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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 320

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Establishing a joint subcommittee to study how Virginia school children compare academically with students in other countries. Report.

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Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, virtually everyone would agree on the importance of excellence in education; however, considerable attention is being given to the condition of public education in the United States and how the nation's students lag in academic performance when compared with other industrialized nations, particularly in science and mathematics; and

WHEREAS, the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment, a comprehensive examination that measures international educational levels from poor, underdeveloped nations to the most wealthy, indicates that "out of 34 countries assessed the United States ranked 14th in reading, 17th in science, and 25th in mathematics, and while these recent scores are higher than those from 2003 and 2006, the United States falls far behind the highest scoring countries, including South Korea, Finland, Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai in China, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada"; and

WHEREAS, in announcing the test results, MSNBC reported that "student performance on international assessments is considered especially relevant as today's high school graduates enter a global job market where highly skilled workers are in increasing demand, and that a number of countries have made significant improvements while the U.S. has made only incremental advancements"; and

WHEREAS, decline in the academic achievement of American students and the failing condition of public education have been prominent among national and state concerns since the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* declared "Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world," and detailed specifically and candidly the problems with the American education system; and

WHEREAS, the national commission responsible for the report wrote, "This report is concerned with only one of the many causes and dimensions of the problem, but it is the one that undergirds American prosperity, security, and civility . . . the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur — others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments . . . education can be both understood and corrected if the people of our country, together with those who have public responsibility in the matter, care enough and are courageous enough to do what is required"; and

WHEREAS, many valiant efforts at the national, state, and local levels have been instituted to reform public education, including student and school accountability and new rigorous requirements in curriculum, assessments, and professional development of teachers; nevertheless, in spite of sporadic successes, the demand for qualified classroom teachers and administrators exceeds the supply, particularly for minority teachers and administrators; the school infrastructure and facilities where many of the neediest of students are concentrated are old, in disrepair, and cannot support modern educational technology; urban and rural school divisions struggle to recruit and retain master teachers; the academic achievement gap between African American, particularly African American males, and other race students, is large and persistent; more students drop out each year than graduate; education must compete with other funding priorities and difficult economic times exacerbate funding needs; and too many schools are impeded by inadequate resources, countless noninstructional duties, relentless societal ills that ravage children and youth, and the lack of business and community support and parental involvement; and

WHEREAS, in the early 1980s, the Commonwealth hosted the national meeting on "A Nation at Risk" and joined the ranks of states and public officials to reform and strengthen public education, and the Standards of Learning, the hallmark of educational reform in Virginia, together with other innovative initiatives such as the Preschool Initiative, and the Governor's, magnet, charter, virtual, laboratory, alternative, dual enrollment, year round, and career and technical education schools, provide increased options to meet the educational needs of students, and significant progress in student achievement has been achieved; and

WHEREAS, public education in Virginia is not immune to the challenges confronting the American

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SJ320

59 education system, and disregarding the distress signs would be imprudent and pose a significant threat to
60 state and national economic and national security and success in the global marketplace; and

61 WHEREAS, Virginia needs a cadre of scientists, engineers, mathematicians, educators, physicians,
62 and entrepreneurs and a steady supply of the brightest minds in all other professions and occupations in
63 the workplace to maintain our productivity and competitive edge; therefore, it is critical to evaluate the
64 academic achievement of Virginia's students relative to the reported outpacing in education by
65 international students to improve and strengthen instruction; now, therefore, be it

66 RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That a joint subcommittee be
67 established to study how Virginia school children compare academically to students in other countries.
68 The joint subcommittee shall consist of eleven members that include eight legislative members, two
69 nonlegislative citizen members, and one ex officio member. Members shall be appointed as follows:
70 three members of the Senate to be appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules; five members of the
71 House of Delegates to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates in accordance with the
72 principles of proportional representation contained in the Rules of the House of Delegates; one
73 nonlegislative citizen member with expertise in educational assessment to be appointed by the Senate
74 Committee on Rules; one nonlegislative citizen member at large to be appointed by the Speaker of the
75 House of Delegates; and the Superintendent of Public Instruction or his designee, who shall serve ex
76 officio with voting privileges. Nonlegislative citizen members shall be citizens of the Commonwealth of
77 Virginia. The joint subcommittee shall elect a chairman and vice-chairman from among its membership,
78 who shall be members of the General Assembly.

79 In conducting its study, the joint subcommittee shall (i) compare the academic achievement of
80 Virginia's students with that of students internationally for the past five years, especially in reading,
81 mathematics, and science; (ii) identify features in the education systems of other countries that rank
82 higher than the United States that may contribute to the academic success of their students; (iii)
83 determine whether any of these features may be adapted for use in Virginia and the cost of
84 implementation; (iv) determine whether and what changes in Virginia's public education system are
85 warranted in light of findings from the comparison of the academic achievement of students in Virginia
86 with students internationally; and (v) consider other matters related to the objectives of this resolution
87 and recommend feasible and appropriate options and alternatives.

88 Administrative staff support shall be provided by the Office of the Clerk of the Senate. Legal,
89 research, policy analysis, and other services as requested by the joint subcommittee shall be provided by
90 the Division of Legislative Services. Technical assistance shall continue to be provided by the
91 Department of Education. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the joint
92 subcommittee for this study, upon request.

93 The joint subcommittee shall be limited to four meetings for the 2011 interim, and the direct costs of
94 this study shall not exceed \$9,800 without approval as set out in this resolution. Of this amount an
95 estimated \$1,000 is allocated for speakers, materials, and other resources. Approval for unbudgeted
96 nonmember-related expenses shall require the written authorization of the chairman of the joint
97 subcommittee and the respective Clerk. If a companion joint resolution of the other chamber is agreed
98 to, written authorization of both Clerks shall be required.

99 No recommendation of the joint subcommittee shall be adopted if a majority of the Senate members
100 or a majority of the House members appointed to the joint subcommittee (i) vote against the
101 recommendation and (ii) vote for the recommendation to fail notwithstanding the majority vote of the
102 joint subcommittee.

103 The joint subcommittee shall complete its meetings by November 30, 2011, and the chairman shall
104 submit to the Division of Legislative Automated Systems an executive summary of its findings and
105 recommendations no later than the first day of the 2012 Regular Session of the General Assembly. The
106 executive summary shall state whether the joint subcommittee intends to submit to the General
107 Assembly and the Governor a report of its findings and recommendations for publication as a document.
108 The executive summary and report shall be submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of
109 Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports and shall be
110 posted on the General Assembly's website.

111 Implementation of this resolution is subject to subsequent approval and certification by the Joint
112 Rules Committee. The Committee may approve or disapprove expenditures for this study, extend or
113 delay the period for the conduct of the study, or authorize additional meetings during the 2011 interim.