**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, TO ABOLISH THE EDUCATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE AND THE COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION ON JULY 1, 2021, AND DEVOLVE THEIR DUTIES, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND FUNCTIONS UPON THE SOUTH CAROLINA COMMISSION FOR COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION HEREAFTER CREATED; BY ADDING CHAPTER 75 TO TITLE 59 SO AS TO ESTABLISH THE SOUTH CAROLINA COMMISSION FOR COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION AND PROVIDE FOR ITS MEMBERSHIP, ORGANIZATION, AND FUNCTIONS INCLUDING BEING THE LEAD AGENCY TO COORDINATE AND IMPLEMENT THE PROVISIONS OF CHAPTER 76, TITLE 59 RELATING TO THE INITIATIVES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING; AND BY ADDING CHAPTER 76 TO TITLE 59 SO AS TO PROVIDE FOR A SEAMLESS SYSTEM OF EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES DESIGNED TO INCLUDE EVERY LEVEL OF EDUCATION FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION THROUGH GRADUATE STUDIES KNOWN AS THE “P‑20 EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM FOR PRESCHOOL THROUGH AGE 20”.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. (A) On July 1, 2021, the Education Oversight Committee and the Commission on Higher Education are abolished and their duties, responsibilities and functions devolved upon the South Carolina Commission for Comprehensive Education hereafter created.

(B) The employees, authorized appropriations, and assets and liabilities of the Education Oversight Committee and the Commission on Higher Education are transferred to the South Carolina Commission for Comprehensive Education. Except for the agency heads, all classified or unclassified personnel employed by the Education Oversight Committee and the Commission on Higher Education on the effective date of this act, either by contract or by employment at will, shall become employees of the Commission for Comprehensive Education with the same employment status, compensation, classification, and grade level as applicable. Agency heads may be retained or offered other positions in the discretion of the commission.

(C) Regulations promulgated by these offices or agencies are continued and are considered to be promulgated by the Commission for Comprehensive Education.

(D) The Code Commissioner is directed to change or correct all references to theses offices or agencies in Title 59 or other related provisions of law to the Commission for Comprehensive Education. References to the names to these offices or agencies in the 1976 Code or other provisions of law are considered to be and must be construed to mean appropriate references.

SECTION 2. Title 59 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“CHAPTER 75

Commission for Comprehensive Education

Section 59‑75‑10. (A) There is hereby created the South Carolina Commission for Comprehensive Education with nine members to be selected in the manner provided in this chapter. Seven members of the commission must be elected by the General Assembly, one from each congressional district. Two members of the commission must be appointed by the Governor one of whom shall serve as chairman as designated by the Governor. The members first elected from congressional districts, one, three, five, and seven shall serve initial terms of two years each, and the members first elected from congressional districts two, four, and six and the members appointed by the Governor shall serve initial terms of four years each. Thereafter all members selected shall serve for terms of four years each. The terms of all members shall expire on the last day of June of the year of expiration and all members shall serve until their successors are selected and qualify. Vacancies must be filled in the manner of original selections for the remainder of the unexpired term.

(B) The chairman and members of the commission shall receive annual salaries payable in the same manner as the salaries of other state officers are paid.

(C) The commission must meet at least once each month, and the chairman must call a meeting at any other time upon the written request of any two members of the commission. A majority of the commissioners constitutes a quorum for the transaction of all business pertaining to their office. The commission may select other officers as it considers necessary other than the chairman.

(D) The commission shall receive appropriations as may be provided by the General Assembly and may employ such staff as necessary including a director and deputy director within the appropriations provided by the General Assembly.

(E) No member of the General Assembly or member of his immediate family may be elected to the commission while the member is serving in the General Assembly; nor may a member of the General Assembly or a member of his immediate family be elected to the commission for a period of four years after the member either:

(1) ceases to be a member of the General Assembly; or

(2) fails to file for election to the General Assembly in accordance with Section 7‑11‑15.

Section 59‑75‑20. The commission shall perform those duties, functions, and responsibilities formerly performed by the Education Oversight Committee and the Commission on Higher Education and additionally is the lead agency to coordinate and implement the initiatives for lifelong learning under Chapter 76 of this title.”

SECTION 3. Title 59 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“CHAPTER 76

Initiatives for Lifelong Learning

Section 59‑76‑10. (A) The General Assembly finds that:

(1) education is an integral part of achieving success in the increasingly knowledge‑based economy of the twenty‑first century;

(2) South Carolina must have a seamless, coordinated and strategically based system of education that empowers its citizens to attain the levels of academic achievement necessary to realize economic prosperity;

(3) the active leadership and commitment of the General Assembly and other public officials working in cooperation with state and local policy makers is necessary for the creation of this fully integrated system of education;

(4) a truly seamless system of education includes every level of education from early childhood education through graduate and professional study which encompasses job training and lifelong learning; and

(5) substantive input from all stakeholders, including business leaders, educators, and governmental agency officials, is essential for the operation of an educational system that supports economic and job development and produces the quality of life all South Carolinians want for themselves and their families.

