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November 14, 2005

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Legislative Education Study Committee

**FR:** David Harrell

**RE: STAFF BRIEF: FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN EVALUATION REPORT**

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The workplan for the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) for the 2005 interim includes a presentation on full-day kindergarten. Enacted in 2000, the statute that implemented full-day kindergarten requires that the Public Education Department (PED) compile program results submitted by school districts and make annual reports to the LESC and the Legislature.

**Issues:**

- School year 2004-2005 marked the completion of the five-year phase-in of voluntary full-day kindergarten statewide so that now students in all 89 school districts in New Mexico have access to full-day kindergarten (for more details about the phase-in, see "Background," below). According to PED, enrollment during school year 2004-2005 was 24,543.
- Among other provisions, the 2000 law:
  - requires PED to adopt rules for the development and implementation of "child-centered and developmentally appropriate full-day kindergarten programs";
  - requires school districts to apply to PED for funding; and
  - requires PED to monitor the programs and notify them that failure to meet the benchmarks prescribed by PED will "result in the cessation of funding for the following school year."

- The law also requires PED to require schools with full-day kindergarten programs to conduct “age-appropriate assessments.” More specifically, the PED rule requires literacy-based pre-tests by September 30 and post-tests by April 30, with the student test data reported to PED by May 30 of each school year. Since school year 2003-2004, PED has required that the programs use as their assessment instrument the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literary Skills (DIBELS), an instrument designed by researchers at the University of Oregon to measure student reading development. According to PED, DIBELS uses a set of standardized, individually administered measures of early literacy development to predict a student’s later reading proficiency.
- During the 2004 interim, the LESC received a written report for school year 2003-2004 that showed at least modest gains in most of the areas measured but that did not identify which programs met the prescribed benchmarks or explain how the benchmarks were measured.
- Finally, the PED rule requires that school districts provide professional development to teachers, assistants, and principals in three specific areas:
  - scientifically based reading research and its implications for instruction;
  - best practices of English as a second language and English language learner instruction; and
  - the principles of peer and expert coaching.

**Background:**

*New Mexico*

- The 2000 Legislature passed legislation to implement voluntary full-day kindergarten programs statewide, to be phased in over a five-year period, allowing one-fifth of the kindergarten classes to become full-day each year. As required by law, the programs were first implemented in schools with the highest proportion of students most in need (based on the at-risk index in the Public School Funding Formula) and in schools with available classroom space.
- A study published by the Education Commission of the States (ECS) in June 2005 highlights New Mexico’s program as an effective method of providing universal access to full-day kindergarten.
- Since 2000, the Legislature has provided a grand total of \$51.4 million in recurring General Fund dollars for operational purposes through the State Equalization Guarantee. Now full-day kindergarten is part of base program cost each year.
- Funding for facilities has come from the Public School Capital Outlay Council (\$18.3 million); the General Fund (\$5.0 million); and the proceeds of two General Obligation Bonds (for \$5.0 million each), the more recent of which was approved during the November 2004 election, after the beginning of school year 2004-2005.

- In addition, to address the facilities needs of the final year of the phase-in, the Public School Capital Outlay Council allocated up to \$12.0 million for classrooms through a loan from the Public School Facilities Authority (PSFA) Deficiencies Correction Program, with \$5.0 million to be repaid through the issuance of the bonds noted above. The PSFA arranged for the delivery by August 2004 of enough suitable portable buildings to accommodate the full-day kindergarten programs that did not have a permanent space. Since then, the PSFA reports that all of these portable buildings are still in use (none having been returned) although the PSFA has encouraged school districts to move higher grades into the portables and to house full-day kindergarten in permanent spaces.

### *The Nation*

- On the national level, the June 2005 ECS study reports that approximately 60 percent of kindergartners attend a full-day program. Among its benefits, according to ECS, full-day kindergarten:
  - provides continuity for children accustomed to full-day experiences outside of the home and continuity with schedules in first grade and beyond;
  - reduces the number of disruptions and transitions that children experience in a typical day; and
  - allows teachers more time for both formal and informal instruction.
- In addition, the ECS report cites several studies showing that students in full-day programs demonstrate “significantly stronger academic gains over the course of the kindergarten year than their counterparts in half-day programs.” One 2004 study in particular found “statistically significant gains in both reading and mathematics when compared to children who participated in half-day programs.”
- These findings notwithstanding, ECS also reports that the research on the long-term benefits of full-day kindergarten is “mixed,” suggesting that additional research is needed “to confirm the extent and duration of positive outcomes.” To illustrate the variety:
  - A recent (January 2004) longitudinal study in Indiana found “significantly higher basic skills test scores” as far as grade 7 for students who had attended full-day kindergarten; and it found a reduction in the number of students who were retained or referred to special education. Among its recommendations, this report calls for state-level evaluation (which New Mexico law requires) and the tracking of any cost savings that the program provides.
  - On the other hand, a December 2002 study by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory concluded that there is no “strong evidence showing that academic gains made in full-day programs last beyond 1<sup>st</sup> grade for all students.” Part of the difficulty, this study says, stems from the number of variables that affect students’ performance (making it difficult to isolate the effects of full-day kindergarten itself) and the small number of studies in which students have been assigned to full- or half-day programs at random.
- Nonetheless, ECS strongly recommends full-day kindergarten as a component of each state’s early learning and elementary school reform efforts.

- Reporting on the access to full-day kindergarten, the ECS report says that nine states (Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and West Virginia) mandate that school districts offer full-day kindergarten; but only two of them (Louisiana and West Virginia) mandate that age-eligible children attend them. In the other 41 states (New Mexico among them), full-day kindergarten is optional. Moreover, only seven states overall (Alaska, Georgia, Illinois, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, and Wisconsin) provide what ECS considers a strong fiscal incentive for districts to offer it; and 19 actually provide disincentives (that is, no additional state funding for the additional time and/or a funding level lower than that for first grade). In addition, the ECS survey also revealed that many states did not know the percentage of their school districts that offer full-day kindergarten.
- Finally, some of the states without statewide full-day kindergarten programs are considering them. Earlier this month in Utah, for example, the state school board began hearing the results of research into full-day kindergarten and proposals to implement it (perhaps over a five-year phase-in). And in Delaware, the state has begun implementing full-day pilot programs and reimbursing school districts that already use local money to pay for them, working toward the Governor's goal of full-day kindergarten available statewide by 2008.

### **Presenters:**

For this presentation:

- Dr. Catherine Cross Maple, Deputy Secretary of Learning and Accountability, PED, will provide an overview of early literacy programs in New Mexico in general, including the roles of full-day kindergarten and Kindergarten Plus; and
- Dr. Lana Paolillo, Bureau Chief, Early Literacy Bureau, PED, will discuss the data for the full-day kindergarten programs from school year 2004-2005.

### **Questions the committee may wish to consider:**

1. What evidence is there that full-day kindergarten is working in New Mexico?
2. What plans are there to conduct a longitudinal study of the effects of New Mexico's full-day kindergarten program? How might such a study be best conducted and supported?
3. What are the estimates of the cost savings from full-day kindergarten in New Mexico?
4. How many half-day kindergarten programs remain? What are the enrollment percentages for half-day and full-day kindergarten?
5. What has been the parental response to full-day kindergarten
6. Does PED monitor the professional development that school districts are required to offer? Has this professional development been effective or helpful?
7. What facilities needs remain to be addressed?