

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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# HOUSE RESOLUTION

No. 133 Session of  
1997

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INTRODUCED BY PERZEL AND EVANS, APRIL 14, 1997

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REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON RULES, APRIL 14, 1997

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## A RESOLUTION

1 Creating a legislative commission to study restructuring of  
2 urban schools in this Commonwealth.

3 WHEREAS, Many Pennsylvanians believe that their urban schools  
4 are failing to provide an efficient and effective education for  
5 the students they serve; and

6 WHEREAS, Many feel that city school districts are too large,  
7 too bureaucratic and as a result may themselves be obstacles to  
8 educational excellence; and

9 WHEREAS, In 1995 the Education Commission of the States found  
10 that urban school systems share common characteristics and  
11 problems, including:

12 (1) the public is estranged from urban school districts,  
13 resulting in a serious loss of public confidence and lack of  
14 support at a time when urban children face greater and more  
15 severe problems than ever before;

16 (2) many public urban school students are underachieving  
17 and too few are engaged in rigorous, high-level academic

1 experiences;

2 (3) too few urban high school students are prepared to  
3 enter college and succeed in college-level work; and

4 (4) not enough public urban high school graduates are  
5 prepared to enter the high-skill/high-wage internationally  
6 competitive economy of the 21st century; and

7 WHEREAS, These challenges indicate a need to examine possible  
8 sweeping restructuring of urban districts. In some states  
9 innovative responses have included state takeovers,  
10 decentralization of district governance, wholesale geographic  
11 and administrative reorganization, privatization, establishment  
12 of charter schools and implementation of parental voucher  
13 proposals. For example:

14 (1) the Illinois legislature in spring 1995 empowered  
15 the mayor of Chicago to replace the elected school boards  
16 with a "super board" with broad authority;

17 (2) in Washington, D.C., the 103rd Congress appointed a  
18 finance authority to oversee the District of Columbia  
19 schools;

20 (3) in Cleveland, the Federal courts mandated a state  
21 takeover of the school district; and

22 (4) in 1995, California passed a law to break up the Los  
23 Angeles Unified School District; and

24 WHEREAS, Civic and business leaders have been urging State  
25 policymakers to examine the effectiveness of their urban  
26 schools, since the success or failure of these school systems is  
27 directly linked to the economic growth and development of the  
28 municipality in which they are located; and

29 WHEREAS, Policies must be developed to facilitate fundamental  
30 change in the structure and governance of urban school districts

1 which will ultimately provide better interaction between these  
2 schools, parents and the community at large and, ultimately, for  
3 greater accountability; therefore be it

4       RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives establish the  
5 Commission on Restructuring Pennsylvania's Urban Schools to:

6           (1) analyze the various reorganizational strategies that  
7 might be used to reform urban schools in this Commonwealth,  
8 including, but not limited to, decentralizing central office  
9 administrations, redefining school boards and their  
10 functions, altering linkages between the school district and  
11 city governance, dissolving the district into smaller  
12 operating units, school-based management and privatization;

13           (2) assess the cost benefits associated with these  
14 various forms of restructuring;

15           (3) analyze the correlation between the various designs  
16 for restructuring and a district's ultimate accountability to  
17 students, parents, taxpayers, its business community and the  
18 urban community at large;

19           (4) assess the potential applicability of various  
20 restructuring strategies within this Commonwealth; and

21           (5) attempt to identify any State statutory and  
22 regulatory impediments that may currently exist to  
23 implementing various reform strategies;

24 and be it further

25       RESOLVED, That the commission shall consist of 17 members  
26 appointed as follows:

27           (1) The Speaker of the House of Representatives, in  
28 consultation with the Majority Leader, shall appoint ten  
29 members, no more than four of whom shall be members of the  
30 House of Representatives. The remaining appointees shall

1 represent the general public.

2 (2) The Minority Leader of the House of Representatives  
3 shall appoint seven members, no more than three of whom shall  
4 be members of the House of Representatives. The remaining  
5 appointees shall represent the general public.

6 The Speaker of the House of Representatives shall designate one  
7 member of the commission to serve as chairman; and be it further

8 RESOLVED, That the commission may hold hearings, take  
9 testimony and make its investigations at such places as it deems  
10 necessary in this Commonwealth; and be it further

11 RESOLVED, That the commission make a report of its findings  
12 and recommendations to the Governor and the House of  
13 Representatives no later than January 1, 1998.