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November 13, 2006

MEMORANDUM

TO: Legislative Education Study Committee

FR: Pamela Herman

RE: STAFF BRIEF: COLLEGE/WORKPLACE READINESS AND HIGH SCHOOL REDESIGN: HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA OPTIONS

The 2006 Interim Workplan for the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) includes a series of presentations regarding the college/workplace readiness of New Mexico high school students. This presentation focuses on high school diploma options available to students.

Issues:

- Recent national public opinion research published by the Educational Testing Service indicates that Americans believe the nation's high schools are falling short of what is needed of them.

  - fewer than one in 10 adults surveyed believes that students are significantly challenged in high school;
  - half of those surveyed think that the secondary education system needs major changes or a complete overhaul; and
  - more than three-quarters of the adults surveyed believe that the United States will be less competitive in 25 years unless high schools improve.

- Teens themselves echo these sentiments, according to a 2005 survey for the National Governors Association. In particular, half of them think the senior year is a waste of time or could be much more meaningful, and fewer than one in 10 said that high school has been "very hard."

- During the 2004 interim, the LESC heard testimony regarding widespread criticism at the national level of high school programs, including calls for elimination of the senior year and reports from the National Commission on the High School Senior Year advocating for improved alignment, higher achievement and more rigorous alternatives for students. PED representatives described the participation of a New Mexico team in the United States Department of Education (USDE) Preparing America's Future high school initiative launched in 2003. Subsequent presentations to the LESC have included updates on high school reform efforts, particularly focused on High Schools That Work and Career Clusters (see below).

- During the 2006 interim, the LESC has heard testimony regarding recent data that show how poorly high school programs serve New Mexico students: a high percentage of students drop out before graduating, and an even higher percentage of those who graduate need to take remedial courses once they start postsecondary education. Ethnic minority and low-income students drop out and need remediation at significantly higher rates than others.

- Spurred by national and local calls for reform and by the evidence that high schools are not addressing many students' needs, New Mexico and other states are developing a range of options that will help students derive more advantage from their high school experience and make the senior year, in particular, more meaningful.

Current Diploma Options

- New Mexico statute provides for one type of high school diploma. To earn a diploma, a student must complete 23 units, including 15 and one-half required units and seven and one-half elective units, and must pass a state graduation examination in reading, English, mathematics, science, and social science (see Attachment).[1]

- Statute provides for a student who has completed the required units but who has not passed the exam to receive a certificate indicating the number of credits earned and the grade level (A certificate of this type is not considered a regular diploma for accountability purposes under state law or the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*). If the student passes the graduation exam within five years after exiting the school system, the student may then receive a diploma.

- State statute also provides that a school that exceeds educational standards as determined by PED may be granted a waiver of statutory graduation requirements.

    - PED states that it has waived the Communication Skills graduation requirement for three school districts, Albuquerque Public Schools (APS), Hobbs Municipal Schools, and Tatum Municipal Schools, based on an explanation that the areas of speaking and writing are covered in each district's four required English or other appropriate courses.

[1] For a more comprehensive discussion of state graduation requirements, see the November 2006 LESC staff brief "College/Workplace Readiness and High School Redesign: Graduation Requirements for Public Schools."

- Under its statutory duty to prescribe requirements for public school graduation, the Public Education Department (PED) has issued rules that provide for certain exceptions to the graduation requirements in law.

  - For students enrolling or re-enrolling in public schools, local boards may adopt policies to accept credits earned through correspondence extension study, foreign study, home study courses, or non-PED accredited non-public schools.

  - For students currently enrolled, PED rule determines the circumstances under which credits earned through correspondence may be used to satisfy graduation requirements.

  - Local districts may design courses known as alternative credit to satisfy the specified credits required for graduation and must provide notification to PED, pursuant to PED rule.

  - A student with a disability may receive either a diploma or a certificate with a follow-up plan of action. PED rule requires that graduation plans must be a part of all individualized education plans (IEPs) and describes three types of programs of study leading to a diploma, as well as circumstances under which a certificate with follow-up plan of action should instead be awarded. A student who earns a certificate may continue to receive special education services until either receiving a diploma or turning 22 years of age.

- **GED Certificate:** Current law also requires PED to issue a general educational development (GED) certificate to any candidate who is at least 16 years of age and who has successfully completed the GED tests. PED rule governs the award of GED certificates, which it calls the "New Mexico High School Diploma."

  - To take the GED test, a person must be at least 16 years old and not be a graduate of or attending an accredited high school; if under age 18, a person must have a form signed by the local superintendent and the parent indicating when the student withdrew from school; and if in a state facility, be authorized or recommended by the warden, director, or educational director of the facility.

