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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 105

Offered January 11, 2006

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Requesting the Board of Education to consider increasing the number of questions on Standards of Learning assessments from the framework for the Standards of Learning for history and social studies that relate to instruction pertaining to minority persons. Report.

Patron—Lambert

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, the United States is the great "melting pot," and racial and ethnic diversity are staples of the American experience; and

WHEREAS, among the nation's greatest strengths is its great diversity of people from different cultures; and

WHEREAS, the education system is the means by which the fundamental principles of democracy are taught and upon which the republic was founded, and these include the core civic values of the rule of law, representative and limited government, individual liberties, and tolerance and respect for the rights of others; and

WHEREAS, as published in "Teaching about Ethnic Diversity," ERIC Digest No. 32 (1986), authored by Cheryl Bernstein Cohen, "studies have shown that the more children understand about stereotyping, the less negativism they will have toward other groups, and that exposing students to knowledge about ethnic diversity and the contributions of various groups to American civilization may change negative racial and ethnic group stereotypes, reduce intolerance, foster acceptance of minority rights, and enhance cooperation for the common good"; and

WHEREAS, a positive image of minority groups and the self-concepts of minority students are enhanced through the education regarding the achievements and contributions of members of such groups; and

WHEREAS, the permeation of information concerning racial, ethnic, and other minority persons throughout the curriculum in the elementary and secondary school grades, particularly in history and social studies, government, geography, economics, mathematics, and the arts, will enrich student understanding about the importance and benefits of a diverse society in which people share, treasure, and hold certain truths and values in common; and

WHEREAS, the achievements and contributions to society of diverse people have been included in the Standards of Learning for history and social studies, and these Standards provide a venue for imparting knowledge concerning multiple perspectives on American culture and history, fostering appreciation of similarities and differences, and creating a sense of community among students of different social, cultural, racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds; and

WHEREAS, instruction relating to members of minority groups helps to expand students' knowledge of minority groups in American history and contemporary society, exposes them to attitudes, institutions, and traditions they share as Americans, and fosters unity; and

WHEREAS, the need to educate students concerning racial and ethnic diversity was made evident on September 11, 2001, as a stunned nation and the world struggled to cope with the horror and shockwaves of the attack reverberated through the nation's classrooms, confounding teachers and administrators and causing bewilderment, extreme sorrow, and fear among students as they attempted to accept the loss of loved ones, teachers, and fellow students, and comprehend such human depravity with naiveté and limited exposure to diverse cultures; and

WHEREAS, in the wake of the terrorist attacks, there has been an increase in news reports concerning incidents of intolerance, harassment, and violence directed towards persons perceived to be of Arab descent; and violence and harassment against innocent people solely on the basis of their race, ethnicity, or national origin compound hatred and bigotry, and should not be condoned or tolerated, particularly in the public schools; and

WHEREAS, since September 11, 2001, the education community has responded to the breach in the social fabric by combatting racial animus with instruction on citizenship, diverse minority groups, and other cultures to promote understanding, peace, and respect for the dignity and rights of people among school children; and

WHEREAS, these initiatives challenge bias, teach students and others how to solve conflicts nonviolently, and help people to communicate better, bridge cultural differences, think critically, and work together to build a more just, peaceful, and democratic society; and

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59 WHEREAS, as a nation overflowing with new immigrants who are unaware of the nation's history
60 and the important ways that Native Americans, African Americans, women, and many others whose
61 forefathers came through Ellis Island have contributed to this country and the Commonwealth, it is
62 imperative that the history of this great country and its people be shared without bias with new
63 Americans; and

64 WHEREAS, the framework for the Standards of Learning objectives in history and social studies lay
65 the foundation for this instruction in the classrooms of our public schools, and student comprehension
66 and scholastic achievement is evaluated by Standards of Learning assessments in these subject areas; and

67 WHEREAS, any question from the framework for these Standards of Learning may be selected by
68 the Board of Education for inclusion on SOL assessments for these subjects; however, there is concern
69 that a minimal number of minority persons, usually only the commonly accepted minority personalities,
70 are noted in the framework, and because few questions relating to minority persons and groups are
71 included on SOL tests, the importance of the contributions, achievements, and role in history of minority
72 persons is marginalized; now, therefore, be it

73 RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Board of Education be
74 requested to consider increasing the number of questions on Standards of Learning assessments from the
75 framework for the Standards of Learning for history and social studies that relate to instruction
76 pertaining to minority persons.

77 The Board of Education shall submit to the Division of Legislative Automated Systems an executive
78 summary and report of its progress in meeting the request of this resolution no later than the first day of
79 the 2007 Regular Session of the General Assembly. The executive summary and report shall be
80 submitted for publication as a report document as provided in the procedures of the Division of
81 Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports and shall be
82 posted on the General Assembly's website.