional development in outdoor and environmental education.

This bill does not contain an effective date and, as a result, would go into effect June 16, 2023, (90 days after the Legislature adjourns) if signed into law.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

SB289 does not contain an appropriation. The House Appropriations and Finance Committee (HAFC) substitute for House Bill 2 appropriates \$250 thousand for outdoor classroom initiatives to the Public Education Department from the public education reform fund.

LFC analysis estimates recurring costs of at least \$150 thousand and up to \$400 thousand per year from the general fund. SB289 would require additional work from PED to coordinate with both schools districts and post-secondary institutions to integrate outdoor and environmental

education into ongoing educator preparation, and to determine – across 13 grades and curriculums, which is significant – course integration for outdoor and environmental education. This work load will likely require at least one additional fulltime equivalent employee and additional administrative costs at PED at an estimated \$150 thousand in additional salaried costs. While the current LFC recommendation for FY24 has \$250 thousand for outdoor classroom initiatives from nonrecurring sources, SB289 would make outdoor and environmental education an ongoing aspect of curriculum and provide a basis for any precedent in outdoor classroom funds to become recurring.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

Districts and charters have spent 1.5 percent, or \$7.3 million, towards outdoor education support, including supplies and professional development. With 40 percent, or over \$150 million, of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) II funds, and over 96 percent, or \$850 million, of ESSER III federal funds remaining, schools can continue to use federal funds to build infrastructural, curricular, and professional supports for outdoor and environmental education.

PED analysis notes, while PED may develop guidelines, school districts and charter schools are responsible for details of outdoor learning. PED analysis notes:

Sequence of instruction is determined by school districts and charter schools. Developing both a scope and sequence, as required by SB289, may constitute an overreach on the part of PED, which instead recommends a process of developing outdoor learning and environmental education content standards and working with stakeholders to also develop a scope integrated with other subjects' current standards and scopes, as found in existing [New Mexico Instructional Scope \(NMIS\)](#).

PED has some minimal preliminary guidelines on outdoor learning, including defining terms, consolidating possible resources for districts and teachers, and defining which spaces in and around schools are potential resources or appropriate spaces for outdoor learning. Albuquerque Public Schools demonstrates some ways outdoor learning is already integrated to some grade levels, including requirements for third, fourth, and fifth grades to visit and participate with local resources on the environment and natural resources.

The medical and educational literatures are replete with studies showing the importance of and benefits of outdoor activity. A summative study from the University of Washington looking at over 300 related studies notes, “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 in advocating for equitable nature contact for children in places where they live, play, and learn.”

ECECD analysis of SB289 notes:

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

Prior analysis from the Environmental Development Department on outdoor education initiatives notes:

In order to avoid duplication of efforts, it would be imperative for the new staff at the outdoor learning program within PED to work closely with the Outdoor Recreation Division and its existing outdoor education programs, including the outdoor equity fund grant and paid outdoor high school internship program.

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