  - The Education Commission of the States (ECS) reports that the GED is a potential second chance for dropouts to attain postsecondary education, and that GED holders who gain a postsecondary degree benefit as much from it as high school graduates. Unfortunately, ECS states, most GED earners do not enroll in postsecondary programs, and less than 3.0 percent earn a bachelor's degree. USDE data show that, in general, the economic prospects for GED holders are closer to those of dropouts than of high school graduates.

- PED states that school districts or the department have awarded diplomas, certificates and GED certificates as follows:

Academic Credentials Awarded 2001-02 to 2005-06

	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
Diplomas	13,418[2]	16,923[3]	17,892	17,353	17,822
Certificates	99	366	413	353	n.a.
GEDs	7,610	3,281	3,946	4,390	4,476
Total	21,127	20,570	22,251	22,096	22,298

- PED states that it cannot provide contemporaneous data on how many students completed all the coursework for graduation but did not pass the High School Competency Exam.

High School Options that Add Value to the Standard Diploma

A growing number of New Mexico high schools offer courses and programs that result in a regular high school diploma but have added value, such as postsecondary credit or scholarship aid.

Opportunities to Earn College Credit While Still in High School

- **Advanced Placement (AP):** The AP program gives students a way to get a head start on college while still in high school. The program, operated by the College Board, delivers introductory level college curricula in high school using high school faculty who participate in AP professional development. The College Board administers national exams to measure student knowledge and skills, and encourages institutions of higher education (IHEs) to grant credit or advanced placement to students based on their scores on the tests.

  - In 2006, the Legislature appropriated approximately $1.2 million to PED for advanced placement for FY 07. PED states that the funds will be used as follows:
    - $53,899 for PED operational costs;
    - $75,000 for AP online courses;
    - $225,000 to nine Regional Education Cooperatives for AP professional development;
    - $300,000 for the AP Summer Institute professional development activity, to New Mexico Highlands University in partnership with New Mexico State University; and
    - $539,275 to the College Board for professional services, including statewide professional development and a PSAT pilot project in 14 public school districts.

  - In spring 2006, the College Board states that 5,549 New Mexico students took AP exams, a 5.9 percent increase over 2005. They took a total of 8,891 exams, a 7.0 percent increase over 2005. Of AP exams taken, 3,989 or approximately 45 percent of the total, earned scores of 3 or better required by most colleges to earn college credit or advanced placement.

- **Dual Credit:** Dual credit agreements allow students to receive both high school and postsecondary credit for courses they take from IHEs while still in high school. According to the Higher Education Department (HED), dual credit is the most effective policy tool to improve alignment between high school and college.

[2] Does not include APS
[3] Does not include two high schools

- Since 1990, state statute has required a school district to transfer to a public two-year IHE the tuition and fees for any student who, during the term, is counted in the membership of the public school district and who will receive high school credit for coursework at the two-year IHE. Legislation in 2004, 2005 and 2006 would have required the same for four-year IHEs; however, it did not pass.

- Both PED and HED have established rules for governing dual credit programs, including a requirement that cooperating school districts and IHEs have written agreements that set out terms for payment and other considerations.

- During the 2003 and 2004 interims the LESC heard presentations regarding dual credit programs, in response to joint memorials from both chambers of the 2003 Legislature that requested PED and the Commission on Higher Education (CHE, now HED) to study how these programs could be improved. The study identified two significant issues and made recommendations for addressing them:
  - lack of consistency among existing dual credit agreements, particularly in terms of payment arrangements; and
  - lack of reliable data on the number of students participating in dual credit statewide.

- The following data, provided by PED, HED, and the New Mexico Association of Community Colleges (NMACC), indicate the number of students their data systems show to have taken dual credit courses:

Dual Credit Enrollment Data Per PED, HED, and NMACC

	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
PED	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	753	602
HED (includes private school students)	4,939	6,336	6,345	6,372	6,691
NMACC (public school students)	5,204	6,235	5,484	6,017	n.a.

- During the 2006 interim, the Dual Credit Subcommittee of the PED/HED Joint Task Force on Alignment has taken up these and other concerns regarding dual credit.

- **Early College High School and Career Pathways:** Both of these programs are variants on the concept of dual credit, but they go far beyond offering isolated postsecondary courses to high school students. These programs allow students to start work toward postsecondary or career goals when they enter high school, and to graduate with both a high school diploma and a postsecondary credential. Early evidence from state and national sources suggests that increased relevance as well as rigor in their high school experience can motivate students to engage enthusiastically in and make good use of their high school years.

