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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 331

Offered January 14, 2009

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Establishing a joint subcommittee to study school dropout prevention in Virginia. Report.

Patron—Colgan

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, chronic truancy and school dropout rates continue to be critical problems nationally and in the Commonwealth, and educators, parents, community leaders, and policymakers at all levels of government have focused attention on the need to address the academic achievement gap and the declining high school graduation rate; and

WHEREAS, truancy affects students of all ages, communities, backgrounds, and school divisions, and unexcused absences from school are linked to numerous harmful social and personal consequences, among them academic failure, school dropout rates, crime and violence, unemployment, substance abuse, adult criminality and incarceration, unwanted pregnancy, and social isolation; and

WHEREAS, although great strides have been made to increase academic achievement and to reduce the school dropout rate in Virginia, as the emphasis on chronic truancy and dropout prevention has waned, the number of students experiencing academic failure and leaving school before graduation has begun to climb, and in certain areas of the Commonwealth, school division dropout rates continue to exceed the annual state and national dropout rates; and

WHEREAS, this problem crosses all racial and socioeconomic groups, and data reveal that a disproportionate number of poor, urban, and minority youth drop out of school each year, and that factors associated with school dropout are also linked to chronic truancy; and

WHEREAS, students who are chronic truants and school dropouts may be children in need of supervision, children in need of services, or both; and

WHEREAS, the personal and social costs of dropping out of school have increased, and the gap between dropouts and more educated people is widening as opportunities increase for higher skilled workers and all but disappear for the less skilled; and

WHEREAS, declining graduation rates threaten the Commonwealth's economic stability and present significant challenges to the nation's ability to maintain a competitive advantage among industrialized nations; and

WHEREAS, numerous initiatives have been instituted by national, state, and local agencies, public schools, legislative groups, law-enforcement agencies and the juvenile and domestic relations district court system, and professional and community organizations to (i) stem the tide of rising school dropout rates and low graduation rates, (ii) improve and standardize the collection, calculation, and interpretation of dropout data to effect greater consistency and quality in pupil accounting and reporting practices, (iii) bridge the academic achievement gap, (iv) provide appropriate outreach to chronic truants and potential school dropouts and to retrieve students who have dropped out, (v) offer educational and support services to students with poor academic achievement, (vi) solicit the aid of policymakers to shape effective public policies, as well as the business and faith communities, in the effort to increase graduation rates, and (vii) help parents properly guide and direct their children to productive endeavors; however, there has been little or no effort by the Commonwealth to establish and enforce a deliberate and coordinated strategy to address, prevent, and ameliorate the causal factors of the high dropout rate; and

WHEREAS, due to lack of proper vigilance, the dropout rate has continued to climb, endangering the economic and social viability of the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, it is imperative that bold, aggressive, and concerted steps be taken immediately to protect the public investment in our children, and to ensure the economic viability and competitive edge of the Commonwealth in the global marketplace; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That a joint subcommittee be established to study school dropout prevention in Virginia. The joint subcommittee shall have a total membership of six members to be appointed as follows: two members of the Senate to be appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules, and four members of the House of Delegates to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates in accordance with the principles of proportional representation contained in the Rules of the House of Delegates. The joint subcommittee shall elect a chairman and vice chairman from among its membership, who shall be members of the General Assembly.

In conducting the study, the joint subcommittee shall (i) identify the reasons for and issues attendant

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SJ331

59 to the problem of school dropout in Virginia; (ii) determine, by school division, the number of students
60 who drop out of school before the seventh grade and the reasons therefor, and the number of students
61 who graduate annually; (iii) conduct a comprehensive assessment of the factors related to school dropout
62 in and prevention efforts employed by each school division, including the academic achievement gap,
63 school dropout prevention, retention, and retrieval initiatives, social and economic dynamics in the
64 locality, family and community support systems, and how and the extent to which the criminal justice
65 system, faith community, and business and industry are actively involved in addressing the problem; (iv)
66 review the findings and recommendations of recent national and state studies and reports related to
67 dropout prevention and increasing the high school graduation rates, and determine the appropriateness of
68 adopting certain of the recommendations for use in Virginia; (v) develop appropriate strategies and an
69 action plan that incorporates a multifaceted approach to address the problem of school dropout
70 comprehensively and systemically throughout the Commonwealth; (vi) review all current state laws,
71 regulations, appropriations, and public policies relative to and that affect the issues attendant to school
72 dropout and recommend such policy, statutory, fiscal, or regulatory changes as the joint subcommittee
73 deems necessary; and (vii) consider such other related matters as the joint subcommittee deems
74 appropriate to assist it in satisfying the objectives of this study.

75 Administrative staff support shall be provided by the Office of the Clerk of the Senate. Legal,
76 research, policy analysis, and other services as requested by the joint subcommittee shall be provided by
77 the Division of Legislative Services. Technical assistance shall be provided by the Departments of
78 Education, Social Services, Juvenile Justice, the Virginia Commission on Youth, and the staffs of the
79 Senate Committee on Finance and the House Committee on Appropriations. All agencies of the
80 Commonwealth shall provide assistance for this study, upon request.

81 The joint subcommittee shall be limited to four meetings for the 2009 interim and four meetings for
82 the 2010 interim, and the direct costs of this study shall not exceed \$6,000 for each year without
83 approval as set out in this resolution. Approval for unbudgeted nonmember-related expenses shall require
84 the written authorization of the chairman of the joint subcommittee and the respective Clerk. If a
85 companion joint resolution of the other chamber is agreed to, written authorization of both Clerks shall
86 be required.

87 No recommendation of the joint subcommittee shall be adopted if a majority of the Senate members
88 or a majority of the House members appointed to the joint subcommittee (i) vote against the
89 recommendation and (ii) vote for the recommendation to fail notwithstanding the majority vote of the
90 joint subcommittee.

91 The joint subcommittee shall complete its meetings for the first year by November 30, 2009, and for
92 the second year by November 30, 2010, and the chairman shall submit to the Division of Legislative
93 Automated Systems an executive summary of its findings and recommendations no later than the first
94 day of the next Regular Session of the General Assembly for each year. Each executive summary shall
95 state whether the joint subcommittee intends to submit to the General Assembly and the Governor a
96 report of its findings and recommendations for publication as a House or Senate document. The
97 executive summaries and reports shall be submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of
98 Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports and shall be
99 posted on the General Assembly's website.

100 Implementation of this resolution is subject to subsequent approval and certification by the Joint
101 Rules Committee. The Committee may approve or disapprove expenditures for this study, extend or
102 delay the period for the conduct of the study, or authorize additional meetings during the 2009 and 2010
103 interims.