

Summaries of the Five Gifted Education Bills (2019-20 Massachusetts Legislature)

H.539 An Act relative to the Use of Computer-adaptive Assessments in K-12 Education

S.277 An Act requiring the use of a computer-adaptive assessment to identify student achievement, growth, and for education system accountability

A computer-based adaptive assessment accurately identifies the place of achievement along the K-12 curriculum for each student, regardless of the child's current grade placement, and identifies whether each student is performing at, below, or above the level typical for the age-based grade.

Students answer test questions on a computer, and the test adapts based on the answers. It uses a range of questions spanning multiple grade levels, to identify the child's level of achievement in each subject. The resulting data would inform districts about the actual learning readiness of each student, so they may be placed in appropriate learning environments.

The use of an adaptive state assessment would provide a fair accountability system for educators, documenting true student growth from year to year, regardless of any student's level of achievement.

H.540 An Act providing for the education of gifted and beyond grade level children in the public schools of the Commonwealth

S.280 An Act to ensure that public schools appropriately educate advanced students and gifted and talented children

Federal and state laws are supposed to protect beyond-grade-level learners' academic, developmental, social, and emotional needs within the public school system. However, most districts in the Commonwealth are not complying with them. Most districts within Massachusetts are not providing these students with the above grade-level curriculum appropriate to their level of academic readiness. They don't demonstrate an understanding of the academic, developmental, social, and emotional needs of academically gifted students. There is a lack of pre-service and in-service training, nor is there any state-level support regarding the unique services gifted and talented students need. That makes it emotionally and academically detrimental to this population.

This bill enables a State Office of Gifted Education and a position of Director of Gifted Education at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to establish guidelines and advise districts regarding meeting the needs of beyond-grade-level, gifted and talented, and twice exceptional students. Additionally, it addresses pre-service training and in-service professional development. It seeks for districts to report what they attempt for gifted students, to make accommodations for them, and for beyond grade-level learners, too. This bill affirms that children who demonstrate academic giftedness (including gifted, highly and profoundly gifted) and twice exceptionality (students who present with both academic giftedness and disability) are recognized as part of "all students" in Chapter 69 Section 1. This bill advances the Massachusetts Public School System's ability to provide equity in education per the Every Student Succeeds Act.

H.541 An Act creating an expert panel on gifted children and their education in the public schools

S.279 An Act relative to an expert panel on gifted children and their education

This bill would require the establishment of an expert panel to consider issues related to gifted children, and their education in the public schools. Because there is so little understanding, in Massachusetts, of gifted children and their education needs, an expert panel could inform policymakers of them. That would help the state and districts begin to mitigate the deficits gifted children currently experience within the public schools and classrooms of the Commonwealth.

H.543 An Act relative to Academic Acceleration of K-12 students

S.276 An Act regarding academic acceleration for beyond grade-level students

Significant percentages of K-12 students are performing above grade level and need access to above grade-level curriculum in order to receive an appropriate challenge in their education. Recent nationwide research estimates that in the range of 20-40 percent of elementary and middle school students perform at least one grade level above their current grade in reading, with 11-30 percent scoring at least one grade level above in math.

Acceleration is the process of providing appropriate curriculum for students who demonstrate mastery of their current grade level material. Acceleration is an effective tool which responds to the individual needs of students and can be part of a personalized learning plan. Acceleration is the most effective intervention for students who are ready for a faster academic pace at a younger age. Because there isn't an acceleration policy in Massachusetts, thousands of children are blocked from access to an appropriate education.

Unlike many other states, Massachusetts does not have a statewide acceleration policy. Research unequivocally supports the positive impact of acceleration on child development, both short- and long-term. This bill requires the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to establish state policy to guide educators on acceleration strategies, to provide a framework for the implementation of equitable acceleration practices in the districts and schools.

H.3408 An Act prohibiting age discrimination within the public schools of the Commonwealth

S.278 An Act prohibiting against age discrimination within the public schools

The Age Discrimination bill protects students against discrimination, which now prevents many from accessing certain courses of study solely because of their age. Current law protects discrimination based on a variety of other classes to which a student may belong, but does not protect on the basis of age. Passage of the Age Discrimination Bill will strengthen protections for students to give them the advantages, privileges, and access to appropriate courses of study, regardless of their age.