



LFC Requester: Liu

**PUBLIC EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
BILL ANALYSIS
2026 REGULAR SESSION**

SECTION I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Check all that apply:

Original Amendment
Correction Substitute

Date Prepared: January 21 2026

Bill No: SB84

Committee Referrals: SEC/SFC

Agency Name and Code: PED - 924

Sponsor: Padilla

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Short Title: SCHOOL WATER MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

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SECTION II: FISCAL IMPACT

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

APPROPRIATION (dollars in thousands)

Appropriation		Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
FY27	FY28		
\$5,000.0	\$5,000.0	Nonrecurring	GF

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	\$620.0– \$880.0	\$500.0– \$760.0	N/A	\$1,120.0– \$1,640.0	Nonrecurring	GF

Duplicates/Relates to Appropriation in the General Appropriation Act: None as of 1/21/2026.

SECTION III: NARRATIVE

BILL SUMMARY

Synopsis: Senate Bill 84 (SB84) would create a two-year pilot program to develop and evaluate an elective high school course in water management and conservation. The program would be administered by the Public Education Department (PED), with its curriculum designed with the Higher Education Department, the Department of Health, the State Engineer, and Indian Pueblos, Tribes, and Nations.

The bill does not provide an effective date. Laws go into effect 90 days after the adjournment of the legislature enacting them, unless a later date is specified. If enacted, this bill would become effective May 20, 2026.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

The bill appropriates \$5 million dollars from the General Fund to PED for expenditure in fiscal FY27 and FY28 for curriculum development and operational expenses, including teacher salaries, for the high school water management and conservation program. Any unexpended balance remaining at the end of FY28 shall revert to the general fund.

The bill allows PED to use up to four percent of appropriations for the program to fund professional development for participating educators and PED's administrative costs. See, "Administrative Implications," below.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

Increasing water scarcity in New Mexico presents a significant threat to the state's natural environment and economic development. In coming years, the state will demand a steady supply of qualified water management professionals to address the 25 percent decrease in available water projected in New Mexico's [50-Year Water Action Plan](#).

Provisions of the bill would require PED to administer a two-year pilot project to study the feasibility of providing practical environmental education that prepares high school students for careers in water management and conservation. The proposed pilot program consists of the creation and evaluation of a one-credit, elective high school course on water management and conservation.

PED must develop the course curriculum and select three high schools to participate in the program, with one school each from a class A county, class B high valuation county, and class B low valuation county, respectively. County classifications are based on population and net taxable property valuations; by selecting schools in counties with varying characteristics, PED can demonstrate a range of feasibility and performance levels across the state's diverse communities.

PED would also be responsible for evaluation design and data collection to assess student and program performance. These findings must then be reported to the legislature and governor.

With the current shortage of math and science teachers, it may be difficult to find teachers who can teach this course.

PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

None.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

The provisions of the bill have administrative implications for PED and the three schools selected to participate in the program. The PED would be required to determine the criteria and procedures for selecting three high schools to participate in the program; provided that the high schools shall be selected from one class A county, one class B high valuation county, and one class B low valuation county. PED would be required to dedicate agency resources to curriculum development, educator training programs, evaluation design, data collection, and reporting. Participating schools would need to accommodate the new elective courses in their roster of course offerings, identify and train existing staff to teach the courses, or recruit additional personnel to support the pilot project. PED may need to promulgate rule for appropriate teacher endorsement or licensure requirements for teaching the course.

Given that PED must coordinate with the Higher Education Department, the Department of Health, the State Engineer, and Indian Pueblos, Tribes, and Nations, the bill will likely generate administrative costs for these entities as well.

PED would be required to establish reporting and evaluation requirements for the participating schools, including student and program assessments.

The bill would allow PED to use up to four percent of any appropriation for the program for educator training and administrative costs (\$200,000 for FY27 and FY28). PED estimates the Department will need at least one additional 1.0 full-time employee (FTE) for the duration of the pilot program, or longer, if the program is permanently adopted by the legislature. This would incur an estimated annual cost of \$140,000 for one FTE, including benefits, for a total cost of approximately \$280,000 for the two-year pilot program.

PED also anticipates other administrative costs for program development. PED would need to convene an educator workgroup to develop the curriculum, which would generate an estimated initial expense of \$120,000 for development and piloting. Additionally, PED would work with an external vendor to support writing teams, content development, assessment items development, field testing developed units, project management, professional learning, and technical assistance, which could cost \$300,000–\$500,000 annually for the life of pilot project. Lastly, the PED would work with external, independent evaluator to support data collection and analysis, which could range from \$60,000–\$120,000 annually for the life of the pilot project.

	FY27	FY28
Initial Curriculum Workgroup	\$120.0	
Content Development and Project Management	\$300.0–\$500.0	\$300.0–\$500.0
Data Collection	\$60.0–\$120.0	\$60.0–\$120.0
One PED FTE	\$140.0	\$140.0
Total:	\$620.0–\$880.0	\$500.0–\$760.0

The total two-year administrative costs for PED are estimated to be between \$1.12 million and \$1.64 million, which exceeds the \$200,000 allowed. Given the administrative implications, the appropriations in the bill are insufficient to support implementation of the program.

Additionally, PED would face time constraints if it must develop and implement the curriculum by FY27. PED estimates that development of the course will take approximately 24 months. In the last six months of course development, implementation roll out could occur in parallel to development. As such, it is likely infeasible to implement the program by FY27.

While the NM STEM-Ready! Science Standards include water resource education, the bill's directive to "provide practical environmental education" would at least require their update, and possibly the development of additional science standards for the required model curriculum. Those standards must include a focus on experiential and practical learning that would likely necessitate fieldwork by students and faculty.

CONFLICT, DUPLICATION, COMPANIONSHIP, RELATIONSHIP

- Relates to [House Bill 37](#), Man-Made Water Infrastructure Failure, which would define resting of land due to a special water district's infrastructure failure as "agricultural use" and require such districts to certify water scarcity to the county assessor.
- Relates to [*House Bill 63](#), NMFA Water Project Changes, which would authorize the New Mexico Finance Authority (NMFA) to make loans or grants from the water project fund for certain water projects and declares an emergency.
- Relates to [House Bill 109](#), Water Project Fund Changes, which would permit the NMFA to fund water projects from the water project fund without the approval of the legislature through December 31, 2028.
- Relates to [Senate Bill 83](#), Accelerating Resilience Innovations Drylands, which would appropriate \$1.937 million from the general fund to the Board of Regents of the University of New Mexico (UNM) for expenditure in FY27 for the university's Accelerating Resilience Innovations in Drylands Institute to be used for a number of purposes, including ecological monitoring and continue programs that foster cooperation among UNM and kindergarten through 12th Grade students enrolled in STEM programming.

TECHNICAL ISSUES

None.

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

None.

ALTERNATIVES

PED may be eligible to receive grant funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's [Innovative Water Infrastructure Workforce Development Program](#), which was created to accelerate career pipelines in the water utilities sector. The EPA confirmed they are developing

another notice of funding opportunity via email on 1/23/2026. UNM [received a grant from this program in 2024](#) to develop a program that introduces undergraduates to career opportunities in the drinking water and wastewater utility sector. PED may consider collaborating with the UNM team to expand the program to high school students

WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ENACTING THIS BILL

None.

AMENDMENTS

Sponsors of the bill may want to consider amending the project to increase outlays for PED's administrative costs and teacher training. Additionally, sponsors may want to consider amending the timeline for implementation of the program to allow sufficient time for curriculum development.