PUBLIC EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
BILL ANALYSIS
2026 REGULAR SESSION

SECTION I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Check all that apply:

		Date Prepared: February 5 2026
Original	x **Amendment** ___	**Bill No:** HM43
Correction ___	**Substitute** ___	**Committee Referrals:** HEC

Agency Name and Code: PED - 924

Sponsor: Gonzales

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Short Title: STUDY FRAMEWORK FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL RANKINGS

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SECTION II: FISCAL IMPACT

(Parenthesis ( ) Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

APPROPRIATION (dollars in thousands)

Appropriation		Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
FY27	**FY28**		
None	None	N/A	NFA

REVENUE (dollars in thousands)

Estimated Revenue			Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
FY27	**FY28**	**FY29**		
None	None	None	N/A	NFA

ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL OPERATING BUDGET IMPACT (dollars in thousands)

	FY27	**FY28**	**FY29**	**3 Year Total Cost**	**Recurring or Nonrecurring**	**Fund Affected**
Total	None	None	None	None	N/A	NFA

Duplicates/Relates to Appropriation in the General Appropriation Act: None as of 2/5/26.

SECTION III: NARRATIVE

BILL SUMMARY

Synopsis: House Memorial 43 (HM43) requests the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) collaborate with the Public Education Department (PED) to conduct a study of the methodologies used to rank performance and growth at public schools, including the Lexile framework. A Lexile measure is a standardized numerical score used to match a student's reading ability with the difficulty of a text. Lexile scores range from below 0L for beginning readers to over 2000L for advanced texts. The measure reflects the level of text a student can typically understand with about 75 percent comprehension.

The LESC would be required to present its findings and recommendations to the New Mexico Legislative Council by November 1, 2026.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

This memorial does not contain an appropriation.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

HM43 requests the LESC study alternative public school ranking systems that use Lexile measures. The memorial duly notes that many national ranking systems, such as the widely publicized U.S. News & World Report ranking, use inconsistent methods that raise equity concerns. As proof of concept for alternative ranking systems, HM43 cites a 2025 white paper commissioned by the New Mexico Coalition of Educational Leaders (NMCEL) that concludes national rankings of public education understate New Mexico's comparative levels of reading proficiency.

All education ranking systems have limitations, however, National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) math and reading scores provide the most accurate comparison of student performance across states. The NAEP, also known as the "Nation's Report Card", is the only nationally comparable measure of student achievement administered in every state. The NAEP is administered every other year to a sample of students in Grades 4, 8, and 12. Mathematics, reading, science, and writing are tested most regularly, and the arts, civics, economics, geography, technology and engineering literacy, and U.S. history are assessed periodically.

New Mexico's average NAEP scores were the lowest of the 50 states for Grade 4 and 8 math and reading in 2022 and 2024. The state's rankings were slightly higher in 2019 and 2017, but New Mexico's average scores still ranked at or near last place nationally. Raw NAEP scores fail to account for the socioeconomic factors that influence standardized test results, and these inherent biases tend to discriminate against students of color and English language learners. Adjusting NAEP scores for demographic differences provides a different state outcome landscape:

Urban Institute's Demographically Adjusted State Rankings, New Mexico – 2024 NAEP				
Grade 4		Grade 8		
Math	Reading	Math	Reading	Average Rank
#37	#31	#37	#30	31.0

Both the NMCEL white paper and HM43 dismiss the validity of the NAEP ranking system and its

demographically adjusted variants with minimal explanation. The primary criticism outlined in HM43 is the small proportion of New Mexico students who are selected to take the NAEP assessments; however, NAEP uses a well-documented and expert-reviewed methodology to select a sample that is representative of the broader student population in the state. First, schools are chosen to represent different locations, sizes, and student populations; next, students within those schools are selected to reflect the state's racial, economic, and academic diversity.

