

Fiscal impact reports (FIRs) are prepared by the Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) for standing finance committees of the NM Legislature. The LFC does not assume responsibility for the accuracy of these reports if they are used for other purposes.

Current FIRs (in HTML & Adobe PDF formats) are available on the NM Legislative Website (legis.state.nm.us). Adobe PDF versions include all attachments, whereas HTML versions may not. Previously issued FIRs and attachments may be obtained from the LFC in Suite 101 of the State Capitol Building North.

FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

SPONSOR Hall **ORIGINAL DATE** 01/29/10
LAST UPDATED _____ **HB** 184
SHORT TITLE Outdoor Classroom Program **SB** _____
ANALYST Woods

APPROPRIATION (dollars in thousands)*

| Appropriation | | Recurring or Non-Rec | Fund Affected |
|---------------|---------|-------------------------|------------------|
| FY10 | FY11 | | |
| | \$100.0 | Recurring | General |

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

* Fiscal impact data provided by the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

LFC Files

Responses Received From

Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD)

Public Education Department (PED)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

House Bill 184 seeks to appropriate \$100.0 to the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department, State Parks Division (SPD), to support the Statewide Outdoor Classroom Program (OCP). The legislation authorizes OCP funding to be spent by SPD at locations that SPD determines are suitable for outdoor classroom programs, including state parks and other federal, state, local and privately managed areas. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of fiscal year 2011 would revert to the general fund.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

EMNRD notes that the appropriation is to "...continue the work of the OCP, which has been funded from FY08 through FY10."

PED advises that staff in the Rural Education Bureau and staff of the Math and Science Bureau of the Public Education Department (PED) administered part of the FY09 Outdoor Classroom Project; however, the Math and Science Bureau and the Rural Education Bureau at PED have not been administrating Outdoor Classroom Projects in FY10. If this bill is enacted for FY11, staff in

the Math and Science Bureau of the PED would collaborate with State Parks to ensure alignment of Outdoor Classroom programs with NM Content Standards and Benchmarks. This work would already be included in the staff work assignments so continuing the outdoor classroom program should not increase that Bureau's workload.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

EMNRD notes that the OCP is a partnership between the Public Education Department (PED) and SPD, and has reconnected students to the natural and cultural heritage of New Mexico since its inception in 2007. The OCP provides standards-based curricula and programs, and is intended to support the needs and goals of teachers. Since 2007, more than 70,000 students from 54 of New Mexico's 89 school districts have participated in OCP learning experiences, and over 300 teachers have been involved with curriculum development workshops and trainings. Further, EMNRD states that the OCP has met with a great deal of success, with SPD, PED and other partners having worked together on projects in five different areas:

- Field trip transportation grants: Since 2007, SPD has given transportation grants statewide for 219 field trips to natural and historic sites across the state for more than 17,877 New Mexico kids.
- Standards-based curricula: SPD has worked with PED and with other partners to ensure that OCP programming is tied to state benchmarks and standards. Since the program's inception, 300 teachers have taken part in curriculum review and training workshops for such programs as the *Bosque Education Guide-Lower Rio Grande Edition*, the *Bitter Water, Bottomless Lakes* curriculum for the Pecos River Basin in southeastern New Mexico, and the dinosaur trackway and habitat exploration curriculum at Clayton Lake State Park.
- Teacher Resources: Because of the OCP, both PED and SPD have trained more than 300 teachers from across the state. Due to OCP funding through the Math and Science and Rural Education Divisions from PED, as well as partnerships with SPD, teachers statewide have received supporting resources for their programs, such as training, kits, trunks, and materials that are essential for well-prepared, hands-on learning experiences in the field.
- Service Learning Programs: Both SPD and the Rural Education Bureau at PED have helped support service learning projects, which provide hands-on stewardship programs while building a sense of community and citizenship. SPD has worked with schools to supported four, multi-year service learning programs, for such projects as watershed and wildlife monitoring, inventory, and habitat restoration, at Sugarite Canyon, Cimarron Canyon, Eagle Nest Lake and Manzano State Parks.
- Evaluation: To ensure that the OCP is meeting the needs of teachers and students, SPD commissioned an independent evaluation of the program in FY10, particularly focusing on teacher satisfaction with the program. Response was overwhelmingly positive and of the 500 teachers evaluated: 100% would recommend OCP to a colleague; 99% would participate in another OCP experience; 90% said the experience helped improve student's attainment of core content and standards; 83%

said they include fieldtrips as a regular component of their overall lesson plans; and 78% changed their teaching practices due to the OCP.

