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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 313
AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE
(Proposed by the Senate Committee on Rules
on January 30, 2009)

(Patron Prior to Substitute—Senator Miller, J. C.)

Directing the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission to study ways to promote and ensure early reading proficiency and comprehension among third graders in the public schools. Report.

WHEREAS, reading is the key to all learning, is the most important skill an individual can acquire, and is essential for economic and social opportunities, particularly in light of the global proliferation of technology and information; and

WHEREAS, according to the Dictionary Project, "reading is the most important skill and many educators view third grade reading as the dividing line between learning to read and reading to learn, and that mastering reading early in life, especially by third grade, is linked to academic success and productivity later in life"; and

WHEREAS, the ability to read enables children to understand and interpret the information and images they receive; contributes to personal empowerment, growth, and enjoyment; builds vocabulary; aids in verbal communication; and provides educational opportunities that can broaden and change lives; and

WHEREAS, reading stimulates the imagination, promotes role play and the development of fine motor skills and eye hand coordination, enhances social skills, and allows children to experience places, things, and events that they are not able to physically explore; and

WHEREAS, national educational research results indicate that "38% of 4th graders nationally cannot read at the basic level, which means they cannot read and understand a simple paragraph from an age-appropriate children's book, and in some school districts this figure rises to over 70%"; and

WHEREAS, serious reading problems impede academic performance through college and are associated with delinquency, drug abuse, unemployment, crime, and other social problems; and

WHEREAS, the more children read, the better they can read and the better their comprehension; children who are good readers experience academic success and have a positive attitude toward learning, and those who read with their families develop a love of reading that lasts a lifetime; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission be directed to study ways to promote and ensure early reading proficiency and comprehension among third graders in the public schools.

In conducting its study, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission shall (i) determine the number of third graders who read at grade level; (ii) rank the school divisions according to the number of third graders who passed the most recent third grade reading test; (iii) identify best practices utilized by school divisions with the highest percentage of third graders who read at grade level; (iv) examine the findings and recommendations of state and national studies pertaining to the efficacy of early reading proficiency and comprehension and its relationship to academic success, and recommend those recommendations appropriate for implementation in Virginia; and (v) determine strategies to increase the number of third graders who pass the third grade reading test and ways to improve and sustain the early reading proficiency of third grade students.

Technical assistance shall be provided to the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission by the Department of Education. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission for this study, upon request.

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission shall complete its meetings for the first year by November 30, 2009, and for the second year by November 30, 2010, and the Chairman shall submit to the Division of Legislative Automated Systems an executive summary of its findings and recommendations no later than the first day of the next Regular Session of the General Assembly for each year. Each executive summary shall state whether the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission intends to submit to the General Assembly and the Governor a report of its findings and recommendations for publication as a House or Senate document. The executive summaries and reports shall be submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.