

**HOUSE . . . . . No. 496**

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The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

*James K. Hawkins*

*To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:*

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

An Act implementing elementary and secondary interdisciplinary climate justice education across the Commonwealth.

PETITION OF:

NAME:	DISTRICT/ADDRESS:	DATE ADDED:
<i>James K. Hawkins</i>	<i>2nd Bristol</i>	<i>1/12/2023</i>
<i>Edward R. Philips</i>	<i>8th Norfolk</i>	<i>2/8/2023</i>
<i>David M. Rogers</i>	<i>24th Middlesex</i>	<i>2/8/2023</i>
<i>Frank A. Moran</i>	<i>17th Essex</i>	<i>2/13/2023</i>
<i>Bradley H. Jones, Jr.</i>	<i>20th Middlesex</i>	<i>3/31/2023</i>
<i>Simon Cataldo</i>	<i>14th Middlesex</i>	<i>4/10/2023</i>
<i>William J. Driscoll, Jr.</i>	<i>7th Norfolk</i>	<i>4/10/2023</i>

**HOUSE . . . . . No. 496**

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By Representative Hawkins of Attleboro, a petition (accompanied by bill, House, No. 496) of James K. Hawkins and others relative to implementing elementary and secondary interdisciplinary climate justice education in the Commonwealth. Education.

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The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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**In the One Hundred and Ninety-Third General Court**  
**(2023-2024)**  
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An Act implementing elementary and secondary interdisciplinary climate justice education across the Commonwealth.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:*

1 Chapter 69 of the General Laws is hereby further amended by inserting after section 1Q  
2 the following new section:-

3 Section 1R. Elementary and Secondary Interdisciplinary Climate Justice Education

4 (a) The board shall direct the commissioner to revise and update curriculum standards for  
5 the subjects of science, technology, and engineering to include relevant and interdisciplinary  
6 climate change standards that will provide students with a deeper understanding of  
7 anthropogenic climate change, its disproportionate impacts, energy technology and technological  
8 and ecosystems strategies in ways that help students apply scientific knowledge to equitable  
9 climate solutions, including but not limited to:

10 (1) The current human impact on the carbon cycle, emphasizing the long residence  
11 time of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and ocean surface waters.

12 (2) Climate change’s impact on the water cycle, including the loss of both sea and  
13 land-based ice, specifically in regard to the Arctic region, Greenland, and Antarctica, increase in  
14 evaporation due to higher temperatures in lower latitudes, higher likelihood of severe storms and  
15 the release of greenhouse gasses from melting permafrost, lower albedo relating to less ice/snow  
16 coverage, increased water vapor in the atmosphere with higher temperatures, and the release of  
17 carbon dioxide from soils and plant biomass from large scale fires.

18 (3) How various energy sources, including fossil fuel combustion, photovoltaics,  
19 geothermal technology, biomass combustion, wind, and hydroelectric, directly and indirectly  
20 affect human and ecological health, including how climate change, natural disasters, energy  
21 facilities, resource extraction, and pollutants cause severe health issues: asthma, cancer, lead  
22 poisoning, inaccessibility of housing, food, and water.

23 (4) How the above impacts disproportionately affect people across race, class and  
24 geography in the US and globally.

25 (5) Ways that humans influence the abilities of forests, oceans, agricultural land, and  
26 settled land to contribute to, mitigate, and adapt to climate change, including carbon uptake,  
27 sequestration, and ocean acidification.

28 (6) How governments, companies, schools and other entities can integrate the above  
29 concepts into viable and just climate policies and solutions.

30 The board shall direct the commissioner to institute a process for setting curriculum  
31 standards for the subjects of history, social sciences, and civics to include relevant and  
32 interdisciplinary climate change standards that will provide students with a deeper understanding  
33 of climate policy, climate justice, and climate action, including engaging elected and appointed

34 officials. The commissioner shall ensure that issues involving those disproportionately affected  
35 by climate change are addressed in the standards, including but not limited to:

36 (7) How conditions and effects in the Northern Hemisphere differ from the conditions  
37 and effects in the Southern Hemisphere.

