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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 706

Offered January 14, 2009

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Establishing a joint subcommittee to study ways to increase the high school graduation rate in Virginia. Report.

 Patrons—Ebbin and Fralin

 Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, there is agreement that high school graduation is fundamentally important for the individual and society, and the high school diploma is the portal to employment, higher education, and higher lifetime earnings; and

WHEREAS, students who drop out of school are unlikely to have the minimum skills needed to successfully compete in today's increasingly complex society and technological workplace; and

WHEREAS, James J. Heckman and Paul A. LaFontaine wrote in "Declining American High School Graduation Rate: Evidence, Sources, And Consequences," for the National Bureau of Economic Research, that "the high school graduation rate is a barometer of the health of American society and the skill level of its future workforce; in the past 25 years, growing wage differentials between high school graduates and dropouts increased the economic incentives for high school graduation; and the real wages of high school dropouts have declined since the early 1970s while those of more skilled workers have risen sharply"; and

WHEREAS, the National Bureau of Economic Research also indicates that "the slowdown in the high school graduation rate accounts for a substantial portion of the recent slowdown in the growth of college educated workers in the U.S. workforce"; and

WHEREAS, the Education Trust reported last year that one in four students drop out of school and dropout rates have not declined, and that the United States is now the only industrialized country where young people are less likely than their parents to earn a diploma; and

WHEREAS, truancy, health conditions, poor academic performance, substance abuse, family dysfunction, behavior problems, crime, and other sociocultural issues both influence and are the results of the dropout rate; and

WHEREAS, although great strides have been made to increase academic achievement and graduation rates, the number of students experiencing academic failure and leaving school before graduation in Virginia has risen, causing grave concern about the personal and social costs of dropping out of school to society; and

WHEREAS, although this problem crosses all racial and socioeconomic groups, the data reveal that a disproportionate number of poor, urban, and minority youth fail to graduate from school each year; and

WHEREAS, over the years, national, state, and local groups have considered ways to increase high school graduation rates; however, low high school graduation rates persist and 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, various programs and alternatives should be explored to increase the high school graduation rate, protect the public investment in our children, and 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 a joint subcommittee be established to study ways to increase the high school graduation rate in Virginia. The joint subcommittee shall have a total membership of six members to be appointed as follows: four members of the House of Delegates to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates in accordance with the principles of proportional representation contained in the Rules of the House of Delegates, and two members of the Senate to be appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules. The joint subcommittee shall elect a chairman and vice chairman from among its membership.

In conducting the study, the joint subcommittee shall (i) identify the reasons for and issues attendant to the problem of school dropout in Virginia; (ii) determine, by school division, the annual high school graduation rate; (iii) review the findings and recommendations of recent national and state studies and reports related to dropout prevention and increasing the high school graduation rates, and determine the appropriateness of adopting certain of the recommendations for use in Virginia; (iv) consider the feasibility of expanding the Virginia Preschool Initiative; (v) ascertain the effect of comprehensive school reform on high school graduation rates, including Enhanced Career and Technical Education (Fine Arts-STEM) programs, classroom teacher participation in instructional decisions within the school

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59 division, dropout prevention, class size reduction, teacher salary increase, and expansion of the Virginia
60 Teaching Scholarship Loan Program; (vi) develop appropriate strategies and an action plan that
61 incorporates a multifaceted approach to address the problem of school dropout and low high school
62 graduation rates comprehensively and systemically throughout the Commonwealth; and (vii) consider
63 such other related matters as the joint subcommittee deems appropriate to achieve the objectives of this
64 study.

65 Administrative staff support shall be provided by the Office of the Clerk of the House of Delegates.
66 Legal, research, policy analysis, and other services as requested by the joint subcommittee shall be
67 provided by the Division of Legislative Services. Technical assistance shall be provided by the Virginia
68 Department of Education. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance for this study,
69 upon request.

70 The joint subcommittee shall be limited to four meetings for the 2009 interim, and the direct costs of
71 this study shall not exceed \$6,000 without approval as set out in this resolution. Approval for
72 unbudgeted nonmember-related expenses shall require the written authorization of the chairman of the
73 joint subcommittee and the respective Clerk. If a companion joint resolution of the other chamber is
74 agreed to, written authorization of both Clerks shall be required.

75 No recommendation of the joint subcommittee shall be adopted if a majority of the House members
76 or a majority of the Senate members appointed to the joint subcommittee (i) vote against the
77 recommendation and (ii) vote for the recommendation to fail notwithstanding the majority vote of the
78 joint subcommittee.

79 The joint subcommittee shall complete its meetings by November 30, 2009, and the chairman shall
80 submit to the Division of Legislative Automated Systems an executive summary of its findings and
81 recommendations no later than the first day of the 2010 Regular Session of the General Assembly. The
82 executive summary shall state whether the joint subcommittee intends to submit to the General
83 Assembly and the Governor a report of its findings and recommendations for publication as a House or
84 Senate document. The executive summary and report shall be submitted as provided in the procedures of
85 the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports
86 and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.

87 Implementation of this resolution is subject to subsequent approval and certification by the Joint
88 Rules Committee. The Committee may approve or disapprove expenditures for this study, extend or
89 delay the period for the conduct of the study, or authorize additional meetings during the 2009 interim.