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SENATE BILL NO. 261

Offered January 11, 2012

Prefiled January 10, 2012

A BILL to amend and reenact § 22.1-199.1 of the Code of Virginia, and to amend the Code of Virginia by adding a section numbered 22.1-199.1:1, relating to a Virginia Preschool Initiative Local Grant Program.

 Patron—Ebbin

Referred to Committee on Education and Health

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 22.1-199.1 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted and that the Code of Virginia is amended by adding a section numbered 22.1-199.1:1 as follows:

§ 22.1-199.1. Programs designed to promote educational opportunities.

A. The General Assembly finds that Virginia educational research supports the conclusion that poor children are more at risk of educational failure than children from more affluent homes and that reduced pupil/teacher ratios and class sizes result in improved academic performance among young children; to this end, the General Assembly establishes a long-term goal of reducing pupil/teacher ratios and class sizes for grades K through three in those schools in the Commonwealth with high or moderate concentrations of at-risk students.

With such funds as are provided in the appropriation act for this purpose, there is hereby established the statewide voluntary pupil/teacher ratio and class size reduction program for the purpose of reaching the long-term goal of statewide voluntary pupil/teacher ratio and class size reductions for grades K through three in schools with high or moderate concentrations of at-risk students, consistent with the provisions provided in the appropriation act.

In order to facilitate these primary grade ratio and class size reductions, the Department of Education shall calculate the state funding of these voluntary ratio and class size reductions based on the incremental cost of providing the lower class sizes according to the greater of the division average per-pupil cost of all divisions or the actual division per-pupil cost. Localities shall provide matching funds for these voluntary ratio and class size reductions based on the composite index of local ability to pay. School divisions shall notify the Department of Education of their intention to implement the reduced ratios and class sizes in one or more of their qualifying schools by August 1 of each year. By March 31 of each year, school divisions shall forward data substantiating that each participating school has a complying pupil/teacher ratio.

In developing each proposed biennium budget for public education, the Board of Education shall include funding for these ratios and class sizes. These ratios and class sizes shall be included in the annual budget for public education.

B. The General Assembly finds that educational technology is one of the most important components, along with highly skilled teachers, in ensuring the delivery of quality public school education throughout the Commonwealth. Therefore, the Board of Education shall strive to incorporate technological studies within the teaching of all disciplines. Further, the General Assembly notes that educational technology can only be successful if teachers and administrators are provided adequate training and assistance. To this end, the following program is established.

With such funds as are appropriated for this purpose, the Board of Education shall award to the several school divisions grants for expanded access to educational technology. Funding for educational technology training for instructional personnel shall be provided as set forth in the appropriation act.

Funds for improving the quality and capacity of educational technology shall also be provided as set forth in the appropriation act, including, but not limited to, (i) funds for providing a technology resource assistant to serve every elementary school in this Commonwealth beginning on July 1, 1998, and (ii) funds to maintain the currency of career and technical education programs. Any local school board accepting funds to hire technology resource assistants or maintain currency of career and technical education programs shall commit to providing the required matching funds, based on the composite index of local ability to pay.

Each qualifying school board shall establish an individualized technology plan, which shall be approved by the Superintendent of Public Instruction, for integrating technology into the classroom and into schoolwide instructional programs, including career and technical education programs. The grants shall be prioritized as follows:

1. In the 1994 biennium, the first priority for these funds shall be to automate the library media

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SB261

59 centers and provide network capabilities in Virginia's elementary, middle and high schools, or
60 combination thereof, in order to ensure access to the statewide library and other information networks. If
61 any elementary, middle or high school has already met this priority, the 1994 biennium grant shall be
62 used to provide other educational technologies identified in the relevant division's approved technology
63 plan, such as multimedia and telecomputing packages, integrated learning systems, laptop computer loan
64 programs, career and technical education laboratories or other electronic techniques designed to enhance
65 public education and to facilitate teacher training in and implementation of effective instructional
66 technology. The Board shall also distribute, as provided in the appropriation act, funds to support the
67 purchase of electronic reference materials for use in the statewide automated reference system.

68 2. In the 1996 biennium and thereafter, the first priority for funding shall be consistent with those
69 components of the Board of Education's revised six-year technology plan which focus on (i) retrofitting
70 and upgrading existing school buildings to efficiently use educational technology; (ii) providing (a) one
71 network-ready multimedia microcomputer for each classroom, (b) a five-to-one ratio of pupils to
72 network-ready microcomputers, (c) graphing calculators and relevant scientific probes/sensors as required
73 by the Standards of Learning, and (d) training and professional development on available technologies
74 and software to all levels and positions, including professional development for personnel delivering
75 career and technical education at all levels and positions; and (iii) assisting school divisions in
76 developing integrated voice-, video-, and data-connectivity to local, national and international resources.

77 This funding may be used to implement a local school division's long-range technology plan, at the
78 discretion of the relevant school board, if the local plan meets or exceeds the goals and standards of the
79 Board's revised six-year technology plan and has been approved by the Superintendent of Public
80 Instruction.

