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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 586

Offered January 20, 1999

Requesting the Department of Education to examine the impact of the Standards of Accreditation on local school division budgets.

Patron—Dillard

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, Article VIII, § 2 of the Virginia Constitution directs the Board of Education to establish standards of quality, while granting the General Assembly the dual responsibilities of revising and funding these standards:

WHEREAS, the Standards of Quality, initially codified in 1972, direct the Board of Education to promulgate regulations pursuant to the Administrative Process Act establishing standards for the accreditation of public schools; and

WHEREAS, the accreditation standards for public schools must include student outcome measures, requirements and guidelines for instructional programs, staffing levels, pupil personnel services, special education program standards, auxiliary programs such as library and media services, community relations, and graduation requirements, as well as "the philosophy, goals, and objectives of public education in Virginia"; and

WHEREAS, cited in the initial Standards of Quality, the Standards of Accreditation (SOA) are "designed to ensure that an effective educational program is established and maintained in Virginia's public schools"; and

WHEREAS, the SOA are organized in eight parts, addressing broad areas, such as school and community communications, instructional programs and leadership, student achievement, school facilities and safety, accreditation, and goals and objectives; and

WHEREAS, while acknowledging that the "mission of the public education system, first and foremost," is to prepare students with "essential academic knowledge and skills in order that they may be equipped for citizenship, work, and a private life that is informed and free," the SOA also include mandates for course offerings, school year and day standards, and staff levels and responsibilities; and

WHEREAS, the 1997 revisions to the SOA set forth new criteria and processes for individual school accreditation, and clearly state that schools shall be accredited "primarily" based on pupil achievement, as evidenced by scores on the Standards of Learning tests and other assessments; and

WHEREAS, to meet the constitutional directive that the Commonwealth and localities jointly provide and support "an educational program of high quality," the General Assembly apportions the state and local share for the Standards of Quality, which necessarily includes the requirements imposed by the Standards of Accreditation; and

WHEREAS, various provisions of the Standards of Accreditation, such as the graduation requirements, mandated course offerings and staffing levels, and the addition of SOL assessments have compounded space and staffing needs in some school divisions, as well as prompted increased demand for instructional time, remediation, teacher re-training, and new instructional materials and textbooks; and

WHEREAS, careful examination of the Standards of Accreditation and the costs of providing the required programs, instruction, and staffing is necessary to determine the fiscal impact of these regulations on local school divisions, which may have widely disparate resources and educational needs; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Department of Education be requested to examine the impact of the Standards of Accreditation on local school division budgets. In pursuing its study, the Department shall consider, among other things, current funding levels for meeting the Standards of Accreditation; specific needs and challenges identified by Virginia school divisions in striving to achieve and maintain accreditation; the varying fiscal capacities and demographics of the Commonwealth's school divisions; the constitutional, fiscal, and policy implications of maintaining separate regulations and statutes imposing minimum standards for public schools in Virginia; and such other issues as it deems appropriate.

All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Department, upon request.

The Department shall complete its work in time to report its findings and recommendations to the House Committees on Education and Appropriations and the Senate Committees on Education and Health and Finance by December 1999 and shall submit such findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 2000 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the procedures of the Division

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