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HOUSE BILL NO. 2052

Offered January 11, 2023

Prefiled January 10, 2023

A BILL to amend and reenact § 22.1-254 of the Code of Virginia, relating to school boards; policies for excusing students from attendance at school; religious reasons.

 Patron—Glass

 Referred to Committee on Education

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**1. That § 22.1-254 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:****§ 22.1-254. Compulsory attendance required; excuses and waivers; alternative education program attendance; exemptions from article.**

A. As used in this subsection, "attend" includes participation in educational programs and courses at a site remote from the school with the permission of the school and in conformity with applicable requirements.

Except as otherwise provided in this article, every parent, guardian, or other person in the Commonwealth having control or charge of any child who will have reached the fifth birthday on or before September 30 of any school year and who has not passed the eighteenth birthday shall, during the period of each year the public schools are in session and for the same number of days and hours per day as the public schools, cause such child to attend a public school or a private, denominational, or parochial school or have such child taught by a tutor or teacher of qualifications prescribed by the Board and approved by the division superintendent, or provide for home instruction of such child as described in § 22.1-254.1.

As prescribed in the regulations of the Board, the requirements of this section may also be satisfied by causing a child to attend an alternative program of study or work/study offered by a public, private, denominational, or parochial school or by a public or private degree-granting institution of higher education. Further, in the case of any five-year-old child who is subject to the provisions of this subsection, the requirements of this section may be alternatively satisfied by causing the child to attend any public educational pre-kindergarten program, including a Head Start program, or in a private, denominational, or parochial educational pre-kindergarten program.

Instruction in the home of a child or children by the parent, guardian, or other person having control or charge of such child or children shall not be classified or defined as a private, denominational or parochial school.

The requirements of this section shall apply to (i) any child in the custody of the Department of Juvenile Justice or the Department of Corrections who has not passed his eighteenth birthday and (ii) any child whom the division superintendent has required to take a special program of prevention, intervention, or remediation as provided in subsection C of § 22.1-253.13:1 and in § 22.1-254.01. The requirements of this section shall not apply to (a) any person 16 through 18 years of age who is housed in an adult correctional facility when such person is actively pursuing the achievement of a passing score on a high school equivalency examination approved by the Board but is not enrolled in an individual student alternative education plan pursuant to subsection E, and (b) any child who has obtained a high school diploma or its equivalent, a certificate of completion, or has achieved a passing score on a high school equivalency examination approved by the Board, or who has otherwise complied with compulsory school attendance requirements as set forth in this article.

B. A school board shall excuse from attendance at school:

1. Any pupil who, together with his parents, by reason of bona fide religious training or belief is conscientiously opposed to attendance at school. For purposes of this subdivision, "bona fide religious training or belief" does not include essentially political, sociological or philosophical views or a merely personal moral code; and

2. On the recommendation of the juvenile and domestic relations district court of the county or city in which the pupil resides and for such period of time as the court deems appropriate, any pupil who, together with his parents, is opposed to attendance at a school by reason of concern for such pupil's health, as verified by competent medical evidence, or by reason of such pupil's reasonable apprehension for personal safety when such concern or apprehension in that pupil's specific case is determined by the court, upon consideration of the recommendation of the principal and division superintendent, to be justified.

C. Each local school board shall develop policies for excusing students who are absent ~~by reason of~~

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59 *for religious reasons, including the observance of a religious holiday or participation in religious*
60 *instruction.* Such policies shall ensure that a student shall not be deprived of any award or of eligibility
61 or opportunity to compete for any award, or of the right to take an alternate test or examination, for any
62 which he missed by reason of such absence, if the absence is verified in a manner acceptable to the
63 school board.

64 D. A school board may excuse from attendance at school:

65 1. On recommendation of the principal and the division superintendent and with the written consent
66 of the parent or guardian, any pupil who the school board determines, in accordance with regulations of
67 the Board, cannot benefit from education at such school; or

68 2. On recommendation of the juvenile and domestic relations district court of the county or city in
69 which the pupil resides, any pupil who, in the judgment of such court, cannot benefit from education at
70 such school.

71 E. Local school boards may allow the requirements of subsection A to be met under the following
72 conditions:

73 For a student who is at least 16 years of age, there shall be a meeting of the student, the student's
74 parents, and the principal or his designee of the school in which the student is enrolled in which an
75 individual student alternative education plan shall be developed in conformity with guidelines prescribed
76 by the Board, which plan must include:

77 1. Career guidance counseling;

78 2. Mandatory enrollment and attendance in a preparatory program for passing a high school
79 equivalency examination approved by the Board or other alternative education program approved by the
80 local school board with attendance requirements that provide for reporting of student attendance by the
81 chief administrator of such preparatory program or approved alternative education program to such
82 principal or his designee;

83 3. Mandatory enrollment in a program to earn a Board-approved career and technical education
84 credential, such as the successful completion of an industry certification, a state licensure examination, a
85 national occupational competency assessment, the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, or the
86 Virginia workplace readiness skills assessment;

87 4. Successful completion of the course in economics and personal finance required to earn a
88 Board-approved high school diploma;

89 5. Counseling on the economic impact of failing to complete high school; and

90 6. Procedures for reenrollment to comply with the requirements of subsection A.