38 (8) How environmental justice communities have been defined historically and legally  
39 :

40 (i) Historical: Environmental justice communities have been defined as  
41 “geographically connected groups of people that experience disproportionate harm from air and  
42 water pollution, natural disasters like fires and floods, sea level rise, the siting of energy,  
43 transportation and other infrastructure, etc. Often members experience intersecting systems of  
44 oppression across race, class, language isolation, citizenship status and more”.

45 (ii) Legal: An environmental justice community in the Commonwealth is defined  
46 per Section 56 of 2021 Acts Chapter 8 as “a neighborhood that meets 1 or more of the following  
47 criteria: (i) the annual median household income is not more than 65 percent of the statewide  
48 annual median household income; (ii) minorities comprise 40 percent or more of the population;  
49 (iii) 25 percent or more of households lack English language proficiency; or (iv) minorities  
50 comprise 25 percent or more of the population and the annual median household income of the  
51 municipality in which the neighborhood is located does not exceed 150 percent of the statewide  
52 annual median household income.”

53 (9) How environmental issues, including pollution, land use change, and climate  
54 change intersect with race, class, human settlement and migration, colonization, war, redlining,  
55 English language dominance, economic, political, and legal systems, etc.

56 (10) How students can engage their communities, civic leaders, Indigenous leaders in  
57 traditional land management in their area, and government officials in promoting social change,  
58 by analyzing historical movements and applying learning to projects for which those officials are  
59 the target audience. Analysis of these historical movements will include evidence of the roles of  
60 for-profit organizations in shaping legislation, changing public opinion, and obfuscating the  
61 impact of industry on the environment.

62 (c) The board shall direct the commissioner to institute a process for setting curriculum  
63 standards for all subjects not mentioned above, including arts, languages, wellness, and  
64 mathematics, to integrate climate policy, climate justice, and climate action.

65 (d)The commissioner shall:

66 (1) Create and engage a diverse Interdisciplinary Climate Education Council to provide  
67 feedback on draft standards and curricular supplements before the board may vote to approve  
68 them and then after their approval continues to assess the application of these standards and  
69 supplements. The council shall include:

70 (i) youth leaders between the ages of 14 to 18, 18 to 22, and 22 to 25 who reside  
71 within the commonwealth from a range of geographic areas, including environmental justice  
72 communities in the commonwealth

73 (ii) staff from environmental and climate justice organizations, including majority  
74 Black and/or Indigenous organizations

75 teachers across multiple disciplines

76 educator union representatives with expertise in climate justice

77 (v) climate experts and researchers to integrate academic fact-checking with other  
78 ways of knowing

79 (2) Ensure that bilingual and English as a second language students are given the same  
80 curricula and learning opportunities by providing them with multilingual resources regarding  
81 environmental activism, climate policy and climate justice in the formation of this curriculum.

82 (3) Consult environmental and climate justice organizations and professionals  
83 throughout the commonwealth while creating these standards.

84 (4) The department of elementary and secondary education shall provide and sponsor  
85 professional development opportunities for educators on the history and social science and  
86 science and technology frameworks and work to create tools aligned with the framework to  
87 support districts in the implementation process. Additional support and outreach from the  
88 department may include statewide and regional training, meetings or conferences, additional  
89 staff to support students and teachers with this work, and opportunities for districts and  
90 stakeholders to assess and share evidence-based best practices in support of climate change  
91 education and provide feedback and recommendations to the department.

92 (5) The commissioner shall consult with childhood development and mental health  
93 specialists to ensure these standards are integrated by grade level according to what will help  
94 empower young people at any age to secure their future. The commissioner shall make every  
95 effort to solicit feedback from superintendents, teachers and students in the formation of these  
96 recommendations.

97 (6) A final set of standards approved by the board must include provisions to create  
98 assignments for students to directly engage in support of an issue, such as environmental justice.

99 Climate justice assignments must be structured such that they protect a student’s right to their  
100 own opinion and position on an issue and so they meet the non-partisan civics project  
101 requirement pursuant to General Laws, Chapter 71, Section 2, and therefore schools may apply  
102 for funding from the Civics Project Trust Fund to support this work.

103 (e) The above requirements shall be integrated into DESE’s routine curriculum standards  
104 revision process and shall be satisfied and implemented by school districts under the  
105 department’s purview on or before August 1, 2025, in time for the following school year.