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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 723
AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE
(Proposed by the Joint Conference Committee
on February 27, 1999)

(Patron Prior to Substitute—Delegate Crittenden)

Establishing a special task force of the Commission on Educational Accountability to examine the impact of the Standards of Accreditation on local school division budgets.

WHEREAS, Article VIII, Section 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; and

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 (SOAs) are "designed to ensure that an effective educational program is established and maintained in Virginia's public schools"; and

WHEREAS, the SOAs 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 SOAs also include mandates for course offerings, school year and day standards, and staff levels and responsibilities; and

WHEREAS, the 1997 revisions to the SOAs 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 include 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; and

WHEREAS, Senate Joint Resolution 481 (1999) directs the Senate Committee on Finance, the Senate Committee on Education and Health, the House Committee on Appropriations, and the House Committee on Education to examine the efficacy and appropriateness of adjusting Standards of Quality funding for certain small school divisions; and

WHEREAS, House Joint Resolution 657 (1999) requests that the efficacy and appropriateness of the Commonwealth's system of funding the Standards of Quality for public schools be determined; and

WHEREAS, Senate Joint Resolution 498 (1999) establishes the Commission on Educational Accountability, which has been charged to address a myriad of issues related to and impacting the Standards of Quality, the Standards of Learning, and the Standards of Accreditation; and

WHEREAS, due to the complexity of the issues and the interaction of public policies affecting education, it is necessary that a special task force be established to assist the Commission with its work and consider the issues raised in HJR 586 (1999) and HJR 657 (1999), and that the Commission collaborate and coordinate its work with the Joint Subcommittee Studying the Efficacy and Appropriateness of Adjusting Standards of Quality Funding for Certain Small School Divisions, pursuant to SJR 481 (1999), to avoid duplication; now, therefore, be it

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60 RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That a special task force of the
61 Commission on Educational Accountability be established to examine the impact of the Standards of
62 Accreditation on local school division budgets. The special task force shall be composed of seven
63 members as follows: four members of the House of Delegates, of whom two shall also be appointed to
64 serve on the Commission on Educational Accountability, pursuant to Senate Joint Resolution 498 (1999),
65 to be appointed by the Speaker of the House in accordance with the provisions of Rule 16 of the House
66 Rules; and three members of the Senate, of whom one shall also be appointed to serve on the
67 Commission on Educational Accountability, pursuant to Senate Joint Resolution 498 (1999), to be
68 appointed by the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections.

69 In pursuing its study, the special task force shall consider, among other things, current funding levels
70 for meeting the Standards of Accreditation; specific needs and challenges identified by Virginia school
71 divisions in striving to achieve and maintain accreditation; the varying fiscal capacities and
72 demographics of the Commonwealth's school divisions; the constitutional, fiscal, and policy implications
73 of maintaining separate regulations and statutes imposing minimum standards for public schools in
74 Virginia; and such other issues as it deems appropriate. In addition, the special task force shall consider
75 the issues raised in HJR 586 (1999) and HJR 657 (1999), and collaborate and coordinate its work with
76 the Joint Subcommittee Studying the Efficacy and Appropriateness of Adjusting Standards of Quality
77 Funding for Certain Small School Divisions, SJR 481 (1999), and other legislative study committees
78 examining related issues to avoid duplication. The special task force shall regularly apprise the
79 Commission on Educational Accountability regarding its deliberations, findings, and recommendations on
80 a schedule to be determined by the Commission.

81 The direct costs of this study shall not exceed \$12,600.

82 The Division of Legislative Services shall provide staff support for the study. Technical assistance
83 for the study shall be provided by the Department of Education, and the staffs of the House Committee
84 on Appropriations and the Senate Committee on Finance. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall
85 provide assistance to the joint subcommittee, upon request.

86 The special task force shall submit its interim findings and recommendations to the Commission on
87 Educational Accountability by November 1, 2000 and its final report by November 1, 2001.

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