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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 123

Offered January 11, 2012

Prefiled January 11, 2012

Requesting the Board of Education to study the causes of chronic school absenteeism and the efficacy of establishing uniform requirements for maximum absences from school attendance. Report.

 Patron—Alexander

 Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, chronic school absenteeism, truancy, and increasing 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, particularly among minority youth; and

WHEREAS, chronic school absenteeism, as distinguished from truancy and unexcused absences, may involve school avoidance, school phobia, school refusal, separation anxiety, health and family issues, neglect, and many other causes for some students; however, little, if any, effort has been exerted to identify and address the reasons for the poor school attendance of chronically absent students; and

WHEREAS, research indicates that attendance (time spent on instruction), attachment (positive school relationships), a welcoming school climate that is conducive to learning, available school-based supports and resources, school safety and protection from bullying and harassment, family appreciation of education and involvement in a student's learning, and skilled, professional and engaged school administrators and classroom teachers are some essential prerequisites for student academic success; and

WHEREAS, in many public schools, some students have established the pattern of being chronically absent from school, missing upwards of a majority of school days in a school year, and chronic school absenteeism is a precursor to undesirable outcomes, including academic failure, truancy, school dropout, gang affiliation, teen pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, future unemployment, the need for social interventions and other support services, and contact with the criminal justice system; and

WHEREAS, in a recent study, Gradual Disengagement: A Portrait of the 2008-2009 Dropouts in Baltimore City Schools by the Baltimore Education Research Consortium in August 2010, it was reported that "the majority of students who eventually drop out of high school enter ninth grade with a pattern of chronic absenteeism that goes back at least several years. Many have been retained and are behind at least one grade"; and

WHEREAS, although chronic school absenteeism is not unique to any racial and socioeconomic group, 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 school absenteeism; and

WHEREAS, students who are chronically absent from school may also be children in need of supervision, children in need of services, or both; and

WHEREAS, the personal and social costs of leaving school before graduation are steep, 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, 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, students who are chronically absent from school are included in the school dropout rate 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, some local school boards have established divisionwide policies concerning chronic school absenteeism to address the poor school attendance of such students, and exploring and recommending best practices to improve school attendance of chronically absent students is in the best interest of children and the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, bold, aggressive, and deliberate action to protect the public investment in Virginia's children would be a tremendous step 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 causes of chronic school absenteeism and the efficacy of establishing uniform requirements for maximum absences from school attendance.

INTRODUCED

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59 In conducting its study, the Board of Education shall (i) determine the causes of and the extent to
60 which chronic school absenteeism is a problem in Virginia, providing an analysis by grade and school
61 division; (ii) determine whether and how the state's compulsory school attendance and school attendance
62 laws and Board policies governing unexcused absences and truancy and dropout prevention address the
63 problem of chronic school absenteeism; (iii) assess the impact of suspensions, expulsions, and other
64 disciplinary actions on chronic school absenteeism; (iv) review and consider the best practices of local
65 school divisions and other states to address chronic school absenteeism; (v) evaluate the need for
66 conformity in statutory and policy requirements pertaining to chronic school absenteeism, including
67 requirements for "make-up" classes or class work for both excused and unexcused absences; and (vi)
68 recommend to the General Assembly such changes to state law and public policies, including funding
69 and sound research-based innovations, as the Board may deem appropriate and necessary to effect a
70 comprehensive approach to chronic school absenteeism.

71 Technical assistance shall be provided to the Board of Education by the Department of Social
72 Services, the State Health Department, the Department of Medical Assistance Services, the juvenile and
73 domestic relations district court system, and the staffs of the House Committee on Appropriations and
74 the Senate Committee on Finance. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the
75 Board of Education for this study, upon request.

76 The Board of Education shall complete its meetings for the first year by November 30, 2012, and for
77 the second year by November 30, 2013, and the Board of Education shall submit to the Governor and
78 the General Assembly an executive summary and report of its findings and recommendations for
79 publication as a House or Senate document for each year. The executive summaries and reports shall be
80 submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the
81 processing of legislative documents and reports no later than the first day of the next Regular Session of
82 the General Assembly and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.