



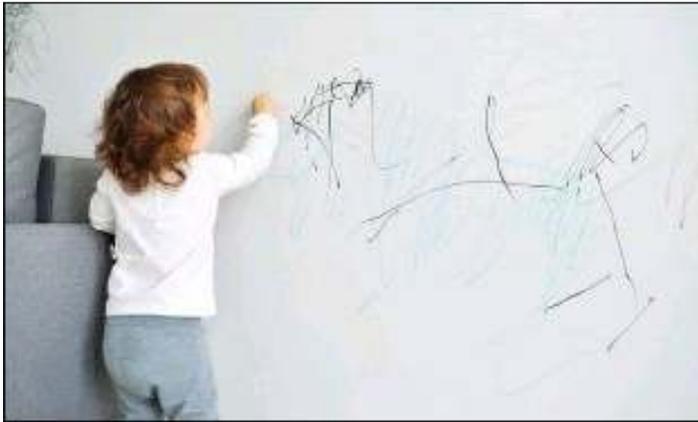
THE TAOS NEWS

Best U.S. Weekly Paper- NNA 2007, 2008, 2010
Inland Press Nation's Best Weekly Newspaper 2009

House passes bill to draw more state funds for pre-K

By Robert Nott rnott@sfnewmexican.com

The Taos News, 21 Feb 2019



Proponents of House Joint Resolution 1, which would take up to another 1 percent, or about \$150 million a year, from the \$17 billion endowment to fund pre-K, say the money would give more of the state's young children a chance to develop social, emotional and motor skills.

The state House of Representatives voted 41-27 Friday (Feb. 15) to advance a proposal to draw money from the state's Land Grant Permanent Fund to pay for more prekindergarten programs.

Taos has a couple of early childhood centers that could benefit from the resolution if it now makes it past the Senate.

"This bill ... is a step in the right direction," said Rep. Javier Martinez, a co-sponsor of the bill, along with Rep. Antonio "Moe" Maestas, a fellow Albuquerque Democrat. "It could transform education in the state of New Mexico."

House Republicans, all of whom voted against the measure, cautioned that any drawdown from the endowment would affect its ability to grow.

"Should we permanently damage the goose that lays the golden egg?" Rep. Jason Harper, R-Albuquerque, asked the assembly.

Four Democrats crossed party lines to vote against the bill.

The outcome was no surprise, given the House has supported similar measures in the past. But the resolution has never moved past the Senate Finance Committee, where conservative Democrats have teamed with Republicans to stop it.

Proponents of the bill, House Joint Resolution 1, which would take up to another 1 percent, or about \$150 million a year, from the \$17 billion endowment to fund pre-K, say the money would give more of the state's young children a chance to develop social, emotional and motor skills, along with basic literacy and math skills, before they start kindergarten.

Advocates say this investment would pay off with better academic achievement scores, fewer high school dropouts and a better shot at success in careers and college for those students.

But critics say any additional draw from the Land Grant Permanent Fund would threaten the long-term solvency of that fund, which for years has sent hundreds of millions of dollars annually to public schools, universities and other beneficiaries across New Mexico through an annual 5 percent draw.

Maestas and Martinez said the bill includes a provision ensuring that if the permanent fund drops to \$10 billion, the extra 1 percent distribution for early childhood education would end.

The initiative has been supported by Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, who announced months before her election that she wanted to pull funds from the endowment to expand pre-K programs.

Should the bill survive the Senate Finance Committee, it would then go to the full Senate for final approval.

Assuming the governor signs it into law, voters would have to approve the deal in the next general election in November 2020. Then Congress has to approve it.

The extra money likely would not be available until at least fiscal year 2022.

This story first published in The Santa Fe New Mexican, a sibling publication of The Taos News.