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HOUSE BILL NO. 538

Offered January 10, 2024

Prefiled January 9, 2024

A *BILL to amend the Code of Virginia by adding in Article 1 of Chapter 1 of Title 10.1 a section numbered 10.1-104.6:3, relating to Virginia Student Environmental Literacy Plan Grant Fund and Program established.*

Patrons—Cole and Reaser

Referred to Committee on Education

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That the Code of Virginia is amended by adding in Article 1 of Chapter 1 of Title 10.1 a section numbered 10.1-104.6:3 as follows:

§ 10.1-104.6:3. Virginia Student Environmental Literacy Plan Grant Fund and Program.

A. In order to assist local school boards in developing and implementing a program of instruction for kindergarten through grade 12 that is aligned to the Standards of Learning and emphasizes environmental literacy as an essential skill and concept of citizenship that is necessary for responsible participation in American society and in the international community, as set forth in subsection C of § 22.1-253.13:1, the Department's Office of Environmental Education shall, in conjunction with the Department of Education and any other stakeholder that it deems appropriate, implement the Virginia Student Environmental Literacy Plan Grant Program and Fund pursuant to subsections C and D for school districts to develop local student environmental literacy plans that:

1. Prepare students to understand, analyze, and address the major environmental challenges facing the Commonwealth and the United States;

2. Provide field experiences as part of regular school curricula and create programs that contribute to healthy lifestyles through outdoor recreation and sound nutrition; and

3. Create opportunities for the enhanced and ongoing professional development of teachers relating to environmental issues.

B. The Office of Environmental Education, with consultation from the Department of Education, shall maintain a state environmental literacy plan that describes how the Department and the Department of Education shall:

1. Provide guidance to local school districts planning to develop environmental literacy programs;

2. Share resources and best practices for achieving student environmental literacy and effective teacher professional development to improve teachers' environmental subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills in teaching about environmental issues;

3. Inform and encourage school districts to create local environmental literacy plans; and

4. Implement the provisions of this section equitably across the Commonwealth, including securing funding and other necessary support.

C. There is hereby created in the state treasury a special nonreverting fund to be known as the Virginia Student Environmental Literacy Plan Grant Fund, referred to in this section as "the Fund." The Fund shall be established on the books of the Comptroller. All funds appropriated for such purpose and any gifts, donations, grants, bequests, and other funds received on its behalf shall be paid into the state treasury and credited to the Fund. Interest earned on moneys in the Fund shall remain in the Fund and be credited to it. Any moneys remaining in the Fund, including interest thereon, at the end of each fiscal year shall not revert to the general fund but shall remain in the Fund. Moneys in the Fund shall be used solely for the purpose of awarding grants on a competitive basis pursuant to the Virginia Student Environmental Literacy Plan Grant Program established in subsection D. Expenditures and disbursements from the Fund shall be made by the State Treasurer on warrants issued by the Comptroller upon written request signed by the Director.

D. There is hereby established the Virginia Student Environmental Literacy Plan Grant Program (the Program) for the purpose of awarding grants from the Fund on a competitive basis to any local school board that seeks assistance to initiate, expand, or improve teacher professional development opportunities or student environmental education programs that align with the content and objectives of this section. The Office of Environmental Education shall administer the Program and shall establish such rules and procedures for the Program that it deems necessary and appropriate.