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Senator Rafferty, Co-chair
Representative Murphy, Co-chair
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Distinguished Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

L.D. 396, An Act to Provide for a Later Starting Time for High Schools, would require School Administrative Units (SAUs) to ensure that their secondary schools' school days start no earlier than 8:30 a.m. beginning with the 2026-2027 school year.

As outlined in Title 20-A, §2(2), the control and management of the public schools shall be vested in the legislative and governing bodies of local school administrative units, as long as those units are in compliance with appropriate state statutes. This commitment to local control ensures that communities retain the authority to make decisions that best reflect their unique needs and circumstances.

SAUs across Maine vary significantly in their geographic, demographic, and logistical realities. Decisions about school start and end times are complex and deeply interconnected with transportation, after-school programming, extracurricular activities, student employment, and family schedules. What is best for one SAU is not necessarily best for another, and a one-size-fits-all mandate does not account for these local considerations. Each SAU must be free to determine the start and end times that work best for their students, families, and communities.

The issue of school start times has been examined in depth. During the 131st Legislature, the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee considered this issue in L.D. 257, *An Act to Provide for a Later Starting Time for High Schools*, which was ultimately voted out ONTP. However, the topic was incorporated into L.D. 1002, *Resolve, Directing the Department of Education to Study the School Day*.

As a result of L.D. 1002, the Maine Department of Education (Department) convened a diverse work group to study the school day. Participants included elementary, middle, and high school administrators, a parent, a student, a mental health clinician, a pediatrician, a school nutritionist, and a representative from a statewide association of curriculum leaders. This group examined eight aspects of the school day, including start times.

Once clear takeaway emerged from the work group's discussions: what works for one SAU does not always work for another. While some participants strongly supported later start times, other raised serious concerns about the logistical challenges such a change would impose in their communities. The work group ultimately concluded that while later start times may be beneficial for some SAUs, a statewide mandate is not the appropriate approach.

The Department will be available to provide additional information on LD 396 and respond to any questions during the upcoming work session.

Sincerely,

Beth Lambert

Beth Lambert
Chief Teaching and Learning Officer