

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY -- 1998 RECONVENED SESSION

CHAPTER 901

An Act to amend and reenact § 22.1-199.1 of the Code of Virginia, relating to reading specialists.

[H 426]

Approved May 20, 1998

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 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 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. Further, the General Assembly notes that education 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, including funds for providing a technology resource assistant to serve every elementary school in this Commonwealth beginning on July 1, 1998. Any local school board accepting these funds to hire such technology resource assistants 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. 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 appropriation 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 those components of the Board of Education's revised six-year technology plan which focus on (i) retrofitting and upgrading existing school buildings to efficiently use educational technology; (ii) providing (a) one network-ready multimedia microcomputer for each classroom, (b) a five-to-one ratio of pupils to network-ready

microcomputers, (c) graphing calculators and relevant scientific probes/sensors as required by the Standards of Learning, and (d) training and professional development on available technologies and software to all levels and positions; and (iii) assisting school divisions in developing integrated voice, video, and data-connectivity to local, national and international resources. 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.

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

4. Beginning on July 1, 1998, a technology replacement program shall be, with such funds as may be appropriated for this purpose, implemented to replace obsolete educational hardware and software. As provided in § 22.1-129 D, school boards may donate obsolete educational technology hardware and software which is being replaced. Any such donations shall be offered to other school divisions and to preschool programs in the Commonwealth.

C. The General Assembly finds that effective prevention programs designed to assist children at risk of school failure and dropout are practical mechanisms for reducing violent and criminal activity and for ensuring that Virginia's children will reach adulthood with the skills necessary to succeed in the twenty-first century; to this end, the following program is hereby established. With such funds as are appropriated for this purpose, the General Assembly hereby establishes a grant program to be disbursed by the Department of Education to schools and community-based organizations to provide quality preschool programs for at-risk four-year-olds who are unserved by another such program. The grants shall be used to provide full-day and at least school-year programs for at-risk four-year-old children that include quality preschool education, health services, social services, parental involvement including activities to promote family literacy, and transportation. The Department of Education, in cooperation with such other state agencies which may coordinate 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. During the 1995-96 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 thirty percent of the unserved at-risk four-year-olds in the Commonwealth pursuant to the funding provided in the appropriation act. During the 1996-97 fiscal year, 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 sixty percent of the unserved at-risk four-year-olds in the Commonwealth, such sixty percent to be calculated by adding services for thirty percent more of the unserved at-risk children to the thirty percent of unserved at-risk children in each locality provided funding in the appropriation act.

Local school boards may elect to serve more than sixty 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 sixty percent allocation, to expand services to at-risk four-year-olds beyond the sixty 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 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 funds currently provided for preschool programs within the locality.

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.