

HOUSE BILL 2663

By Hensley

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, to establish a special joint committee to review and study the establishment of an occupational course of study for students in special education.

WHEREAS, the State of Tennessee has initiated significant efforts to increase graduation rates and to improve high school graduates' readiness for college and careers; and

WHEREAS, in the past 10 years, almost 31,000 Tennessee students with disabilities completed their high school education with a certificate rather than a diploma; and

WHEREAS, the certificate provided to these 31,000 students significantly limits access to employment and postsecondary educational opportunities; and

WHEREAS, the State of Tennessee strives to provide transition services to students with disabilities as required by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which facilitate the student's movement from school to post-school activities, including, but not limited to, integrated employment, post-secondary education, vocational education, and independent living; and

WHEREAS, students with disabilities should be afforded full and equal opportunities through the State of Tennessee's campaign for excellence in education; and

WHEREAS, the development of an occupational course of study would enhance employment and postsecondary educational opportunities for students with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, the development of an occupational course of study option needs careful study and consideration to ensure coordination with Tennessee's campaign for excellence in education; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. There is created a special committee to conduct a study on the establishment of an occupational course of study for students receiving special education services who require a modified curriculum focused on preparation for employment, post-secondary education, and independent living, leading to either a regular or an occupational diploma.

SECTION 2. The course of study would concentrate on occupational preparation including school-based training, community-based training, employment or vocational training, internships, and volunteer and community services hours.

SECTION 3. The special committee shall study issues relating to the creation of an occupational course of study, including the following:

(1) A review of post-secondary outcomes for students receiving special education services under the current diploma and certificate options;

(2) A review of current challenges to ensure that students with disabilities are provided with an education that enhances their opportunities to obtain and maintain jobs, to participate in post-secondary education, and to live independently;

(3) A review of federal and state laws and programs that have an impact on the development of an occupational course of study; and

(4) A review of occupational courses of study currently in operation in other states, including, but not limited to, attention to student populations, curriculum, and compliance with federal requirements, and outcomes.

SECTION 4. In conducting its study, the special committee shall also review information from a variety of sources, including input from stakeholders such as state and local education officials, family members and advocates.

SECTION 5. The special committee shall consist of fifteen (15) members, as follows:

- (1) A member of the education committee of the house of representatives to be appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives;
- (2) A member of the education committee of the senate to be appointed by the speaker of the senate;
- (3) A representative of the state board of education to be appointed by the board;
- (4) A representative of the department of education, division of special education to be appointed by the commissioner;
- (5) A representative of the department of human services, vocational rehabilitation services to be appointed by the commissioner;
- (6) A representative of a local education agency to be appointed by the Tennessee Association of Secondary School Principals;
- (7) A special education administrator from a local education agency to be appointed by the Tennessee Association for Administrators in Special Education;
- (8) An educator who provides transition services to students with disabilities to be appointed by the Tennessee Education Association;
- (9) A representative of the Tennessee School Boards Association to be appointed by the association;
- (10) Two (2) parents of students with disabilities to be appointed by the Disability Coalition on Education;
- (11) A representative of The Arc of Tennessee to be appointed by the agency;
- (12) A representative of the Disability Law and Advocacy Center of Tennessee to be appointed by the agency;
- (13) A representative of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities to be appointed by the council;

(14) A representative of the Disability Coalition on Education to be appointed by the coalition; and

(15) A representative of the Next Steps post-secondary program for students with disabilities at Vanderbilt University.

SECTION 6. All members of the special joint committee shall be appointed no later than July 1, 2012.

SECTION 7. All appropriate state agencies shall provide assistance to the special joint committee upon request of the chair.

SECTION 8. All legislative members of the special joint committee who are duly elected members of the general assembly shall remain members of such committee until the committee reports its findings and recommendations to the general assembly.

SECTION 9. The special joint committee shall be convened by the member appointed from the senate education committee, and at its first meeting, the committee shall elect a chair, vice-chair, and such other officers the committee deems necessary.

SECTION 10. The special committee shall report its findings and recommendations, including any proposed legislation, to the education committees of the senate and house of representatives by January 8, 2013, at which time the special committee shall cease to exist.

SECTION 11. This act shall take effect upon becoming law, the public welfare requiring it.