81 3. The Departments of Education, Information Technology, and General Services shall coordinate
82 master contracts for the purchase by local school boards of the aforementioned educational technologies
83 and reference materials.

84 4. Beginning on July 1, 1998, a technology replacement program shall be, with such funds as may be
85 appropriated for this purpose, implemented to replace obsolete educational hardware and software. As
86 provided in subsection D of § 22.1-129, school boards may donate obsolete educational technology
87 hardware and software which are being replaced. Any such donations shall be offered to other school
88 divisions and to preschool programs in the Commonwealth, or to public school students as provided in
89 guidelines to be promulgated by the Board of Education. Such guidelines shall include criteria for
90 determining student eligibility and need; a reporting system for the compilation of information
91 concerning the number and socioeconomic characteristics of recipient students; and notification of
92 parents of the availability of such donations of obsolete educational hardware and software.

93 5. In fiscal year 2000, the Board of Education shall, with such funds as are appropriated for this
94 purpose, contract for the development or purchase of interactive educational software and other
95 instructional materials designed as tutorials to improve achievement on the Standards of Learning
96 assessments. Such interactive educational software and other instructional materials may be used in
97 media centers, computer laboratories, libraries, after-school or before-school programs or remedial
98 programs by teachers and other instructional personnel or provided to parents and students to be used in
99 the home. This interactive educational software and other instructional materials shall only be used as
100 supplemental tools for instruction, remediation, and acceleration of the learning required by the K
101 through 12 Standards of Learning objectives.

102 Consistent with school board policies designed to improve school/community communications and
103 guidelines for providing instructional assistance in the home, each school division shall strive to
104 establish a voice mail communication system after regular school hours for parents, families, and
105 teachers by the year 2000.

106 C. The General Assembly finds that effective prevention programs designed to assist children at risk
107 of school failure and dropout are practical mechanisms for reducing violent and criminal activity and for
108 ensuring that Virginia's children will reach adulthood with the skills necessary to succeed in the
109 twenty-first century; to this end, the following program is hereby established. With such funds as are
110 appropriated for this purpose, the General Assembly hereby establishes a grant program to be disbursed
111 by the Department of Education to schools and community-based organizations to provide quality
112 preschool programs for at-risk four-year-olds who are unserved by Head Start programs and for at-risk
113 five-year-olds who are not eligible to attend kindergarten.

114 The grants shall be used to provide at least half-day services for the length of the school year for
115 at-risk four-year-old children who are unserved by Head Start programs and for at-risk five-year-olds
116 who are not eligible to attend kindergarten. The services shall include quality preschool education, health
117 services, social services, parental involvement including activities to promote family literacy, and
118 transportation.

119 The Department of Education, in cooperation with such other state agencies that may coordinate
120 child day care and early childhood programs, shall establish guidelines for quality preschool education

and criteria for the service components, consistent with the findings of the November 1993 study by the Board of Education, the Department of Education, and the Council on Child Day Care and Early Childhood Programs.

The guidelines for quality preschool education and criteria for preschool education services may be differentiated according to the agency providing the services in order to comply with various relevant federal or state requirements. However, the guidelines for quality preschool education and the criteria for preschool education services shall require when such services are being provided by the public schools of the Commonwealth, and may require for other service providers, that (i) one teacher shall be employed for any class of nine students or less, (ii) if the average daily membership in any class exceeds nine students but does not exceed 18, a full-time teacher's aide shall be assigned to the class, and (iii) the maximum class size shall be 18 students.

School divisions may apply for and be granted waivers from these guidelines by the Department of Education.

During the 1995-1996 fiscal year, the Board of Education shall, with such funds as are appropriated for this purpose, distribute grants, based on an allocation formula providing the state share of the grant per child, as specified in the appropriation act, for 30 percent of the unserved at-risk four-year-olds in the Commonwealth pursuant to the funding provided in the appropriation act.

During the 1996-1997 fiscal year and thereafter, grants shall be distributed, with such funds as are appropriated for this purpose, based on an allocation formula providing the state share of the grant per child, as specified in the appropriation act, for at least 60 percent of the unserved at-risk four-year-olds and five-year-olds who are not eligible to attend kindergarten in the Commonwealth, such 60 percent to be calculated by adding services for 30 percent more of the unserved at-risk children to the 30 percent of unserved at-risk children in each locality provided funding in the appropriation act.

Local school boards may elect to serve more than 60 percent of the at-risk four-year-olds and may use federal funds or local funds for this expansion or may seek funding through this grant program for such purposes. Grants may be awarded, if funds are available in excess of the funding for the 60 percent allocation, to expand services to at-risk four-year-olds beyond the 60 percent goal.

In order for a locality to qualify for these grants, the local governing body shall commit to providing the required matching funds, based on the composite index of local ability to pay. Localities may use, for the purposes of meeting the local match, local or other nonstate expenditures for existing qualifying programs and shall also continue to pursue and coordinate other funding sources, including child care subsidies. Funds received through this program shall be used to supplement, not supplant, any local funds currently provided for preschool programs within the locality.

