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HOUSE BILL NO. 512

Offered January 18, 1996

A BILL to amend and reenact § 22.1-199.1 of the Code of Virginia, relating to programs designed to promote educational opportunities.

Patrons—Van Landingham, Connally, Darner, Moran, Plum and Puller

Referred to Committee on Education

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**1. That § 22.1-199.1 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted 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 3 in those schools in the Commonwealth with high or moderate concentrations of at-risk students.

Effective July 1, 1996, and with such funds as are provided in the appropriations 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 3 in schools with high or moderate concentrations of at-risk students, consistent with the provisions first provided during the 1994-1995 school year.

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 the proposed 1996-1998 biennium budget for public education, the Board of Education shall include funding for these ratios and class sizes. Effective July 1, 1996, the 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 and, 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 by the local school boards. 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. 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 centers and provide network capabilities in Virginia's elementary, middle and high schools, or combination thereof, in order to ensure access to the statewide library and other information networks. If any elementary, middle or high school has already met this priority, the 1994 biennium grant shall be used to provide other educational technologies identified in the relevant division's approved technology plan, such as multimedia and telecomputing packages, integrated learning systems, laptop computer loan programs, vocational technology laboratories or other electronic techniques designed to enhance public education and to facilitate teacher training in and implementation of effective instructional technology. The Board shall also distribute, as provided in the appropriations act, funds to support the purchase of electronic reference materials for use in the statewide automated reference system.

2. In the 1996 biennium, the first priority for funding shall be consistent with the Board of Education's revised six-year technology plan; *this funding may be used to implement a local school division's long-range technology plan, at the discretion of the relevant school board, if the local plan meets or exceeds the goals and standards of the Board's revised six-year technology plan and has been approved by the Superintendent of Public Instruction.*

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

63 C. The General Assembly finds that effective prevention programs designed to assist children at risk
64 of school failure and dropout are practical mechanisms for reducing violent and criminal activity and for
65 ensuring that Virginia's children will reach adulthood with the skills necessary to succeed in the
66 twenty-first century; to this end, the following program is hereby established. With such funds as are
67 appropriated for this purpose, the General Assembly hereby establishes a grant program to be disbursed
68 by the Department of Education to schools and community-based organizations to provide quality
69 preschool programs for at-risk four-year-olds who are unserved by another such program. The grants
70 shall be used to provide full-day and at least school-year programs for at-risk four-year-old children that
71 include quality preschool education, health services, social services, parental involvement, and
72 transportation. The Department of Education, in cooperation with such other state agencies which may
73 coordinate child day care and early childhood programs, shall establish guidelines for quality preschool
74 education and criteria for the service components, consistent with the findings of the November 1993
75 study by the Board of Education, the Department of Education, and the Council on Child Day Care and
76 Early Childhood Programs. During the 1995-96 fiscal year, the Board of Education shall, with such
77 funds as are appropriated for this purpose, distribute grants, based on an allocation formula providing
78 the state share of the grant per child, as specified in the appropriations act, for thirty percent of the
79 unserved at-risk four-year-olds in the Commonwealth pursuant to the funding provided in the
80 appropriations act. During the 1996-97 fiscal year, grants shall be distributed, with such funds as are
81 appropriated for this purpose, based on an allocation formula providing the state share of the grant per
82 child, as specified in the appropriations act, for sixty percent of the unserved at-risk four-year-olds in the
83 Commonwealth, such sixty percent to be calculated by adding services for thirty percent more of the
84 unserved at-risk children to the thirty percent of unserved at-risk children in each locality provided
85 funding in the appropriations act.

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

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