

School Board discusses 55th New Mexico legislative session

Written by Gallupsun Staff
Friday, 04 March 2022 04:04



By Molly Ann Howell
Sun Correspondent

The second session of the 55th New Mexico Legislature ended on Feb. 17, and similar to past years, New Mexico schools are looking at how some of the decisions will impact staff and students alike.

Gallup-McKinley County Schools Superintendent Mike Hyatt went over the latest legislative session with the Board of Education during its Feb. 22 meeting.

First up for discussion was Senate Bill 1, which increased the base salaries of New Mexico teachers.

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Gov. Michelle Lujan-Grisham released a statement on Feb. 14 showing her support for the bill.

“The Legislature has answered my call to deliver the largest increase in pay to New Mexico teachers in recent memory, underscoring our shared respect for the profession and commitment to supporting current and future educators,” she stated in a press release. “Education is the bedrock of future success, and a properly compensated workforce is integral to ensuring the strongest possible foundation for New Mexico children.”

New Mexico has a three-tier teacher license advancement plan based on how long a teacher has been teaching and how much education they have. The new law would place a \$50,000 starting salary minimum for Level 1 teachers, a \$60,000 starting salary minimum for Level 2, and \$70,000 for Level 3.

House Bill 60 requires that all native language teachers also receive the minimum of \$50,000.

Another bill that brings money into teachers’ pockets is House Bill 13. This bill gives student teachers \$35,000 while they’re trying to attain their teaching license.

“That’s an exciting bill because we do have a lot of people in our community and around who want to come and student teach for us, and it’s a great way to attract those students to come work for us,” Hyatt said.

Hyatt told the board that House Bill 119 would give GMCS \$1.6 million in revenue that could be spent on buildings and infrastructure needs.

According to Hyatt, one bill would help GMCS with its staff shortages. House Bill 73 allows a person who has retired to come back to work in 90 days if they want to. In the past, a retired teacher had to wait a year before they could come back to teaching.

“The purpose of this bill was to help us better attract and keep – to some extent – teachers in

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our classrooms,” Hyatt said.

One bill that did not pass was Senate Bill 14. However, Hyatt said that this was a good thing for the district, as the bill was a proposal to raise gas tax.

According to Hyatt, the bill was projected to increase gas prices by 30 to 35 cents per gallon.

“This is an example of a bill that is not an education bill, but it would’ve resulted in probably at least a \$50,000 increase to our fuel costs per year.” Hyatt explained.

School board member Priscilla Benally expressed enthusiasm over the impact the bills would have on district coffers.

“I know we still have to do the signing part of it, but it’s nice to know that our indigenous people are supported with House Bill 60 and [that] our teachers are gonna be receiving some additional funding,” Benally said.

The governor has until March 9 to sign the bills into law.