

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

H. 433 (Rep. Barber), S. 326 (Sen. O'Connor)

Description

This legislation will help ensure that all teachers who apply for an initial Massachusetts educator license receive instruction on the appropriate use of augmentative and alternative communication devices for children with disabilities who are nonverbal or who have limited speech. The bill directs DESE to amend teacher licensure regulations as necessary to meet the needs of this population of students.

This legislation builds upon Chapter 299 of the Acts of 2010 which required that newly licensed teachers of students with moderate disabilities and teachers of students with severe disabilities receive instruction on the appropriate use of AAC and other assistive technologies.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication, or “AAC” includes methods of communication other than oral speech, such as pictorial language boards, manual communication systems, speech synthesizers, iPads, or other electronic communication devices that can enhance or replace conventional forms of expressive and receptive communication.

This bill will enhance the lives of thousands of children who are nonverbal or have limited speech, including children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, cerebral palsy, and acquired brain injury who rely on augmentative and alternative communication methods to interact with others.

Why This Matters

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.

Federal special education law already requires school districts to provide assistive communication technology necessary for students who are nonverbal or who have limited speech to receive an appropriate education. In many instances, however, AAC assistive technology remains unavailable or is purchased but 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.**

By ensuring that all special education and general education teachers have training on the appropriate use of augmentative and alternative communication, **this bill will help reduce costs for school districts by facilitating inclusion and supporting placement of children with disabilities who are nonverbal or who have limited speech in the least restrictive environment.**

For more information please contact Johanne Pino at jpino@massadvocates.org