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HOUSE BILL NO. 955

Offered January 14, 2026

Prefiled January 13, 2026

A BILL to amend and reenact § 23.1-203 of the Code of Virginia, relating to State Council of Higher Education for Virginia; public institutions of higher education; certain annual student demographic data.

Patron—Guzman

Committee Referral Pending

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**1. That § 23.1-203 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:****§ 23.1-203. Duties of Council.**

The Council shall:

1. Develop a statewide strategic plan that (i) reflects the goals set forth in subsection A of § 23.1-1002 or (ii) once adopted, reflects the goals and objectives developed pursuant to subdivision B 5 of § 23.1-309 for higher education in the Commonwealth, identifies a coordinated approach to such state and regional goals, and emphasizes the future needs for higher education in the Commonwealth at both the undergraduate and the graduate levels and the mission, programs, facilities, and location of each of the existing institutions of higher education, each public institution's six-year plan, and such other matters as the Council deems appropriate. The Council shall revise such plan at least once every six years and shall submit such recommendations as are necessary for the implementation of the plan to the Governor and the General Assembly.

2. Review and approve or disapprove any proposed change in the statement of mission of any public institution of higher education and define the mission of all newly created public institutions of higher education. The Council shall report such approvals, disapprovals, and definitions to the Governor and the General Assembly at least once every six years. No such actions shall become effective until 30 days after adjournment of the session of the General Assembly next following the filing of such a report. Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to authorize the Council to modify any mission statement adopted by the General Assembly or empower the Council to affect, either directly or indirectly, the selection of faculty or the standards and criteria for admission of any public institution of higher education, whether relating to academic standards, residence, or other criteria. Faculty selection and student admission policies shall remain a function of the individual public institutions of higher education.

3. Study any proposed escalation of any public institution of higher education to a degree-granting level higher than that level to which it is presently restricted and submit a report and recommendation to the Governor and the General Assembly relating to the proposal. The study shall include the need for and benefits or detriments to be derived from the escalation. No such institution shall implement any such proposed escalation until the Council's report and recommendation have been submitted to the General Assembly and the General Assembly approves the institution's proposal.

4. Review and approve or disapprove all enrollment projections proposed by each public institution of higher education. The Council's projections shall be organized numerically by level of enrollment and shall be used solely for budgetary, fiscal, and strategic planning purposes. The Council shall develop estimates of the number of degrees to be awarded by each public institution of higher education and include those estimates in its reports of enrollment projections. The student admissions policies for such institutions and their specific programs shall remain the sole responsibility of the individual governing boards but all baccalaureate public institutions of higher education shall adopt dual admissions policies with comprehensive community colleges as required by § 23.1-907.

5. Review and approve or disapprove all new undergraduate or graduate academic programs that any public institution of higher education proposes.

6. Review and require the discontinuance of any undergraduate or graduate academic program that is presently offered by any public institution of higher education when the Council determines that such academic program is (i) nonproductive in terms of the number of degrees granted, the number of students served by the program, the program's effectiveness, and budgetary considerations or (ii) supported by state funds and unnecessarily duplicative of academic programs offered at other public institutions of higher education. The Council shall make a report to the Governor and the General Assembly with respect to the discontinuance of any such academic program. No such discontinuance shall become effective until 30 days after the adjournment of the session of the General Assembly next following the filing of such report.

7. Review and approve or disapprove the establishment of any department, school, college, branch, division, or extension of any public institution of higher education that such institution proposes to establish,

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whether located on or off the main campus of such institution. If any organizational change is determined by the Council to be proposed solely for the purpose of internal management and the institution's curricular offerings remain constant, the Council shall approve the proposed change. Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to authorize the Council to disapprove the establishment of any such department, school, college, branch, division, or extension established by the General Assembly.

8. Review the proposed closure of any academic program in a high demand or critical shortage area, as defined by the Council, by any public institution of higher education and assist in the development of an orderly closure plan, when needed.

9. Develop a uniform, comprehensive data information system designed to gather all information necessary to the performance of the Council's duties. The system shall include ~~information~~ *annual data* on admissions, enrollment, *including the enrollment of Virginia students, non-Virginia students, and international students*, self-identified students with documented disabilities, personnel, programs, financing, space inventory, facilities, and such other areas as the Council deems appropriate *and each public institution of higher education shall annually provide to the Council such information as may be necessary to fulfill such duty. To the extent permitted by applicable state and federal law, the Council shall post such data publicly and conspicuously on its website.* When consistent with the Government Data Collection and Dissemination Practices Act (§ 2.2-3800 et seq.), the Virginia Unemployment Compensation Act (§ 60.2-100 et seq.), and applicable federal law, the Council, acting solely or in partnership with the Virginia Department of Education or the Virginia Employment Commission, may contract with private entities to create de-identified student records in which all personally identifiable information has been removed for the purpose of assessing the performance of institutions and specific programs relative to the workforce needs of the Commonwealth.

