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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 179

Offered January 9, 2008

Prefiled January 9, 2008

Requesting the Board of Education to study the need for and ways of improving the coordination between chronic truancy prevention and dropout prevention in Virginia. Report.

Patron—Hall

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, chronic truancy and school dropout rates continue to be critical problems nationally and in the Commonwealth, and educators, parents, community leaders, and policymakers at all levels of government have focused attention on the need to address the academic achievement gap and the declining high school graduation rate; and

WHEREAS, truancy affects students of all ages, communities, backgrounds, and school divisions, and unexcused absences from school are linked to numerous harmful social and personal consequences, among them academic failure, school dropout rates, crime and violence, unemployment, substance abuse, adult criminality and incarceration, unwanted pregnancy, and social isolation; and

WHEREAS, although great strides have been made to increase academic achievement and to reduce the school dropout rate in Virginia, as the emphasis on chronic truancy and dropout prevention has waned, the number of students experiencing academic failure and leaving school before graduation has begun to climb, and in certain areas of the Commonwealth school division dropout rates continue to exceed the annual state and national dropout rates; and

WHEREAS, this problem crosses all racial and socioeconomic groups, and data reveal that a disproportionate number of poor, urban, and minority youth drop out of school each year, and that factors associated with school dropout are also linked to chronic truancy; and

WHEREAS, students who are chronic truants and school dropouts may be children in need of supervision, children in need of services, or both; 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 higher skilled workers and all but disappear for the less skilled; and

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

WHEREAS, the Board of Education has adopted and instituted certain of the National Governors Association's recommendations to improve the collection, calculation, and interpretation of dropout data to effect greater consistency and quality in pupil accounting and reporting practices; however, comparable data pertaining to truants is not available; and

WHEREAS, over the years, Virginia's laws have been amended to address truancy and dropout prevention, their respective attendant issues and public policies, and the state and local agencies responsible for enforcing compulsory school attendance laws; however, to maximize existing and future efforts to resolve these difficult problems, it is necessary to examine relevant state laws to provide sufficient authority to public schools, parents, law enforcement, and the court system to deal with compulsory school attendance, chronic truancy, and school dropout prevention, and to ensure consistency, clarity and specificity in and articulation between pertinent state laws and public policies; and

WHEREAS, it is imperative that bold, aggressive steps be taken immediately to protect the public investment in our children, and to ensure the economic viability and competitive edge of the Commonwealth in the global marketplace; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Board of Education be requested to study the need for and ways of improving the coordination between chronic truancy prevention and dropout prevention in Virginia.

In conducting its study, the Board of Education shall (i) review state laws and its policies relating to the enforcement of compulsory school attendance, truancy, and dropout prevention for consistency and clarity; (ii) determine the impact of suspensions, expulsions, and other disciplinary actions on school dropout rates, and, to the extent possible, whether such students receive educational, social, and community services during their suspension or expulsion from school, the number of such students who fail to return to school after suspension and expulsion, and the number who enter the court system during this period; (iii) evaluate the need for and duties of school attendance officers as provided by

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59 state law, and the need for conformity in statutory requirements pertaining to school attendance officers;
60 (iv) evaluate the need to clarify and enhance the responsibilities of division superintendents to enforce
61 compulsory school attendance laws; (v) ascertain the need to require the establishment of local consortia
62 of parents, school officials, community leaders, court service personnel, law enforcement, and other
63 persons to address truancy and dropout prevention in each school division; (vi) assess factors related to
64 the causes of academic underachievement, chronic truancy, and school dropout and determine whether,
65 and under what conditions, such students should also be considered "children in need of services" for
66 compulsory school attendance purposes; (vii) consider the need and efficacy of defining "truancy" and
67 "chronic truancy" in the Code of Virginia; and (viii) recommend to the General Assembly such changes
68 to state law and public policies, including funding, and such other initiatives as the Board may deem
69 appropriate and necessary to effect a comprehensive approach to chronic truancy and dropout prevention.

70 Technical assistance shall be provided to the Board of Education by the Departments of Education,
71 Social Services, and Juvenile Justice. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the
72 Board for this study, upon request.

73 The Board of Education shall complete its meetings by November 30, 2008, and shall submit to the
74 Governor and the General Assembly an executive summary and a report of its findings and
75 recommendations for publication as a House or Senate document. The executive summary and report
76 shall be submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for
77 the processing of legislative documents and reports no later than the first day of the 2009 Regular
78 Session of the General Assembly and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.