



# MASSACHUSETTS ADVOCATES *for* CHILDREN

## **An Act Creating Higher Education Opportunities for Students with Intellectual Disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorders, and other Developmental Disabilities**

Lead Sponsors: Rep. Sannicandro and Sen. L'Italien  
House Docket No. 840 – Senate Docket No. 1487

### **Fact Sheet**

- This bill provides inclusive higher education opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) and autism (ASD), a population that has historically been excluded from our state colleges and universities. As emphasized in the recent report of the Joint Task Force on Higher Education for Students with ID and ASD, “With limited access, too many individuals with ID/ASD have been relegated to a lifetime of sheltered work, day habilitation, or languishing at home – living in poverty and dependent on government care.”<sup>i</sup> This legislation addresses the major findings and recommendations of the Joint Task Force report.
- The Commonwealth recognizes the importance of higher education for nondisabled students to ensure the personal, social and academic growth necessary to succeed. With a groundbreaking discretionary grant program launched by the legislature in 2007 (the Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment initiative), a small fraction of our state’s young adults with ID and ASD have had the opportunity to demonstrate that they *similarly excel in higher education*, gaining the skills necessary to work and live independently in the community.
- The proven success of the Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment grant program has led to increased demand for this cost-effective initiative. This legislation supports statewide expansion of the partnerships between high schools and public institutions of higher education that offer students with severe disabilities, ages 18-22, the opportunity to participate in inclusive college courses with necessary services and supports. The bill also provides consideration of higher education as an option for older students through the special process. At this time, 10 institutions of higher education including UMass Amherst, Bridgewater State University, UMass Boston, and Westfield State University, along with Bunker Hill, Holyoke, Roxbury, MassBay, Middlesex, and Cape Cod community colleges are currently partnering with 50 school districts, representing urban, rural, and suburban communities.
- The legislation removes barriers identified in the Joint Task Force report which preclude access for adults with ID and ASD of all ages. For example, individuals with ID and ASD who are unable to pass MCAS would be able to audit courses with their nondisabled peers. The higher education statute is also amended to ensure that inclusion of students with ID is addressed in the goals, mission statement, and performance measures of our state colleges and universities.
- The state Board of Higher Education is also required to work with EOHHS, DESE, and EOE to develop mechanisms to include students with IAD and ASD in the residence life of colleges, with accommodations, supports, and services necessary to enable inclusive dormitory living.
- Research confirms that inclusion in college has had a positive impact on rates of employment, wages, self-determination skills, and independent living for adults with ID/ASD. This legislation responds to the cry for more inclusive higher education opportunities from parents, students, educators, and experts who testified in regional hearings before the Joint Task Force.

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<sup>i</sup> A Task Force on Higher Education for Students with Intellectual Disability and Autism Spectrum Disorder A Report to the Massachusetts Legislature April 2014