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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 685

Offered January 9, 2013

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Directing the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission to study the Standards of Quality; funding and teacher-student ratios. Report.

Patrons—Kearney and Surovell

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, under Article VIII, Section I of the Constitution of Virginia, ultimate responsibility for public education rests with the Virginia General Assembly, which is specifically charged with the duties of establishing a public school system and striving to ensure its quality; and

WHEREAS, the Standards of Quality (SOQ), prescribed by the Board of Education and revised only by the General Assembly, establish minimum educational goals and requirements, and localities may and often do surpass these Standards; and

WHEREAS, recognizing that the fiscal authority must bolster the Commonwealth's renewed commitment to quality education, the framers of the 1971 Constitution clarified that the legislative branch must not only revise the SOQ prescribed by the Board, but also determine the method of financing public education, and agreed that while the General Assembly would apportion costs, responsibility for funding public schools would be shared with localities; and

WHEREAS, to meet this constitutional directive, the General Assembly has established a methodology for apportioning the state and local share for the SOQ; and

WHEREAS, Virginia's method for apportioning state and local fiscal responsibility for SOQ programs has evolved over the years to recognize the actual costs of education as well as local fiscal capacity; and

WHEREAS, while many local school divisions surpass the minimum requirements of the SOQ, their educational costs often exceed the Commonwealth's share of the costs of public education, straining local resources; and

WHEREAS, concerns have been expressed about the funding methodology for the SOQ, and the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission last completed a comprehensive review of the formula for funding the SOQ in 2002; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission be directed to study the Standards of Quality; funding and teacher-student ratios.

In conducting its study, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission shall examine the teacher-student ratio in grades K-12 and in academic advanced programs. The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission shall also determine the feasibility of (i) converting the prevailing costs into ratios for each major category of the support services positions per 1,000 students, including ratios for some or all of the categories in the appropriation act; (ii) establishing alternative staffing approaches to provide school divisions with additional instructional resources to address identified needs, which may include ratios based on positions per 1,000 students for assistant principals, school counselors, and library-media specialists to reduce a funding precipice; (iii) assigning weights and requiring additional support for at-risk students and students with disabilities and services to English language learners and disadvantaged students; (iv) updating technology staffing ratios, taking into consideration the increased role of technology in instruction, assessment, and operations since staffing standards were first established in the SOQ; (v) mitigating the perverse incentive of reducing a school division's special education funding when it mainstreams students with disabilities into general education classrooms or uses Response to Intervention (RtI) or other instructional supports to reduce the number of students identified as needing special education services; and (vi) updating career and technical education staffing ratios relative to the implementation of new curricular pathways that require high-tech equipment and specialized instruction.

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

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission shall complete its meetings by November 30, 2013, 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 2014 Regular Session of the General Assembly. The executive summary shall state whether the Commission intends to submit to

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59 the General Assembly and the Governor a report of its findings and recommendations for publication as
60 a House or Senate document. The executive summary and report shall be submitted as provided in the
61 procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents
62 and reports and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.