Resolve, To Create a State-run Virtual Academy Providing Maine Students with Access to Online Learning through Their Existing School Districts

(EMERGENCY)

Reference to the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs suggested and ordered printed.

Presented by Representative HUBBELL of Bar Harbor.
Emergency preamble. Whereas, acts and resolves of the Legislature do not become effective until 90 days after adjournment unless enacted as emergencies; and

Whereas, it is crucial that the Department of Education, education stakeholders and school administrative units begin their work as soon as possible to ensure the stakeholder group convened by the department pursuant to this resolve has sufficient time to obtain information and develop plans to establish online and digital learning opportunities and to develop a memorandum of understanding that provides Maine secondary school students with the opportunity to access a virtual learning academy during the 2015-2016 school year; and

Whereas, in the judgment of the Legislature, these facts create an emergency within the meaning of the Constitution of Maine and require the following legislation as immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety; now, therefore, be it

Sec. 1. Stakeholder group to develop online and digital learning opportunities. Resolved: That the Department of Education shall convene a stakeholder group to develop plans to establish online and digital learning opportunities, which may include a state-administered virtual academy and a state-administered digital learning exchange, that provide all public schools in the State access to online instruction, online courses and digital learning resources for their students. The stakeholder group must include a member of the Maine Charter School Commission, established in the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 5, section 12004-G, subsection 10-D, and representatives of education associations in the State, including but not limited to representatives of the Maine School Superintendents Association, the Maine School Boards Association, the Maine Principals’ Association and the Maine Education Association, and Maine educators who are currently providing online and digital learning opportunities for their students through the virtual high school program. In designing online and digital learning opportunities the stakeholder group, in collaboration with the Department of Education, shall:

1. Ensure that any virtual academy provides for a blended learning environment that offers access to virtual classes along with traditional classroom-based instruction;

2. Ensure that any digital learning exchange provides expanded digital learning opportunities to all Maine students and establishes a clearinghouse of open educational resources available to all educators, parents and students;

3. Place particular emphasis on enhancing curriculum and addressing potential scheduling obstacles, including scheduling obstacles that may be encountered by students in career and technical education programs; and

4. Use as models the Vermont Virtual Learning Cooperative, the Virtual Learning Academy Charter School in New Hampshire and digital learning exchanges in other states and jurisdictions.
The stakeholder group, with the assistance of the Department of Education, shall complete the design of online and digital learning opportunities by July 1, 2015; and be it further

Sec. 2. Access to a virtual learning academy during the 2015-2016 school year. Resolved: That, by July 1, 2015, the stakeholder group convened pursuant to section 1, in collaboration with school administrative units in the State, shall make a good faith effort to develop a memorandum of understanding with the Virtual Learning Academy Charter School in New Hampshire to provide Maine secondary school students with access to virtual learning programs during the 2015-2016 school year through the Virtual Learning Academy Charter School in New Hampshire. The memorandum of understanding must include the agreement of participating school administrative units and the Virtual Learning Academy Charter School in New Hampshire to provide access to virtual learning programs that serve the best interest of Maine secondary school students and that reduce to the greatest extent possible the cost of admission to virtual learning programs during the 2015-2016 school year. The Commissioner of Education shall submit a copy of any memorandum of understanding developed in accordance with this section to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs by July 15, 2015; and be it further

Sec. 3. Report. Resolved: That, by December 1, 2015, the Commissioner of Education or the commissioner’s designee, on behalf of the stakeholder group pursuant to section 1, shall submit a report, including findings and any recommended legislation necessary to implement plans for the establishment of online and digital learning opportunities, which may include a state-administered virtual academy and a state-administered digital learning exchange, to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. The joint standing committee may submit a bill related to the report to the Second Regular Session of the 127th Legislature.

Emergency clause. In view of the emergency cited in the preamble, this legislation takes effect when approved.

SUMMARY

This resolve does the following.

1. It directs the Department of Education to convene a stakeholder group to develop plans to establish online and digital learning opportunities, which may include a state-administered virtual academy and a state-administered digital learning exchange, that provide all public schools in the State access to online instruction, online courses and digital learning resources for their students.

2. It directs the stakeholder group, in collaboration with the Department of Education, to complete the design of online and digital learning opportunities for Maine students and submit a report, including findings and any necessary implementing legislation, to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs by December 1, 2015.
3. It directs the stakeholder group, in collaboration with school administrative units in the State, to develop a memorandum of understanding with the Virtual Learning Academy Charter School in New Hampshire to provide Maine secondary school students with access to virtual learning programs during the 2015-2016 school year.