  - In September 2006, the LESC heard a report on HM 33, *Early College High School Initiative Study* (2005). The presentation by Eastern New Mexico University-Roswell and Hagerman High School described how the partners were implementing a model combined high school/college program that enables students to earn two years of college credit as well as a high school diploma within five years of entering 9th grade. The model, promoted by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Jobs for the Future, blends high school and college into a coherent educational program leading to a baccalaureate program or a career.

- In the 2005 and 2006 interims, the LESC heard presentations regarding Career Cluster programs. According to the USDE, a career cluster or pathway is a "coherent, articulated sequence of rigorous academic and career courses, commencing in the 9th grade and leading to an associate degree, an industry-recognized certificate or licensure, or a baccalaureate degree and beyond." Like Early College High Schools, Career Cluster programs require close cooperation between participating high schools and IHEs. At the 2006 presentation, PED stated that 59 high schools in New Mexico are involved in Career Cluster program development or implementation. The LESC also heard testimony about the Governor's Workforce Coordination and Oversight Committee initiative to promote Career Clusters, including distribution of *Work in New Mexico: New Mexico Career Cluster Guidebook*.

- **Distance Learning:** During the 2006 interim, the LESC heard a presentation regarding growing opportunities to fill curricular gaps in schools of any size and to offer postsecondary coursework to high school students statewide through distance learning technologies.

Opportunities to Earn Scholarships by Taking More Rigorous High School Coursework

- **State Scholars Initiative:** The State Scholars Initiative is a national program of USDE and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) to motivate students to complete a rigorous course of study in high school to be better prepared for postsecondary success. The initiative enlists state level business and education partnerships to work with students in middle and high school to bring its message of the value of a rigorous high school curriculum directly to students.

  - 1n 2003, the New Mexico Business Roundtable for Educational Excellence undertook a State Scholars Initiative pilot project in Albuquerque Public Schools, Rio Rancho Public Schools, and Bernalillo Public Schools.

  - New Mexico students who complete the State Scholars Initiative program may be eligible for a federal Academic Competitiveness (AC) grant of $750 as college freshmen and $1,300 as sophomores if they are income-eligible for a Pell grant and meet other criteria.

  - PED has identified three other ways to qualify for an AC: Students may take a specified course of study similar to the State Scholars Initiative (see Attachment 1); they may take at least two AP courses and earn scores of 3 or better; or they may participate in the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, taking a minimum of two IB courses and earning a score of 4 or better (of a possible 7) on both IB exams. Currently, the United World College of the American West in Las Vegas, New Mexico, is the only approved IB program in the state.

Presenters:

Dr. Catherine Cross Maple, Deputy Secretary, Learning and Accountability, PED, will describe the diploma options available to students in New Mexico high schools. Dr. Elizabeth Gutierrez, Director, P-20 Policy Development and Programs, HED, will present the work of the Dual Credit Subcommittee of the HED/PED Alignment Task Force.

Questions the committee may wish to consider:

1. What types of options should New Mexico high schools and IHEs offer to high school students to keep them engaged and prepare them adequately for postsecondary education and careers?

2. How might leaders and educators better inform students about the value of more rigorous high school courses of study?

3. How can New Mexico ensure that high school students across the state have equitable access to options that will prepare them adequately for their future?

4. What needs to be done to address barriers that currently exist to making dual credit options more readily available to high school students?

ATTACHMENT 1

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS - 2006

	STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS	STATE SCHOLARS INITIATIVE	ALTERNATIVE TO STATE SCHOLARS INITIATIVE
English	4 units	4 units	4 units
Mathematics	3 units, one equal to Algebra I or higher	3 units, including Algebra I, Algebra II and Geometry	3 units, including Algebra I and a higher level course such as Algebra II, Geometry or Data Analysis and Statistics
Communication Skills or Business Education	1 unit, major emphasis on writing and speaking. May include a language other than English		
Language Other than English		2 units	1 unit
Science	2 units, one with a lab component. For students beginning 9th grade in 2005-2006, 3 units including one with a lab component	3 units with labs: Biology, Chemistry and Physics	3 units, including 2 from Biology, Chemistry or Physics
Social Science	3 units, including US History and Geography, World History and Geography, and Government and Economics	3.5 units	3 units
New Mexico History	.5 unit		
Physical Education	1 unit		
Electives	8 units. For students beginning 9th grade in 2005-2006, 7.5 units.		