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HOUSE BILL NO. 636

Offered January 12, 2022

Prefiled January 11, 2022

A *BILL to amend the Code of Virginia by adding a section numbered 22.1-212.1:3, relating to Virginia student environmental literacy; plan; grant fund and program.*

Patrons—Carr, Orrock and Simon

Referred to Committee on Education

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That the Code of Virginia is amended by adding a section numbered 22.1-212.1:3 as follows:

§ 22.1-212.1:3. Virginia student environmental literacy; plan; Virginia Student Environmental Literacy Plan Grant Fund and Program.

A. In order to assist each local school board in developing and implementing a program of instruction for grades kindergarten through 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 Board, in consultation with the Department of Environmental Quality, the Department of Health, any other stakeholder that it deems appropriate, and the public, shall establish and update at least once every five years a Virginia student environmental literacy plan (the plan) that:

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

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

3. Creates opportunities for the enhanced and ongoing professional development of teachers that improves teachers' environmental subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills in teaching about environmental issues, including the use of interdisciplinary, field-based, and research-based learning and innovative technology in the classroom.

B. The plan shall include a description of:

1. (i) How the Board will measure the environmental literacy of students, including relevant Standards of Learning and related curricula and courses or subjects where environmental education instruction will be integrated throughout grades kindergarten through 12 curricula, and (ii) the relationship of the plan to the high school graduation requirements established by the Board;

2. Programs for the professional development of teachers to improve teachers' environmental subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills in teaching about environmental issues, including the use of interdisciplinary, field-based, and research-based learning and innovative technology in the classroom; and

3. A description of how the Board will implement the plan, 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 purposes 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 Superintendent.

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 the plan. The Department of Education shall administer the Program and shall establish such rules and procedures for the Program that it deems necessary and appropriate.