EMNRD adds that the OCP supports the academic, physical and mental health of students statewide. Studies have shown that students who had structured outdoor learning experiences as part of their classroom study realized improved test scores, reduced disciplinary issues, better problem solving skills and social growth. Adequate funding is vital to continuing and expanding the performance of the OCP. In the past three years, the partnership between the PED and SPD, as well as many other governmental and non-governmental entities has solidified, allowing for increased opportunities for students statewide to participate in the OCP. Since 2007, more than 70,000 students have participated in OCP learning experiences and the performance of the OCP will be limited without funding in FY11. HB184 would continue to support the grants, resources and training that teachers and students have indicated are important to them and that are making a difference.

As background, PED advises the following:

In 2005, the Legislature passed SJM 24, *The New Mexico Outdoor Education Initiative: Improve Education and State Parks Relationship*, requesting the PED and State Parks Division to prepare a study outlining opportunities for increased partnerships between them. The result is a partnership between the Division and PED to use the unique resources provided by the state's parks for improved and expanded outdoor education programs. The report produced through this partnership, "Making New Mexico Schools Work Outdoors," cites recent research indicating outdoor, interactive education can increase student test scores, reduce discipline problems, build citizenry skills and resource stewardship ethics, and increase teacher job satisfaction. The Outdoor Classroom Program has four components: teacher training institutes, hands-on teacher resources, transportation funding, and service learning projects.

According to NM State Parks, since its inception in 2007, more than 10,000 students from 110 schools across the state have participated in Outdoor Classroom Program learning experiences, and over 100 teachers have been involved with curriculum development workshops and trainings. The program seeks to positively impact NM youth academically, socially, and personally, by connecting classroom learning with engaging, standards-based field trips to outdoor sites, such as State Parks, National Monuments, and wildlife refuges.

PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

EMNRD indicates that the legislation will positively affect three key SPD performance measures: visitation, revenue and the number of interpretive programs delivered to the public.

PED adds that the legislation would contribute to the performance measures related to the percent of students who achieve a level of Proficient or above on the New Mexico Standards-Based Assessment (NMSBA) in math and science. "This legislation supports Goal 1 of PED's *A Strategic Action Plan for Advancing Math and Science Education in New Mexico 2007-2010*: "Increase student interest, participation and achievement in math and science"¹

¹ http://www.ped.state.nm.us/div/math_science/dl/MathSciStrategicPlan%20fv.pdf

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

EMNRD anticipates no administrative implications, noting that, “...it has successfully administered funds for the OCP for several years.” PED adds that, for FY11, “...this work would already be included in the staff work assignments so continuing the program should not increase that Bureau’s workload. Staff in the Math and Science Bureau of the PED would collaborate with State Parks to ensure alignment of Outdoor Classroom programs with *NM Content Standards and Benchmarks*.”

DUPLICATION

EMNRD indicates that HB 184 duplicates the funding request in HB 3.

TECHNICAL ISSUES

EMNRD notes the following:

NMSA 1978, Section 16-2-19, restricts spending appropriations made to SPD to the state parks themselves, unless otherwise authorized. OCP is a statewide program that works with schools to support student educational experiences at diverse outdoor classroom locations, including many locations that are not state parks. Previous OCP funding channeled through PED was not limited by NMSA 1978, Section 16-2-19. HB 184 authorizes OCP funding to be spent by SPD at locations that SPD determines are suitable for outdoor classroom programs in order to continue the OCP’s ability to work with all school districts and utilize diverse outdoor classroom locations. Without this language, SPD would be restricted to providing transportation grants to schools for trips to state parks only, which would deny participation to large areas of the state and many school districts that are not close to state parks.

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

PED states that teachers who participated in Outdoor Classroom Programs in the past evaluated such experiences very highly and reported positive impacts of these experiences on student attitudes, academic understanding, and social interactions.

ALTERNATIVES

None noted by respondents.

WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ENACTING THIS BILL

EMNRD suggests that, if HB 184 is not enacted, the OCP will not continue in its current form and will be a much smaller program in FY11. As a result, students will not be offered as many outdoor classroom experiences statewide and teachers will not have resources, training or standards-based programs to support the OCP. Teachers who have been trained and are already working with the OCP will not have the resources to get their students to outdoor learning locations. Some ongoing progress and momentum in the OCP program will be lost.

House Bill 184 – Page 5

PED notes, “There will be less or no funding for outdoor classroom programs and the percentage of students at or above proficiency levels at the New Mexico Standards Based Assessment might be negatively affected.”

AMENDMENTS

None suggested by respondents.

BW/mew