10. In cooperation with public institutions of higher education, develop guidelines for the assessment of student achievement. Each such institution shall use an approved program that complies with the guidelines of the Council and is consistent with the institution's mission and educational objectives in the development of such assessment. The Council shall report each institution's assessment of student achievement in the revisions to the Commonwealth's statewide strategic plan for higher education.

11. In cooperation with the appropriate state financial and accounting officials, develop and establish uniform standards and systems of accounting, recordkeeping, and statistical reporting for public institutions of higher education.

12. Review biennially and approve or disapprove all changes in the inventory of educational and general space that any public institution of higher education proposes and report such approvals and disapprovals to the Governor and the General Assembly. No such change shall become effective until 30 days after the adjournment of the session of the General Assembly next following the filing of such report.

13. Visit and study the operations of each public institution of higher education at such times as the Council deems appropriate and conduct such other studies in the field of higher education as the Council deems appropriate or as may be requested by the Governor or the General Assembly.

14. Provide advisory services to each accredited nonprofit private institution of higher education whose primary purpose is to provide collegiate or graduate education and not to provide religious training or theological education on academic, administrative, financial, and space utilization matters. The Council may review and advise on joint activities, including contracts for services between public institutions of higher education and such private institutions of higher education or between such private institutions of higher education and any agency or political subdivision of the Commonwealth.

15. Adopt such policies and regulations as the Council deems necessary to implement its duties established by state law. Each public institution of higher education shall comply with such policies and regulations.

16. Issue guidelines consistent with the provisions of the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (20 U.S.C. § 1232g), requiring public institutions of higher education to release a student's academic and disciplinary record to a student's parent.

17. Require each institution of higher education formed, chartered, or established in the Commonwealth after July 1, 1980, to ensure the preservation of student transcripts in the event of institutional closure or revocation of approval to operate in the Commonwealth. An institution may ensure the preservation of student transcripts by binding agreement with another institution of higher education with which it is not corporately connected or in such other way as the Council may authorize by regulation. In the event that an institution closes or has its approval to operate in the Commonwealth revoked, the Council, through its Executive Director, may take such action as is necessary to secure and preserve the student transcripts until such time as an appropriate institution accepts all or some of the transcripts. Nothing in this subdivision shall be deemed to interfere with the right of a student to his own transcripts or authorize disclosure of student records except as may otherwise be authorized by law.

18. Require the development and submission of articulation, dual admissions, and guaranteed admissions agreements between associate-degree-granting and baccalaureate public institutions of higher education.

19. Provide periodic updates of base adequacy funding guidelines adopted by the Joint Subcommittee Studying Higher Education Funding Policies for each public institution of higher education.

20. Develop, pursuant to the provisions of § 23.1-907, guidelines for articulation, dual admissions, and guaranteed admissions agreements, including guidelines related to a one-year Uniform Certificate of General Studies Program and a one-semester Passport Program to be offered at each comprehensive community college. The guidelines developed pursuant to this subdivision shall be developed in consultation with all public institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth, the Department of Education, and the Virginia Association of School Superintendents and shall ensure standardization, quality, and transparency in the implementation of the programs and agreements. At the discretion of the Council, private institutions of higher education eligible for tuition assistance grants may also be consulted.

21. Cooperate with the Board of Education in matters of interest to both public elementary and secondary schools and public institutions of higher education, particularly in connection with coordination of the college admission requirements, coordination of teacher training programs with the public school programs, and the Board of Education's Six-Year Educational Technology Plan for Virginia. The Council shall encourage public institutions of higher education to design programs that include the skills necessary for the successful implementation of such Plan.

22. Advise and provide technical assistance to the Brown v. Board of Education Scholarship Committee in the implementation and administration of the Brown v. Board of Education Scholarship Program pursuant to Chapter 34.1 (§ 30-231.01 et seq.) of Title 30.

23. Insofar as possible, seek the cooperation and utilize the facilities of existing state departments, institutions, and agencies in carrying out its duties.

24. Serve as the coordinating council for public institutions of higher education.

25. Serve as the planning and coordinating agency for all postsecondary educational programs for all health professions and occupations and make recommendations, including those relating to financing, for providing adequate and coordinated educational programs to produce an appropriate supply of properly trained personnel. The Council may conduct such studies as it deems appropriate in furtherance of the requirements of this subdivision. All state departments and agencies shall cooperate with the Council in the execution of its responsibilities under this subdivision.

26. Carry out such duties as the Governor may assign to it in response to agency designations requested by the federal government.

27. Insofar as practicable, preserve the individuality, traditions, and sense of responsibility of each public institution of higher education in carrying out its duties.

28. Insofar as practicable, seek the assistance and advice of each public institution of higher education in fulfilling its duties and responsibilities.

29. Administer the Virginia Longitudinal Data System as a multiagency partnership for the purposes of developing educational, health, social service, and employment outcome data; improving the efficacy of state services; and aiding decision making.

30. Assist the Department of Education with collecting and compiling information for distribution to high school students that assist such students in making more informed decisions about post-high-school educational and training opportunities pursuant to § 22.1-206.2.