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HOUSE MEMORIAL 131

**49TH LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - FIRST SESSION, 2009**

INTRODUCED BY

Rick Miera

A MEMORIAL

REQUESTING THE PUBLIC SCHOOL CAPITAL OUTLAY OVERSIGHT TASK  
FORCE TO STUDY THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL SIZE AND STUDENT  
SUCCESS AND TO DETERMINE THE IMPACT OF REDUCING SCHOOL SIZE ON  
CAPITAL AND OPERATIONAL COSTS.

WHEREAS, some research indicates that schools with a small  
student population may have a positive effect on graduation  
rates, student achievement, student engagement and satisfaction  
among students, parents, principals and teachers; and

WHEREAS, other research indicates that these small-  
population schools may have either a mixed or negligible effect  
on school climate and student success; and

WHEREAS, according to data from the public education  
department, in school year 2008-2009, sixty-one percent of New  
Mexico ninth graders entered high schools with populations

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1 larger than one thousand students, and eighteen percent entered  
2 high schools with more than two thousand students; and

3 WHEREAS, several school districts in New Mexico have  
4 embraced the tenets of smaller schools and are implementing a  
5 "small learning communities" philosophy in new school design  
6 and renovation, especially at the middle school and high school  
7 levels, as a way of retaining the economies of scale derived  
8 from a larger school setting while at the same time creating a  
9 small school educational and academic environment; and

10 WHEREAS, the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation has  
11 invested more than two billion dollars (\$2,000,000,000) in  
12 grants to make changes in the way schools are organized,  
13 including reducing their size, changing the approach to  
14 instruction and adjusting the curriculum, with the hope that  
15 these schools will operate in a more cost-effective manner; and

16 WHEREAS, the foundation discovered that many of the  
17 schools in which it had invested showed improvement, but others  
18 did not improve student achievement in any significant way  
19 because, although they did reduce school size, they did not  
20 take steps to improve the school culture, such as allowing the  
21 principal to select the team of teachers or change the  
22 curriculum; and

23 WHEREAS, some researchers caution that simply reducing a  
24 school's enrollment will not automatically improve academic  
25 performance, and they state that the effectiveness of small

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1 schools may depend more directly on the school culture that is  
2 created within the schools than on their absolute size; and

3 WHEREAS, the impact of reducing school size on operational  
4 costs, such as personnel, maintenance and equipment, is  
5 uncertain in New Mexico schools; and

6 WHEREAS, in some instances, the capital costs of smaller  
7 schools may be reduced through the shared use of community  
8 educational resources that support educational programs,  
9 including physical education facilities, sports fields,  
10 gymnasiums, swimming pools, performing arts facilities, fine  
11 arts facilities, libraries and media centers; and

12 WHEREAS, no complete statewide analysis of existing  
13 community educational facilities is currently available;

14 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF  
15 REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO that the public  
16 school capital outlay oversight task force be requested to  
17 study the relationship between school size and student success  
18 and to determine the impact of reducing school size on capital  
19 and operational costs; and

20 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the task force consider input  
21 from public school personnel and from representatives of  
22 educational, community and business organizations and that it  
23 make recommendations to the legislative education study  
24 committee, the legislative finance committee and the governor  
25 before the second session of the forty-ninth legislature; and

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1 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that, among other issues, the study  
2 include a review of current research regarding the impact of  
3 smaller schools on educational achievement; and

4 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the study include a comparison  
5 between building smaller schools or implementing smaller  
6 learning communities within a larger school; and

7 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the study compare the  
8 performance of small schools in New Mexico with the performance  
9 of larger schools in New Mexico; and

10 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the staff of the legislative  
11 council service work in conjunction with the staffs of the  
12 public school capital outlay council, the legislative education  
13 study committee, the legislative finance committee, the public  
14 education department and the office of education accountability  
15 to provide technical assistance to the task force; and

16 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this memorial be  
17 transmitted to the co-chairs of the public school capital  
18 outlay oversight task force, the secretaries of public  
19 education and finance and administration, the chair of the  
20 public school capital outlay council and the directors of the  
21 legislative council service, the legislative education study  
22 committee, the legislative finance committee and the office of  
23 education accountability.