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December 12, 2005

MEMORANDUM

TO: Legislative Education Study Committee

FR: Pamela Herman

RE: STAFF BRIEF: SERVICE LEARNING IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The 2005 Interim Workplan for the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) includes a presentation on service learning in the public schools.

Issues:

The Education Commission of the States (ECS) describes service learning as the combination of meaningful service to the community, academically rigorous classroom education and deliberate, structured reflection so that students connect what they are learning to the service performed. ECS identifies the following important characteristics of service learning:

- Strong curricular connections and ongoing opportunities for students to reflect upon service experiences;
- Projects that meet genuine community needs and have clear education goals that engage students in challenging cognitive and developmental tasks;
- Assessments that enhance student learning and measure progress toward standards;
- Student voice that is expressed in selecting, designing, implementing, and evaluating the service project;
- Diversity that is valued in practice and outcomes;
- Community partnerships that provide a real-world context for student learning;
- Acknowledgment and celebration of service contributions made by students; and
- Systematic evaluation to determine the effort's effectiveness.

The 2003 Legislature acknowledged the value of service learning in HB 212, *Public School Reforms*, by requiring high schools to offer service learning as an elective. Electives must meet state content and performance standards. In addition, since 2000¹, the Legislature has appropriated funds for service learning as follows:

- For FY 00 and FY 01, special appropriations of \$100,000 each year; however, these appropriations were vetoed by the Governor;
- For FY 04, a special appropriation of \$100,000, which the Public Education Department (PED) states that it used to support projects in 10 public school districts through contractors, as follows:
 - The Center for Service Learning Opportunities in Education (CSLOE) assisted 25 schools to provide 29 service-learning projects involving approximately 1,600 students, 70 teachers, and more than 70 community agencies in Albuquerque, Farmington, Aztec, Santa Fe, Taos, Gadsden, and Portales school districts;
 - The University of New Mexico Institute for Professional Development designed three graduate level teacher professional development modules that were delivered to 45 teachers from Farmington, Taos, Santa Fe, Gadsden, and Portales; and
 - Albuquerque Technical-Vocational Institute (TVI) supported service learning projects and courses that involved more than 1,100 students and a variety of community agencies and school districts in Portales, Santa Rosa, Socorro, and Rio Rancho, and provided eight teacher professional development workshops, courses and public forums; and
- For FY 06, through language in the *General Appropriation Act of 2005* stating the appropriation to the Teacher Professional Development Fund included funding for service learning. PED states that \$70,000 from the fund has been allocated through a joint powers agreement (JPA) with the Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD) for a contract with a service learning provider.

Service learning projects in schools are also supported by federal and private foundation grants. For example:

- PED reports that it received a three-year grant of federal funds for FY 05 through FY 07 from the Learn and Serve America program, which PED is using to support projects in Silver City and Gadsden; and
- The New Mexico Acequia Association states that it has received grants from the Christensen Fund and the Marguerite Casey Foundation for Sembrando Semillas, a project at Mora, Peñasco, and Taos High Schools, wherein five to 10 students at each school are learning traditional agricultural practices from local farmers and ranchers, and documenting these practices for the creation of school curricula.

¹ Prior to 2000, LESC records show that in FY 95, the State Department of Education (SDE, now PED) allocated \$55,000 from Special Projects funds appropriated by the Legislature in 1994 for service learning.

Background:

In 2002, the National Commission on Service Learning released a report entitled “Learning In Deed” that documented the benefits of high quality service learning for schools, which include:

- Increased student engagement and stronger ties to school, community and society;
- Improved academic achievement as shown by standardized test scores and other measures;
- Better social behavior, reduced risk-taking, and greater trustworthiness, responsibility, and empathy;
- Exposure to new careers and more positive workplace attitudes;
- Positive school environments, including improved staff morale; and
- Stronger community organizations and increased community support for schools.

Also in 2002, ECS released its report “Learning That Lasts”, which presents “a host of compelling reasons” why service learning should be institutionalized into K-12 education. ECS points to better continuity, sounder teaching practice, increased resources, improved support for and from staff, and better community relations. Most important, the report states, is the finding that “students with multiple service-learning experiences clearly had more significant and lasting gains across a range of measures than did students who only had a single exposure. . . .Where service learning is part of the district’s infrastructure, students will typically experience service-learning once in every grade or grade span.”

A 2005 report jointly issued by the American Youth Policy Forum and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, “Restoring the Balance Between Academics and Civic Engagement in the Public Schools”, presents evidence that efforts to raise academic performance in schools have displaced attention from the task of “educating young people to become engaged members of their communities, not just as wage earners and taxpayers, but as citizens. . .who participate in the civic life of their communities.” To address this concern, the report outlines a seven-point action plan for developing both academically proficient and civically engaged students, as follows:

- Clearly connect expectations for both program and student performance regarding civic education and civic engagement to state or district standards and assessment;
- Enact supportive education policy at the national, state, and local levels that provides a framework for balancing academic performance and civic engagement;
- Implement a system-wide accountability plan, including meaningful assessment of both student outcomes and opportunities to learn;
- Plan and secure funding for professional development for educators to support mastery among students of the knowledge and skills required for civic engagement;
- Secure funding by districts and/or schools to hire a coordinator to facilitate collaboration between the school and the community;
- Maintain active awareness and sensitivity to the role of school culture in academic performance; and
- Maintain communication and public relations efforts to inform all stakeholders.

Presenters:

Dr. Paula Papponi, Associate State Director for Professional Development and School Improvement, North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, will describe how integrating service learning into core academic programs improves student academic proficiency and civic engagement.

Ms. Paula García, Executive Director, New Mexico Acequia Association, will describe the association's Sembrando Semillas service learning project in three rural northern New Mexico school districts.

Questions the committee may wish to consider:

1. Why did PED choose to enter into a JPA with the Commission on Community Volunteerism at CYFD for service learning activities required in the 2005 legislative appropriation for the Teacher Professional Development Fund?
2. What models exist in New Mexico or elsewhere for K-12 programs that successfully balance service and learning to achieve demonstrated results?
3. What support do New Mexico schools and school districts need in order to integrate service learning more fully in the K-12 curriculum?
4. What benefits, if any, might schools in New Mexico gain from such an effort?