

An Act to Improve Augmentative and Alternative Communication Opportunities for Students with Disabilities

S. 223

Lead Sponsors: Sen. Creem, Rep. Bradley

FACT SHEET

- Thousands of children who are nonverbal or have limited speech, including children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, cerebral palsy, and acquired brain injury, rely on augmentative and alternative communication methods to interact with others.
- Augmentative and Alternative Communication, or “AAC” includes methods of communication other than oral speech, such as pictorial language boards, manual communication systems, speech synthesizers or other electronic communication devices, that enhance or replace conventional forms of expressive and receptive communication.
- Research demonstrates that use of AAC in general and special education settings for students who are nonverbal or have limited speech can lead to tremendous gains in academic, communication, social, and functional skills, and participation in a more complex curriculum.¹
- Federal and State special education laws already require schools and educators to provide specialized instruction, services, and accommodations, such as assistive communication technology, necessary for students who are nonverbal or who have limited speech to make progress in the general curriculum.
- In many instances, however, AAC assistive technology remains unavailable or unused in a classroom because many teachers lack the training necessary to teach or use utilize these communication options. Children who are nonverbal or have limited speech are therefore often denied the essential AAC systems needed to communicate effectively with teachers and peers and to make effective progress.
- The ability to communicate is considered a basic right² and a critical component of education. Therefore, to facilitate education and inclusion of students with students who are nonverbal or have limited speech, all teachers must be adequately prepared to use AAC.³
- The Massachusetts education licensure regulations need to be revised to ensure that all special education teachers, general education teachers and specialists receive sufficient coursework and practical experience in methods of augmentative and alternative communication to facilitate interaction of students who are nonverbal or have limited speech, to ensure access to the general education curriculum, and to facilitate inclusion.

¹ See Pam Hunt et al., *Collaborative Teaming to Support Students with Augmentative and Alternative Communication Needs in General Education Classrooms*, 18 *Augmentative and Alternative Communication* 20 (2002).

² The National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons With Severe Disabilities, *Guidelines for Meeting the Communication Needs of Persons With Severe Disabilities*, 34 ASHA, (Suppl. 7), 2-3 1992, available at <http://www.asha.org/NJC/njcguidelines.htm>.

³ See Gloria Soto et al., *Professional Skills for Serving Students Who Use AAC in General Education Classrooms: A Team Perspective*, 32 *Language Speech and Hearing Services In Schools* 51 (2001).

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