

013869518

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 324

Offered January 10, 2001

Prefiled January 3, 2001

Establishing a joint subcommittee to study the feasibility and appropriateness of providing universal, voluntary education for four-year-olds in Virginia public schools.

Patron—Puller

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, quality preschool educational efforts have received renewed attention in recent years as studies continue to indicate that children acquire information more effectively in the years preceding kindergarten; and

WHEREAS, educators and policymakers agree that expanding early learning opportunities may reduce the disparity in academic achievement between racial and economic groups; and

WHEREAS, at the federal level, Head Start, a program of preschool development for low-income children instituted during the Johnson administration as part of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (Pub. L. No. 88-452), has demonstrated success in improving pupils' intellectual and emotional development; and

WHEREAS, although some studies have questioned the lasting effects of these initial positive experiences for these children, educators and policymakers have continued to revisit and retool preschool initiatives to ensure program quality and more sustained results; and

WHEREAS, preschool initiatives, like Head Start, may be especially beneficial if supplemented by parental efforts to stimulate infants and to remain involved in their children's educational endeavors throughout early elementary school; and

WHEREAS, the value of well-crafted early childhood initiatives has been borne out in recent studies indicating that at-risk children enrolled in quality preschool programs are five times less likely to become chronic criminal offenders; and

WHEREAS, several states have recently reinforced their efforts in preschool education, such as North Carolina, where the Smart Start Program targets the school readiness and social development of preschool children; and

WHEREAS, the North Carolina Partnership for Children has received a \$527,000 grant to establish the National Smart Start Technical Assistance Center to aid other states in creating early childhood initiatives; and

WHEREAS, in Maryland, legislators are examining all-day kindergarten, the accreditation of child care centers, and continuing education for child care workers; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth's commitment to addressing the educational and developmental needs of these students is evidenced in several initiatives, including the work of the Commission on Early Childhood and Child Day Care Programs, created "to study and provide recommendations addressing the need for quality developmental early childhood and child day care programs and services"; and

WHEREAS, the 19-member Commission was, among other things, to determine the number of at-risk four-year-olds in the Commonwealth and the number of such children who are not enrolled in developmental early childhood or child day care programs and develop a mechanism for the phased integration of and funding for quality developmental early childhood and child day care programs; and

WHEREAS, the General Assembly has expressed in § 22.1-199.1 its finding that "effective prevention programs designed to assist children at risk of school failure and dropout are practical mechanisms for reducing violent and criminal activity and for ensuring that Virginia's children will reach adulthood with the skills necessary to succeed in the twenty-first century" and created a grant program for schools and community-based organizations to "provide quality preschool programs for at-risk four-year-olds who are unserved by Head Start programs and for at-risk five-year-olds who are not eligible to attend kindergarten"; and

WHEREAS, these grants are to be used to provide at least half-day services, including "quality preschool education, health services, social services, parental involvement including activities to promote family literacy, and transportation" for the length of the school year for at-risk four-year-old children who are unserved by Head Start programs and for at-risk five-year-olds who are not eligible to attend kindergarten; and

WHEREAS, the General Assembly has provided various levels of funding for this initiative, based on an allocation formula providing the state share of the grant per child, as specified in the

INTRODUCED

SJ324

59 appropriation act, for various percentages of unserved at-risk four-year-olds and five-years-olds not
60 eligible to attend kindergarten; and

61 WHEREAS, pursuant to Item 143 C 12 of the 2000-2002 biennial budget, funding is based on
62 providing a state share of a \$5,400 grant for 60 percent of unserved four-year-olds in each locality, and
63 localities desiring to obtain this funding must supply a local match, based on the composite index of
64 local ability-to-pay; and

65 WHEREAS, pursuant to the Code of Virginia, local school boards may elect to serve more than 60
66 percent of the at-risk four-year-olds and may use federal funds or local funds for this expansion or may
67 seek funding through this grant program for such purposes, and grants may be awarded, "if funds are
68 available in excess of the funding for the sixty percent allocation, to expand services to at-risk
69 four-year-olds beyond the sixty percent goal"; and

70 WHEREAS, Tidewater educators estimate that 15 to 20 percent of eligible students are not currently
71 served by a local preschool initiative or by the state's program for at-risk four-year-olds; and

72 WHEREAS, expanding the Commonwealth's funding to provide for universal, voluntary delivery of
73 preschool services for at-risk four-year-olds requires careful examination of a variety of educational,
74 fiscal, and other policy issues; now, therefore, be it

75 RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That a joint subcommittee be
76 established to study the feasibility and appropriateness of providing universal, voluntary education for
77 four-year-olds in the public schools. The joint subcommittee shall consist of 10 legislative members as
78 follows: four members of the Senate, to be appointed by the Senate Committee on Privileges and
79 Elections, and six members of the House of Delegates, to be appointed by the Speaker of the House in
80 accordance with the principles of proportional representation contained in the Rules of the House.

81 In conducting its study, the joint subcommittee shall consider, among other things, (i) the work and
82 recommendations of the Commission on Early Childhood and Child Day Care Programs; (ii) the
83 administration, implementation, and funding of the current program for at-risk four-year-olds; (iii)
84 current participation levels by local school divisions; (iv) relevant federal laws and regulations relating
85 to preschool education and development; and (v) other issues as it deems appropriate.

86 The direct costs of this study shall not exceed \$10,000.

87 The Division of Legislative Services shall provide staff support for the study. All agencies of the
88 Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the joint subcommittee, upon request.

89 The joint subcommittee shall complete its work in time to submit its findings and recommendations
90 to the Governor and the 2002 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the procedures of the
91 Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents.

92 Implementation of this resolution is subject to subsequent approval and certification by the Joint
93 Rules Committee. The Committee may withhold expenditures or delay the period for the conduct of the
94 study.