

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 329

Requesting the Board of Education to study high school dropout and graduation rates in the Commonwealth. Report.

Agreed to by the Senate, February 6, 2007

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 20, 2007

WHEREAS, national leaders, state governors, and the business community have focused attention on the declining high school graduation rate, and the No Child Left Behind Act, Title I, Part H, established the school dropout prevention program to increase high school graduation rates; and

WHEREAS, the United States Department of Education estimates that every day 5,000 students drop out of school before graduation; and

WHEREAS, the National Governors Association (NGA) in its newly released report, "Graduation Counts: A Report of the NGA Task Force on State High School Graduation Data," indicated that "high school reform is at the forefront of the national and state education agendas; however, the quality of data concerning graduation and dropout rates is alarmingly poor, exceptionally difficult to track accurately, and often grossly inaccurate and misleading"; and

WHEREAS, the Educational Testing Service (ETS) analyzed the National Center on Education Statistics' data on dropout rates and stated in its report, "Dreams Deferred: High School Dropouts in the United States," that "dropouts comprise nearly half of the heads of households on welfare, and a similar percentage of the prison population"; and

WHEREAS, Focus Adolescent Services cited the following dropout statistics: (i) students in large cities are twice as likely to leave school before graduating than nonurban youth; (ii) more than one in four Hispanic youths drop out and nearly half leave by the eighth grade; (iii) Hispanics are twice as likely as African Americans to drop out. White and Asian American students are least likely to drop out; (iv) more than half the students who drop out leave by the tenth grade, 20 percent quit by the eighth grade, and three percent drop out by the fourth grade; (v) nearly 25 percent changed schools two or more times, with some changing for disciplinary reasons; (vi) almost 20 percent were held back a grade, and almost one-half failed a course; (vii) almost one-half missed at least 10 days of school, one-third cut class at least 10 times, and one-quarter were late at least 10 times; (viii) eight percent spent time in a juvenile home or shelter; (ix) one-third were put on in-school suspension, suspended, or put on probation, and more than 15 percent were either expelled or told they could not return; and (x) 12 percent of dropouts ran away from home; and

WHEREAS, in February 2005, the Educational Testing Service released its report, "One-Third of a Nation: Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities," in which it stated that one-third of students are leaving high school without a diploma, high school completion rates have not been accurately reported, and, from 1990 to 2000, the graduation rate declined in all but seven states and the rate declined by eight percent or more in 10 states; and

WHEREAS, the Educational Testing Service also reported that "there is a shortage of guidance counselors available to work with students at risk of dropping out and their families, the opportunity for dropouts to resume education and training is diminishing, the earning power of high school dropouts has been in almost continuous decline over the past three decades, and the United States ranks 10th in the world in high school completion rates"; and

WHEREAS, the personal and social costs of dropping out of school have increased, and the gap between dropouts and more educated people is widening as opportunities increase for more highly skilled workers and all but disappear for the less skilled; and

WHEREAS, it is estimated that high school dropouts will earn \$200,000 less than high school graduates and more than \$800,000 less than college graduates during their lifetime; and

WHEREAS, truancy, health conditions, poor academic performance, substance abuse, family dysfunction, behavioral problems, crime, and other sociocultural issues influence the dropout rate; and

WHEREAS, declining graduation rates present significant challenges to the stability of the nation's and the Commonwealth's social and economic global standing and ability to maintain a competitive advantage among industrialized nations; and

WHEREAS, federal agencies and nationally recognized organizations have directed states' attention to the need to address the declining graduation rate; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Board of Education be requested to study high school dropout and graduation rates in the Commonwealth. In conducting its study, the Board of Education shall (i) evaluate the relevancy of the current process and procedures for defining, counting, and reporting school dropout statistics and consider the need for revisions in such

process and procedures and compliance by school divisions; (ii) determine the number of students who dropped out of school before the seventh grade and the reasons therefor and the number of students who graduated annually, for school years 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006; (iii) ascertain whether, by whom, and the manner in which students at risk of dropping out are counseled to remain in school; (iv) identify local school division initiatives and efforts to retain and retrieve students at risk of dropping out, particularly student populations with low high school graduation rates; and (v) recommend such policy, statutory, fiscal, or regulatory changes as the Board may deem necessary to increase the high school graduation rates, particularly among student populations with high dropout rates. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Board of Education for this study, upon request.

The Board of Education shall complete its meetings by November 30, 2007, and shall submit to the Governor and the General Assembly an executive summary and a report of its findings and recommendations for publication as a House or Senate document. The executive summary and report shall be submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports no later than the first day of the 2008 Regular Session of the General Assembly and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.