91 A student for whom an individual student alternative education plan has been granted pursuant to this
92 subsection and who fails to comply with the conditions of such plan shall be in violation of the
93 compulsory school attendance law, and the division superintendent or attendance officer of the school
94 division in which such student was last enrolled shall seek immediate compliance with the compulsory
95 school attendance law as set forth in this article.

96 Students enrolled with an individual student alternative education plan shall be counted in the
97 average daily membership of the school division.

98 F. A school board may, in accordance with the procedures set forth in Article 3 (§ 22.1-276.01 et
99 seq.) of Chapter 14 and upon a finding that a school-age child has been (i) charged with an offense
100 relating to the Commonwealth's laws, or with a violation of school board policies, on weapons, alcohol
101 or drugs, or intentional injury to another person; (ii) found guilty or not innocent of a crime that
102 resulted in or could have resulted in injury to others, or of an offense that is required to be disclosed to
103 the superintendent of the school division pursuant to subsection G of § 16.1-260; (iii) suspended
104 pursuant to § 22.1-277.05; or (iv) expelled from school attendance pursuant to § 22.1-277.06 or
105 22.1-277.07 or subsection C of § 22.1-277, require the child to attend an alternative education program
106 as provided in § 22.1-209.1:2 or 22.1-277.2:1.

107 G. Whenever a court orders any pupil into an alternative education program, including a program
108 preparing students for a high school equivalency examination approved by the Board, offered in the
109 public schools, the local school board of the school division in which the program is offered shall
110 determine the appropriate alternative education placement of the pupil, regardless of whether the pupil
111 attends the public schools it supervises or resides within its school division.

112 The juvenile and domestic relations district court of the county or city in which a pupil resides or in
113 which charges are pending against a pupil, or any court in which charges are pending against a pupil,
114 may require the pupil who has been charged with (i) a crime that resulted in or could have resulted in
115 injury to others, (ii) a violation of Article 1 (§ 18.2-77 et seq.) of Chapter 5 of Title 18.2, or (iii) any
116 offense related to possession or distribution of any Schedule I, II, or III controlled substances to attend
117 an alternative education program, including, but not limited to, night school, adult education, or any
118 other education program designed to offer instruction to students for whom the regular program of
119 instruction may be inappropriate.

120 This subsection shall not be construed to limit the authority of school boards to expel, suspend, or

121 exclude students, as provided in §§ 22.1-277.04, 22.1-277.05, 22.1-277.06, 22.1-277.07, and 22.1-277.2.
122 As used in this subsection, the term "charged" means that a petition or warrant has been filed or is
123 pending against a pupil.

124 H. Within one calendar month of the opening of school, each school board shall send to the parents
125 or guardian of each student enrolled in the division a copy of the compulsory school attendance law and
126 the enforcement procedures and policies established by the school board.

127 I. The provisions of this article shall not apply to:

128 1. Children suffering from contagious or infectious diseases while suffering from such diseases;

129 2. Children whose immunizations against communicable diseases have not been completed as
130 provided in § 22.1-271.2;

131 3. Children under 10 years of age who live more than two miles from a public school unless public
132 transportation is provided within one mile of the place where such children live;

133 4. Children between the ages of 10 and 17, inclusive, who live more than 2.5 miles from a public
134 school unless public transportation is provided within 1.5 miles of the place where such children live;
135 and

136 5. Children excused pursuant to subsections B and D.

137 Further, any child who will not have reached his sixth birthday on or before September 30 of each
138 school year whose parent or guardian notifies the appropriate school board that he does not wish the
139 child to attend school until the following year because the child, in the opinion of the parent or
140 guardian, is not mentally, physically, or emotionally prepared to attend school, may delay the child's
141 attendance for one year.

142 The distances specified in subdivisions 3 and 4 shall be measured or determined from the child's
143 residence to the entrance to the school grounds or to the school bus stop nearest the entrance to the
144 residence of such children by the nearest practical routes which are usable for walking or riding. Disease
145 shall be established by the certificate of a reputable practicing physician in accordance with regulations
146 adopted by the Board.

147 J. Subject to guidelines established by the Department, any student who is absent from school due to
148 his mental or behavioral health shall be granted an excused absence.

149 K. Subject to guidelines established by the Department, each school board (i) shall permit one school
150 day-long excused absence per school year for any middle school or high school student in the local
151 school division who is absent from school to engage in a civic event and (ii) may permit additional
152 excused absences for such students who are absent for such purpose. Local school boards may require
153 that the student provide advance notice of the intended absence and require that the student provide
154 documentation of participation in a civic event.

155 L. Subject to guidelines established by the Department, any student who is a member of a
156 state-recognized or federally recognized tribal nation that is headquartered in the Commonwealth and
157 who is absent from school to attend such tribal nation's pow wow gathering shall be granted one
158 excused absence per academic year, provided that the parent of such student provides to the student's
159 school advance notice of such absence in the manner required by the school.