



## **2013 Education and Broadband Advisory Committee Report**

Legislative Members: Delegate Kathy Byron (chair), Senator Mamie Locke, Delegate Eileen Filler-Corn, Delegate Kaye Kory, Delegate Scott Surovell

- ◆ In addition to the legislative members, the Advisory Committee was comprised of 15 individuals appointed by JCOTS, representing the Department of Education, SCHEV, the Virginia Community College System, local school boards, private sector technology and publishing companies, and other interested parties.
- ◆ The Advisory Committee's primary task during the 2013 Interim was the review and study of three bills referred to JCOTS by the 2013 Session of the General Assembly:
  - HB 1777 (Filler-Corn) concerning open source resources for higher education;
  - HB 1915 (Surovell) and;
  - HB 2286 (Kory) both of which concern electronic textbooks and broadband availability.
- ◆ The Advisory Committee held three meetings during the interim.

### **HB 1777 (Filler-Corn)**

- ◆ HB 1777 would establish the Virginia Open Education Resources Council and the Virginia Digital Open Source Textbook Library.
  - ◆ The bill would require the council to acquire open source textbooks to be used in the most highly enrolled undergraduate courses. The textbooks would be available to students free of charge. The bill does not require any faculty to use the textbooks.
  - ◆ Proponents of the bill cite the high cost of undergraduate textbooks as the driving force behind the legislation. By acquiring and distributing open source electronic textbooks, the bill could help control those costs. Concerns were raised regarding the quality of
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open source textbooks as well as concerns over unnecessary state involvement.

- ◆ The committee made no recommendation on the bill. The patron, publishing company representatives, and other stakeholders agreed to continue to work closely on ways to control the cost of undergraduate textbooks and other ways open source resources may be utilized in the Commonwealth.

### **HB 1915 (Surovell)**

- ◆ HB 1915 prohibits local school boards from making electronic textbooks available for use by students in their residence unless the local school board takes steps to ensure that (i) each student in the local school division has actual access to at least one compatible personal computing device that is not shared with another student and (ii) that each student in the division has internet access at a level of 256kb per second. The bill makes exceptions for certain pilot programs.
  - ◆ This bill, as well as HB 2286, was introduced in part as a response to a situation in Fairfax, in which the local school board assigned an online math textbook. Some students were unable to complete assignments as they were unable to access the textbook in their homes.
  - ◆ The discussion surrounding this bill focused on the digital divide between those students with broadband access at home and those without. The Advisory Committee recognized that the broadband access is a challenging and complex issue and that barriers to access are not uniform throughout the Commonwealth.
  - ◆ The Advisory Committee recommended an amended version of HB 1915 which requires local school boards to adopt a plan to ensure that all students, by July 1, 2017 have Internet access which meets the requirements of the bill before such local school board can assign a textbook.
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## **HB 2286 (Kory)**

- ◆ HB 2286 requires the Board of Education, in conjunction with CIT, to report annually to the General Assembly and the Governor (i) the level of broadband connectivity of each local school division and (ii) the level of computer ownership and access to broadband of each student. The data will be available on the Commonwealth broadband availability map. The bill also specifies that a local school board's contracts and purchase orders with publishers of textbooks approved by the Board for use in kindergarten through grade 12 shall allow for the purchase of printed textbooks, printed textbooks with electronic files, or electronic textbooks separate and apart from printed versions of the same textbook.
  - ◆ Much of the discussion concerned the lack of information available regarding the broadband capabilities of the school divisions. In response, Delegate Byron, on behalf of the Advisory Committee, sent a letter to each school division in the Commonwealth requesting information regarding the division's level of broadband connectivity for each individual school. The Committee received responses from 72 of the 132 divisions. The letter and a spreadsheet of the responses are on the JCOTS website. In addition, the Department of Education noted that it will be conducting a broadband speedtest for all school division this fall.
  - ◆ The Advisory Committee was also concerned over the lack of information regarding the level of broadband access of individual students. The Committee recognized that this information would be invaluable to local school boards, however, the feasibility of collecting such information was in question.
  - ◆ The Advisory Committee recommended an amended version of HB 2286 which adds "each student's ability to access electronic textbooks, both at school and outside of school" to the reporting requirement. The amended bill also requires the Department of Education, rather than the Board to do the reporting.
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## **Other Recommendations**

- ◆ The Advisory Committee recommended that JCOTS continue to study the issues surrounding Education and Broadband in the 2014 interim.

