



## **ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL OPERATING BUDGET IMPACT (dollars in thousands)**

	<b>FY22</b>	<b>FY23</b>	<b>FY24</b>	<b>3 Year Total Cost</b>	<b>Recurring or Nonrecurring</b>	<b>Fund Affected</b>
<b>Total</b>	NFI	NFI	NFI	N/A	N/A	N/A

(Parenthesis ( ) Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

Duplicates/Conflicts with/Companion to/Relates to: N/A

Duplicates/Relates to Appropriation in the General Appropriation Act: N/A

### **SECTION III: NARRATIVE**

#### **BILL SUMMARY**

##### Synopsis:

Senate Bill 32 (SB32) would appropriate \$500 thousand to the Public Education Department (PED) to create an Outdoor Learning Program. The bill would create two outdoor learning positions – one outdoor learning specialist and one outdoor learning assistant – at the PED to promote high-quality professional learning activities and materials focused on creating and expanding outdoor learning opportunities and to provide training and support for public school teachers on outdoor learning protocols and best practices.

#### **FISCAL IMPLICATIONS**

The bill appropriates \$500 thousand from the general fund to PED for expenditure in FY23:

- \$200 thousand for an outdoor learning specialist and an outdoor learning assistant, to be housed at the PED; and
- \$300 thousand to promote high-quality professional learning activities and materials focused on creating and expanding outdoor learning opportunities and to provide training and support for teachers on outdoor learning protocols and best practices.

Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of FY23 shall revert to the general fund.

The FY23 executive budget recommendation includes \$500 thousand for outdoor learning opportunities within the STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math) Initiative line in related, recurring requests.

SB32 would appropriate non-recurring funding in the current year, and assuming the legislature does not appropriate funds in the future, the PED would be required to cover all costs associated with implementing the provisions of the bill in future fiscal years.

#### **SIGNIFICANT ISSUES**

Data suggests youth depression and anxiety are on the rise.

- According to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than one in three high school students reported having persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness in 2019, a 40 percent increase from 2009.
- A recent study suggests the pandemic exacerbated such negative feelings. According to a

2021 [study](#) from the University of Calgary, Global Prevalence of Depressive and Anxiety Symptoms in Children and Adolescents During COVID-19: A Meta-Analysis, depression and anxiety have doubled in children and adolescents globally when compared with pre-pandemic times. One in four adolescents globally are “experiencing clinically elevated depression symptoms, while one in five youth are experiencing clinically elevated anxiety symptoms.”

- In 2020, [the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration National Helpline](#), a confidential and free information service for individuals and family members facing mental or substance use disorders, received 833,598 calls. This is a 27 percent increase from 2019, when the helpline received 656,953 calls.

A 2021 [review](#) of nearly 300 studies, conducted by a team of researchers from Washington State University and the University of Washington, found a strong connection between exposure to green spaces and mental health benefits in children. The research showed access to green spaces improved children’s physical activity, which may also benefit their emotional wellbeing. The benefits were more pronounced in children from historically marginalized communities, which tend to have limited access to green spaces.

Additional research shows that learning outside can also be beneficial to children in the following ways. A [2018 study](#) that assessed third-grade students, found learning outdoors was not just novel for children, but also helped them to focus once they returned to the classroom. Prior studies have found teaching outdoors may also increase [students’ interest](#) in a subject, [intrinsic motivation](#) to learn, and ability to [retain information](#) longer than regular indoor classes.

The PED created reentry guidance for the 2020-2021 school year that provided administrators, teachers, and families with practical tools, resources, and practices to safely conduct learning outdoors: [New Mexico Outdoor Learning | Guidance for 2020-2021 School Reentry](#).

## PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

N/A

## ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

**Outdoor Learning Positions.** The PED would need to develop, post, and hire two positions. Current PED staff would need to begin developing the job descriptions to post when funding becomes available.

**Outdoor Learning Professional Learning.** The responsibilities associated with developing the professional learning activities and materials would fall on existing PED staff, as the two positions required by the bill may not be filled in time to advise, develop, or implement outdoor learning protocols or best practices. The funding for professional learning opportunities would need to be allocated and spent within the fiscal year, meaning some professional learning would need to start before the outdoor learning specialist and assistant are onboarded.

**Other.** For teachers to implement outdoor learning, school districts and charter schools would need to build or convert outdoor learning spaces, which means the provisions of the bill could result in an unfunded mandate.

## CONFLICT, DUPLICATION, COMPANIONSHIP, RELATIONSHIP

N/A

**TECHNICAL ISSUES**

N/A

**OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES**

N/A

**ALTERNATIVES**

Under SB32, the “Outdoor Learning Assistant” position title through the bill is not commensurate with the title of similar positions (i.e., 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center Program Coordinator, Community Schools and Extended Learning Coordinator). The sponsor may wish to amend the position title to reflect this change.

**WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ENACTING THIS BILL**

N/A

**AMENDMENTS**

N/A