(B) The General Assembly therefore declares that it is enacting the provisions of this act because for too long education in South Carolina has operated as a series of discrete silos: early childhood programs, elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, vocational and technical programs, two‑year community and technical colleges, workforce training, four‑year colleges and universities, and graduate education. As students move from one silo to the next in their academic careers, too many fall through the numerous cracks created by a disjointed system. A third grader who cannot read at grade level enters the fourth grade with little hope of catching up academically to his peers. A middle school student who does not receive appropriate academic counseling enters high school with little hope of taking the courses necessary to prepare for her postsecondary success. A technical college student who is unable to transfer course credits enters a four‑year degree program with little hope of finishing his degree on time, or at all. An undergraduate student who must take remedial courses has little hope of pursuing a graduate degree. While some students do manage to navigate the system and move through one silo to the next, it is much less common than it should be.

(C) As a result it is in the best interest of our state’s students, parents, educators, and taxpayers if a more coordinated and integrated system of learning in each grade level and area of education from preschool to graduate school be implemented so that students can be trained in areas that are not strictly academic subjects, such as critical thinking skills, so that they can be thoroughly prepared for future academic matriculation and other endeavors.

Section 59‑76‑20. In order to provide for adequate implementation and execution of the provisions of this chapter, South Carolina Commission for Comprehensive Education is deemed the lead agency to facilitate integration of the provisions of this chapter into all phases of education in this State from kindergarten through post graduate training. This system of education is known and may be cited as the P‑20 educational system (preschool through age 20). In addition, upon coordinating with the Commission for Comprehensive Education, other agencies involved with delivering educational services to the children and adults of this State, including, but not limited to, the State Department of Education, and the State Board for Technical and Comprehensive Education also shall incorporate the provisions of this chapter into those policies and programs it is responsible for overseeing or undertaking under state law in the manner it determines reasonable and appropriate consistent with the provisions of this chapter.

Section 59‑76‑30. The commission and other agencies or departments identified in Section 59‑76‑20 shall address as applicable including, but not limited to, the following specific issues:

(1) improving the preparation, retention and professional development of educators at all levels;

(2) ensuring that all students have the basic, critical thinking, and technical skills necessary to succeed in the modern workplace;

(3) increasing cooperation and interaction with other states such as Maryland, Illinois, and West Virginia which use the P‑20 educational system;

(4) strengthening the use of technology in the development and delivery of curriculum and instruction;

(5) increasing student and parent awareness of postsecondary educational opportunities and financial aid availability;

(6) ensuring the integration of vocational and technical education and career counseling into all levels of education;

(7) designing other means to strengthen the connections between technical college programs and workforce development needs;

(8) aligning high school course content and graduation requirements with postsecondary admissions and placement standards;

(9) promoting greater family and community involvement in the education system;

(10) developing a more proactive, collaborative process for identifying and applying for external grants for education and workforce development;

(11) making better use of student data for public accountability and longitudinal research purposes;

(12) strengthening and expanding educational leadership programs;

(13) creating pathways for all students to obtain college degrees;

(14) improving the connections between the prekindergarten, primary, secondary, and higher education systems; and

(15) creating programs and incentives to encourage mutually beneficial relationships between schools, school systems, higher education, and the business community.`

Section 59‑76‑40. The commission shall determine performance measures under this chapter and annually report to the Governor, General Assembly, and the general public the success of the educational agencies, departments, and commissions charged with implementing this chapter in regard to:

(1) providing for the maximal use of state resources throughout the educational grades or other training under their purview;

(2) allowing longitudinal data analyses of finances, programs and students;

(3) requiring joint planning and coordination among complementary initiatives;

(4) identifying duplicative and counterproductive programs and initiatives;

(5) identifying common interagency legislative interests and strategies;

(6) identifying extant laws, regulations, and practices that impede student articulation and transition which warrant elimination;

(7) introducing system‑wide best practices, including the sharing of faculty and staff positions among secondary and postsecondary institutions; and

(8) creating incentives for partnerships among institutions that may include access to innovation funding and mutual performance requirements.

Section 59‑76‑50. The Governor in his executive budget beginning with the Fiscal Year 2022‑2023 shall include funding for those initiatives the Governor annually identifies which will accomplish the objectives and provisions of this chapter.

Section 59‑76‑60. All actions required of educational agencies, departments, and commissions under this chapter shall ensure that these actions complement our state’s job creation and economic development efforts.”

SECTION 4. This act takes effect on July 1, 2021.

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