

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 646

Directing the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission to study the efficacy of year-round schools. Report.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 4, 2011

Agreed to by the Senate, February 22, 2011

WHEREAS, year-round education is not a novel concept; however, in the wake of school reform efforts and concerns about student achievement, overcrowded schools, school construction costs and empty buildings during the summer, idle youth, and rising educational costs and strained school budgets, states are searching for ways to improve student academic performance and maximize state and local investment in public education while decreasing costs to taxpayers; and

WHEREAS, most traditional schools in the country operate on a 10-month system established when the American economy was centered on farming; and

WHEREAS, the traditional and year-round school calendars both are based on 180 instructional days; and

WHEREAS, public schools on the year-round education calendar generally use either the 45-15, 60-20, or 90-30 plan models, which spread out the instructional days with shorter or longer breaks between each term; and

WHEREAS, year-round education is believed to have certain benefits, among them improved student academic performance; minimization of summer learning loss; reinforcement of learning; accommodation of students with certain educational needs; less need for students to repeat the process of acclimating to new teachers, classmates, and classroom procedures; reduced classroom overcrowding; efficient use of school facilities; reduced capital expenses; opportunities for teachers to spend less time reviewing previously taught material; opportunities for teachers to earn extra income during term breaks; reduced student and teacher absences; less teacher and student fatigue and burnout; lower incidence of student misconduct; and opportunities to utilize flexible staffing patterns, alternative salary and benefit programs, and part-time staff; and

WHEREAS, many educators and parents cite the following concerns in their opposition to year-round schools: the initial cost to establish year-round schools may be prohibitive; savings from year-round schools may be offset by increased costs for school renovations and the hiring of additional staff; changing school schedules may be problematic; and carefully coordinated school transportation, child-care arrangements, special education services, athletic and extracurricular programs, school functions, parent conferences, and family time and vacations may be disrupted; and

WHEREAS, although research on the benefits and effectiveness of year-round education is inconclusive, and several school divisions have received permission from the Board of Education to implement year-round schools, numerous factors must be carefully evaluated before establishing year-round schools statewide; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission be directed to study the efficacy of year-round schools.

In conducting its study, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission shall (i) review the Board of Education's procedure for approving year-round schools; (ii) determine which school divisions have implemented year-round schools and evaluate their experience with this alternative method of providing education; (iii) conduct a comprehensive analysis of each year-round school, including scheduling format, offerings of instructional and extracurricular programs, and the enrollment in the year-round school; (iv) consider the minimum number of required teaching days or hours that should constitute the length of a school term and the issues attendant thereto; (v) identify and review year-round schools offered by other states and countries, noting advantages and disadvantages; (vi) ascertain and weigh the essential factors that must be considered before implementing year-round schools statewide, including, but not limited to, instructional costs, transportation and special education services, and the need for additional classroom teachers, staff, and support services; (vii) evaluate the impact of changing the scheduling format on school functions, length of terms, and school breaks; and (viii) consider and thoroughly vet other issues and matters related to year-round schools as the Commission may deem necessary to provide feasible and appropriate recommendations.

Further, in conducting its study, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission shall seek and include classroom teachers, school administrators, parents, representatives of localities with and without year-round schools, the Virginia School Boards Association, and the Virginia Association of School Superintendents, as well as other educational organizations and other persons with expertise in alternative educational programs and options, in the Commission's deliberations.

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Technical assistance shall be provided to the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission by the Department of Education. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Commission for this study, upon request.

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission shall complete its meetings for the first year by November 30, 2011, and for the second year by November 30, 2012, and the Chairman shall submit to the Division of Legislative Automated Systems an executive summary of its findings and recommendations no later than the first day of the next Regular Session of the General Assembly for each year. Each executive summary shall state whether the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission intends to submit to the General Assembly and the Governor a report of its findings and recommendations for publication as a House or Senate document. The executive summaries and reports shall be submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.