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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 261

Offered January 8, 2025

Prefiled January 8, 2025

Designating the first week of October, in 2025 and in each succeeding year, as Specialized Education School Week in Virginia.

Patrons—Pekarsky and Hashmi

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, educators across the Commonwealth are committed to providing a high-quality education that meets the needs of students at all levels and learning capacities in both public and private school settings; and

WHEREAS, specialized education schools in the Commonwealth play a vital role in the continuum of educational options for students who have the most serious emotional, mental health, and behavioral health disabilities; and

WHEREAS, of the 1.2 million K-12 students in the Commonwealth, approximately 4,500 students with disabilities, whose educational, therapeutic, and behavior management needs cannot be adequately met by the public school system, are enrolled in specialized education schools; and

WHEREAS, students enrolled in specialized education schools represent a broad range of conditions, from autism to other emotional, mental health, and behavioral challenges; and

WHEREAS, local school districts partner with private providers of specialized education services to extend the continuum of learning opportunities for students who struggle to succeed or who are not capable of thriving in a mainstream public school; and

WHEREAS, individualized education plan teams guide families through a rigorous process to identify schools that meet a student's unique needs and facilitate attendance, ensuring the best quality education for the student and preventing strain on the special education resources within the public school system; and

WHEREAS, specialized education schools offer low student-to-staff ratios in the classroom, with teachers who are trained in differentiated instruction, support staff who are trained in techniques for behavior management and crisis intervention, and fully credentialed specialists and therapists, all of whom support these students; and

WHEREAS, Virginia's specialized education schools are licensed by the Department of Education and accredited by the Virginia Association of Independent Specialized Education Facilities (VAISEF), which ensures that these schools meet rigorous standards of quality; and

WHEREAS, Specialized Education School Week provides an opportunity to raise statewide awareness of the vital role VAISEF's member schools play in the continuum of K-12 educational opportunities available to children in the Commonwealth; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly designate the first week of October, in 2025 and in each succeeding year, as Specialized Education School Week in Virginia; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate transmit a copy of this resolution to the Virginia Association of Independent Specialized Education Facilities so that members of the organization may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly of Virginia in this matter; and be it

RESOLVED FINALLY, That the Clerk of the Senate post the designation of this week on the General Assembly's website.