Unused funds allocated by the General Assembly pursuant to this subsection shall be deposited in the Virginia Preschool Initiative Local Grant Program Fund established in § 22.1-199.1:1.

D. The General Assembly finds that local autonomy in making decisions on local educational needs and priorities results in effective grass-roots efforts to improve education in the Commonwealth's public schools only when coupled with sufficient state funding; to this end, the following block grant program is hereby established. With such funds as are provided in the appropriation act, the Department of Education shall distribute block grants to localities to enable compliance with the Commonwealth's requirements for school divisions in effect on January 1, 1995. Therefore, for the purpose of such compliance, the block grant herein established shall consist of a sum equal to the amount appropriated in the appropriation act for the covered programs, including the at-risk add-on program; dropout prevention, specifically Project YES; Project Discovery; English as a second language programs, including programs for overage, nonschooled students; Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID); the Homework Assistance Program; programs initiated under the Virginia Guaranteed Assistance Program, except that such funds shall not be used to pay any college expenses of participating students; Reading Recovery; and school/community health centers. Each school board may use any funds received through the block grant to implement the covered programs and other programs designed to save the Commonwealth's children from educational failure.

E. In order to reduce pupil/teacher ratios and class sizes in elementary schools, from such funds as may be appropriated for this purpose, each school board may employ additional classroom teachers, remedial teachers, and reading specialists for each of its elementary schools over the requirements of the Standards of Quality. State and local funding for such additional classroom teachers, remedial teachers, and reading specialists shall be apportioned as provided in the appropriation act.

F. Pursuant to a turnaround specialist program administered by the Department of Education, local school boards may enter into agreements with individuals to be employed as turnaround specialists to address those conditions at the school that may impede educational progress and effectiveness and academic success. Local school boards may offer such turnaround specialists or other administrative personnel incentives such as increased compensation, improved retirement benefits in accordance with Chapter 6.2 (§ 51.1-617 et seq.) of Title 51.1, increased deferred compensation in accordance with

182 § 51.1-603, relocation expenses, bonuses, and other incentives as may be determined by the board.

183 G. The General Assembly finds that certain schools have particular difficulty hiring teachers for
184 certain subject areas and that the need for such teachers in these schools is particularly strong.
185 Accordingly in an effort to attract and retain high quality teachers, local school boards may offer
186 instructional personnel serving in such schools as a member of a middle school teacher corps
187 administered by the Department of Education incentives such as increased compensation, improved
188 retirement benefits in accordance with Chapter 6.2 (§ 51.1-617 et seq.) of Title 51.1, increased deferred
189 compensation in accordance with § 51.1-603, relocation expenses, bonuses, and other incentives as may
190 be determined by the board.

191 For purposes of this subsection, "middle school teacher corps" means licensed instructional personnel
192 who are assigned to a local school division to teach in a subject matter in grades six, seven, or eight
193 where there is a critical need, as determined by the Department of Education. The contract between such
194 persons and the relevant local school board shall specify that the contract is for service in the middle
195 school teacher corps.

196 § 22.1-199.1:1. Virginia Preschool Initiative Local Grant Program.

197 A. There is hereby created in the state treasury a special nonreverting fund to be known as the
198 Virginia Preschool Initiative Local Grant Program Fund, hereafter referred to as "the Fund." The Fund
199 shall be established on the books of the Comptroller. All unallocated funds appropriated by the General
200 Assembly pursuant to subsection C of § 22.1-199.1 shall be paid into the state treasury and credited to
201 the Fund. The Fund shall also consist of such other sums as may be made available to it from any
202 other source, public or private. Interest earned on moneys in the Fund shall remain in the Fund and be
203 credited to it. Any moneys remaining in the Fund, including interest thereon, at the end of each fiscal
204 year shall not revert to the general fund but shall remain in the Fund. Moneys in the Fund shall be
205 used to improve training for preschool educators; create, outfit, or expand preschool classrooms;
206 implement the Virginia Quality Rating and Improvement System; ensure the availability of preschool
207 education for the children of veterans; and create innovative early childhood programs for rural
208 communities where access to services is difficult. Expenditures and disbursements from the Fund shall
209 be made by the State Treasurer on warrants issued by the Comptroller upon written request signed by
210 the Superintendent of Public Instruction or his designee.

211 B. The Board of Education shall develop written guidelines that govern the award of grants from the
212 Fund through a competitive request for proposals process designed to ensure that all service providers
213 in the Commonwealth, regardless of size or geographic location, are afforded the opportunity to apply
214 for funds. Such guidelines shall (i) establish a uniform process, (ii) specify eligibility requirements, (iii)
215 govern the application for and the distribution and conditions of grants, and (iv) list criteria for
216 prioritizing funding requests. All applicants shall be required to submit a detailed proposal to the
217 Department of Education that includes a budget, proposed program outcomes, and proposed program
218 outcome measures. All grant recipients shall report to the Department of Education within one year on
219 the use of the funds and the outcomes achieved.

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