Notably, the cross-state comparisons in the white paper rely on data from a convenience sample of 29 out of 89 New Mexico school districts, with participation based on opt in and data availability. The analysis does not demonstrate that the participating districts are representative of the state's student population. PED's assessment data indicates that Native American students are considerably underrepresented in the white paper sample, while white and Hispanic students are overrepresented. Students with disabilities are also slightly underrepresented in the white paper sample. As a result, the findings of the white paper are not as generalizable as those derived from NAEP scores.

While HM43 and the NMCEL white paper raise valid concerns about how New Mexico's reading proficiency is represented in national rankings, the NAEP remains the most reliable and broadly comparable measure of student performance across states. HM43 cites the NMCEL white paper as "proof of concept" for the proposed LESC study; however, the Lexile-based comparisons proposed in the white paper rely on non-representative convenience samples and multi-step conversions that introduce uncertainty and obfuscate interpretability. These concerns are outlined in the sections below. Considering the limitations of Lexile conversions and the reliability of NAEP, it may be advisable to prioritize analyses that have clearer implications for improving literacy.

Concerns with New Mexico Cross-Assessment Growth Trends: The NMCEL white paper concludes that reading proficiency in New Mexico is improving at rates higher than the national average; however, a methodological choice likely overstates student performance and growth. The New Mexico-specific trend analysis combines results from multiple assessments taken during the school year and selects the highest Lexile score each student earns that year, rather than using an average score or a score from a consistent testing window. The paper uses the MetaMetrics 50th-percentile Lexile values for winter as the national benchmark, making for poor comparison with the "highest-score-of-the-year" trends calculated for New Mexico.

Concerns with Cross-State Comparisons: In cross-state comparisons, the authors of the white paper take the student performance data for 35 state-specific summative assessments, which are treated as equivalents to the New Mexico Measures of Student Success and Achievement (NM-MSSA), and attempt to standardize state-specific reading proficiency cutoffs into a comparable measure. They conclude that New Mexico's standards for reading proficiency are comparatively stringent.

The recalculated proficiency cutoffs are the result of a multi-step process that introduces uncertainty at each stage. First, the authors map the scores from 35 state-specific summative assessments onto the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) Rasch Unit (RIT) scale. The authors determine the MAP cut scores that correspond to each state's definition of "proficient" performance, then convert these MAP-linked proficiency cutoffs to Lexile measures using a table developed by MetaMetrics.

This approach depends on the accuracy of links between state tests and the MAP scoring scale, which likely varies between states due to varying achievement standards. School districts elect to participate in MAP testing in most states, and the characteristics of the districts that participate in MAP testing may not be representative of the broader student population. Additionally, the paper assumes that the relationship between MAP scores and Lexile measures has remained unchanged since 2019. Unverified assumptions introduce uncertainty at each step of the conversion process, making the resulting cross-state comparisons less reliable than assessments designed specifically for national comparability.

The MAP-to-Lexile conversion in the white paper strays from industry standards and best practices for equating assessment data. Standard equating methods require a direct comparison of a common factor across exams: either the same set of students needs to take each of the different tests, or the same item needs to be shared across different tests. The MAP-to-Lexile conversion compares different assessments administered to different groups of students at varying points in the school year.

Additionally, Lexile scores may be an inadequate measure for comparing reading proficiency levels. Text complexity is the only dimension measured by Lexiles, while literacy achievement, as measured by the NM-MSSA, requires students to demonstrate their ability to compare and analyze a variety of texts, determine central themes, and write arguments supported by evidence.

The white paper does not convincingly demonstrate a more reliable or consistent method as proof of concept for the LESC study.

PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

None.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

HM43 requests that LESC works with PED in its study of education ranking systems, but the nature of the collaboration is not detailed. PED would likely need to dedicate resources to sharing and analyzing assessment data and ensuring compliance with privacy laws.

CONFLICT, DUPLICATION, COMPANIONSHIP, RELATIONSHIP

None.

TECHNICAL ISSUES

None.

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

None.

ALTERNATIVES

None.

WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ENACTING THIS BILL

None.

AMENDMENTS

None.