

An Act to Ensure Equitable Access to Education, Including Special Education Services, for All Students in Massachusetts

H. 478 (Rep. Decker), S. 290 (Sen. Creem)

Description

Due to the disproportionate and devastating impact of COVID-19 on communities of color, it is urgent that state education data is reported in a manner that reveals inequities facing the most vulnerable subgroups of students. **This bill would require student-specific education data, such as school discipline and special education data, to be reported in a manner that reflects information about specific subgroups of students** (for example, Black boys with disabilities, Hispanic English Learners, or economically disadvantaged Asian American students). This will help to ensure an equitable recovery as students return to school.

This bill would require DESE to publish the data that it already collects in such a way that it can be easily cross-tabulated by race, sex, economic status, high needs status, English learner status and category of disability. For example, currently, DESE displays discipline data separately for Black students, male students, and students with disabilities. Under the proposed legislation, DESE would be required to display discipline data across these categories (i.e. for Black boys with disabilities).

In the future, when DESE collects data about the delivery of specific special education services through a web-based system, DESE must also publish this data in a cross-tabulated manner, in order to identify any inequities in the delivery of special education services.

This bill also requires DESE to notify school districts of potential denial of equal educational opportunities if there is a statistically significant increase in the rates of segregated placement of students of color with disabilities during the COVID-19 recover period.

Why This Matters

Existing Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) statistics showed that our statewide drop-out rate was 4.9% generally in 2017. However, **the drop-out rate for Hispanic English Learners was 22%. We can only see that stark disparity through the power of cross-tabulated data.** It shines a light on the educational outcomes for specific subgroups of students.

Having access to this level of data is a critically important first step to address educational inequities for the students hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. **This bill makes it easier for educators, parents, students, communities, and policymakers to identify bias and discrimination to help them target their resources and responses.**

This bill does not require schools or DESE to collect additional student data, it just changes the way they report it. Children and youth have complex identities which can impact their education, and this should be reflected in the data reported by the state.

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