



Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, MA, 02133-1053

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 9, 2012

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Senate Passes Transition Services Legislation for Students with Special Needs

BOSTON – Massachusetts students with special needs will be better prepared to get a job, go to college and live on their own under legislation passed unanimously by the Senate today that aims to improve transition planning and services required by federal law.

“Transitioning from high school to the real world can be a very stressful time for anyone,” Senate President Therese Murray (D-Plymouth). “Students with disabilities have additional challenges to overcome, and it is important that we have trained specialists developing the plan and services they need for success. This bill makes sure special educators have the necessary training to start evaluating students earlier, focus on their abilities and help get them to that next phase in their lives.”

“Unfortunately, many students with disabilities are not receiving the transition planning services needed to help them further their education, access employment opportunities, and live independently,” said Senator Sal DiDomenico (D-Everett), lead sponsor of the bill. “This bill will begin to remedy this problem by empowering special education teachers to receive specialized training to provide these critical services. Young people with disabilities should be afforded every opportunity to reach their full potential as they leave of the school system and begin the next chapter of their lives. I would also like to thank former Senator Steven Tolman and Senate President Therese Murray for all their hard work on this bill.”

Once a student with special needs turns 22 in Massachusetts, the school system is no longer responsible for providing services, making proper transition planning essential. The bill will directly benefit students with special needs between the ages of 14 and 22 when transition preparations become most important. Currently, because of lacking state standards, special educators through no fault of their own can be unprepared to provide transition services.

Under the bill, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will establish an endorsement program by which licensed special education teachers and rehabilitation counselors can receive the additional training and field experience necessary to qualify as transition coordinators.

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Educators and advocates believe that higher standards and a new focus on transition planning will help alleviate some discouraging trends.

For example, Massachusetts Advocates for Children reports that the national unemployment rate for adults with special needs is approximately 70 percent. In Massachusetts, the dropout rate for students with special needs is 50 percent higher than typical students (5 percent compared to 2.5 percent). Additionally, they are less likely to graduate from high school and “three times more likely to live in poverty as adults.”

According to recent testimony on the bill from Debra Hart, director of education and transition for the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston: “Current research supports that the best possible employment outcome for people with disabilities is integrated paid employment; meaning competitive employment – a real job earning a living wage in the community. Yet of the 4,000 students ages 16-26 enrolled in the Massachusetts vocational rehabilitation system, only 25 percent had an integrated employment outcome.”

Additional testimony from colleges and universities indicated an ability and willingness to offer transition services coursework. Contingent upon the bill’s passage, UMass Boston is ready to make use of a \$1.25 million federal grant to develop courses for special educators to earn a transition services endorsement.

The bill now goes back to the House for enactment.

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