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SENATE BILL NO. 817

Offered January 13, 1999

A BILL to amend and reenact § 22.1-208.01 of the Code of Virginia, relating to character education programs.

Patrons—Edwards, Barry, Couric, Gartlan, Holland, Houck, Howell, Lambert, Lucas, Marsh, Marye, Maxwell, Puckett, Reynolds, Saslaw, Ticer, Whipple and Woods; Delegates: Bennett, Bryant, Cranwell, Davies, Hull, Moran, Phillips, Plum, Shuler, Tate, Thomas and Woodrum

Referred to Committee on Education and Health

Whereas, Virginia has implemented a new system for school accreditation which is based on student achievement on the Standards of Learning assessments; and

Whereas, in some schools, the learning environment must be improved to enhance the quality of instruction and increase the opportunities to learn; and

Whereas, young people respond well to being accorded respect, understanding, and encouragement; and

Whereas, projects across the United States have shown that public schools can teach good character; and

Whereas, character education can improve the behavior and enhance the future of our young children; and

Whereas, implementation of character education requires strong community involvement and unwavering commitment; and

Whereas, successful character education programs also require state commitment to support and coordinate the programs and to ensure accountability; now, therefore,

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 22.1-208.01 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 22.1-208.01. Character education required.

A. Each school board shall establish, within its existing programs, a character education program in its elementary schools. The purpose of the character education program shall be to instill in students civic virtues and personal character traits so as to improve the learning environment, promote student achievement, reduce disciplinary problems, and develop civic-minded students of high character. The components of each program shall be developed in cooperation with the students, their parents, and the community-at-large. The basic character traits shall include (i) trustworthiness, including honesty, reliability, and loyalty; (ii) respect, including the precepts of the Golden Rule, tolerance, and courtesy; (iii) responsibility, including accountability, diligence, perseverance, and self-control; (iv) fairness, including justice, impartiality, freedom from prejudice and open-mindedness; (v) caring, including kindness, empathy, compassion, consideration, generosity, and charity; and (vi) citizenship, including concern for the common good, sharing respect for authority and the law, and community-mindedness.

Classroom instruction may be used to supplement a character education program; however, each program shall be interwoven into the school procedures and environment and structured to instruct primarily through example, illustration, and participation.

This provision is intended to educate students regarding those core civic values and virtues which are efficacious to civilized society and are common to the diverse social, cultural, and religious groups of the Commonwealth. Nothing herein shall be construed as requiring or authorizing the indoctrination in any particular religious or political belief.

B. The Board of Education shall establish criteria for elementary character education programs, consistent with the provisions of this section. To assist school divisions in implementing character education programs and practices that are designed to promote the development of personal qualities as set forth in this section and the Standards of Quality and that will improve family and community involvement in the public schools, ~~there the Board of Education shall be established~~ also establish, within the Department of Education, the Commonwealth Character Initiative. ~~This unit~~ The Board shall provide resources and technical assistance to school divisions regarding successful character education programs. ~~The unit~~ and shall (i) identify and analyze effective character education programs and practices and (ii) collect and disseminate among school divisions information regarding such programs and practices and potential funding and support sources. ~~Such unit~~ The Board may also provide resources supporting professional development for administrators and teachers in the delivery of any character education programs.

C. The Board of Education shall issue, consistent with the character education criteria set forth in

60 *this section, Requests For Proposals, and shall award, with such funds as are appropriated for this*
61 *purpose, grants to school boards for the implementation of innovative character education programs.*