

LESC bill analyses are available on the New Mexico Legislature website (www.nmlegis.gov). Bill analyses are prepared by LESC staff for standing education committees of the New Mexico Legislature. LESC does not assume any responsibility for the accuracy of these reports if they are used for other purposes.

LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS
57th Legislature, 1st Session, 2025

Bill Number	<u>SB344</u>	Sponsor	<u>Soules</u>
Tracking Number	<u>.230253.1</u>	Committee Referrals	<u>SEC/SFC</u>
Short Title	<u>K-4 Vision and Hearing Screening</u>		
Analyst	<u>Davalos</u>	Original Date	<u>2/15/2025</u>
		Last Updated	<u>3/3/2025</u>

BILL SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

Senate Bill 344 (SB344) would appropriate \$2 million to the Public Education Department (PED) to provide vision and hearing screening for students in kindergarten through fourth grade.

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill appropriates \$2 million from the general fund to PED for expenditure in FY26. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of FY26 shall revert to the general fund.

The House Appropriations and Finance Committee Substitute for House Bills 2 and 3 (HB2/HAFCS) does not include funding to PED specifically for proposed screenings in SB344. HB2/HAFCS does, however, include \$150 thousand from the early childhood and care program fund for deaf and hard-of-hearing screenings for young children.

Additional analysis indicates there may be other avenues for funding vision and hearing screening, although it is unclear at exactly what amounts:

- The Department of Health (DOH) analysis of SB344 notes the New Mexico save our children's sight fund ([Section 21-1-31 NMSA 1978](#)) provides vision screenings and follow-up exams for all New Mexico children, regardless of income, and operates under DOH's authority. HB2/HAFCS does not include funding for this specific fund.
- The Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) reports vision and hearing screenings are covered under the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) [program](#) for Medicaid-eligible recipients under the age of 21.

SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

Vision and Hearing Screening In New Mexico. According to the New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department's (ECECD's) FY23 Annual Outcomes [Report](#), prekindergarten

programs are required to ensure all children receive health, developmental, vision, hearing, and dental screenings to identify those needing special education or support services. Additionally, [FOCUS On Young Children's Learning](#), New Mexico's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS), provides early childhood programs with resources to enhance quality and support children's growth, development, and learning.

The New Mexico Administrative Code ([7.30.11 NMAC](#)) outlines the requirements for vision screening in public schools. All prekindergarten, kindergarten, first, and third grade students are required to undergo vision screening to identify potential visual impairments early. The regulation specifies the procedures for conducting these screenings, including the qualifications of personnel, acceptable screening methods, and the process for notifying parents or guardians if a potential issue is detected. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of maintaining records of the screenings and any follow-up actions taken to ensure students receive the necessary care. Although vision screening has been addressed in New Mexico's Administrative Code for prekindergarten through third grade, it does not address hearing screenings.

Importance of Early Vision and Hearing Screenings. Vision and hearing screenings are critical in early childhood, as they help families and professionals understand the foundation of a child's development of cognitive, social, and academic skills. [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) highlights that early screening for hearing loss is vital, as even mild or moderate impairments can hinder speech and language development, leading to literacy and academic performance difficulties. Similarly, research shows [poor visual acuity](#) in young children is also associated with lower reading proficiency, delayed motor development, and decreased classroom engagement.

Detecting and addressing vision and hearing impairments early ensures students have equitable educational opportunities and can reach their full potential. [Research](#) has consistently shown that uncorrected vision and hearing impairments can significantly impact a child's ability to learn, communicate, and socialize effectively. Therefore, it is important that children have regular screenings as they can provide numerous benefits beyond academic performance. Children who detect vision and hearing issues early can receive the necessary interventions to prevent classroom frustration and disengagement. When vision and hearing impairments are addressed appropriately, students can see improved communication, confidence, and social interactions with peers and teachers.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

PED would need to administer the appropriation and provide vision and hearing screening for kindergarten through fourth grade students.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- LESC Files
- New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD)
- New Mexico Regional Education Cooperatives Association (NMRECA)
- New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NMSBVI)

ND/mca/jkh