

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 691

Directing the Commission on Educational Accountability to examine the instructional needs of students and teachers in the public schools of the Commonwealth.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 25, 1999

Agreed to by the Senate, February 23, 1999

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth's recently revised Standards of Learning (SOL), heralded as among the most demanding curriculum standards nationwide, signify a renewed commitment to rigorous academic pursuit, clearly defining what students must learn and what teachers must teach; and

WHEREAS, bolstering these Standards of Learning are new assessments that will measure academic progress and help make our schools more accountable for student learning; and

WHEREAS, essential to improved educational performance in Virginia's public schools is a renewed commitment to increasing capacity as students, educators, schools, and divisions must be given the tools necessary to achieve educational excellence; and

WHEREAS, to meet this imperative, students must be given every opportunity to meet heightened educational challenges and preservice training and continuing professional development opportunities must be available for teachers and administrators to address academic and curriculum standards and to promote effective, innovative instructional methods that support application of knowledge; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to § 22.1-253.13:3 of the Code of Virginia, the Standards of Accreditation (SOA) 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; and "the philosophy, goals, and objectives of public education in Virginia"; and

WHEREAS, 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 SOL tests and other assessments; 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 retraining, and new instructional materials and textbooks; and

WHEREAS, while the Standards of Quality already acknowledge that "effective educational leadership and personnel and appropriate programs of professional development are essential for the advancement of public education in the Commonwealth," meeting the challenges of increasingly rigorous curriculum and accreditation standards may necessitate further examination of a variety of issues, such as specific teacher training needs and additional instructional time, the adequacy of the current school year and day, and the optimum balance of teaching duties and development opportunities; and

WHEREAS, Senate Joint Resolution No. 498 (1999) establishes a Commission on Educational Accountability; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Commission on Educational Accountability be directed to examine the instructional needs of students and teachers in the public schools of the Commonwealth.

The Commission shall consider, among other things, (i) current training requirements and professional development opportunities for educational personnel in the Commonwealth; (ii) the efficacy and appropriateness of the current school year and day to meet the goals and standards set by the Standards of Quality, the Standards of Accreditation, and the Standards of Learning; (iii) the interplay of current instructional hours, length of school year, and teacher contract requirements; (iv) optimum instructional loads, including classroom instruction, student assessment, lesson plan development, safety and disciplinary responsibilities, and in-service training; and (v) such other issues as it deems appropriate.

The Division of Legislative Services shall provide staff support for the study. The staffs of the House Committee on Appropriations and the Senate Committee on Finance shall provide technical assistance for the study. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Commission, upon request.

The Commission shall complete its work in time to submit its findings and recommendations to the

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Governor and the 2000 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents.

Implementation of this resolution is subject to subsequent approval and certification by the Joint Rules Committee. The Committee may withhold expenditures or delay the period for the conduct of the study.