

**Date:** January 15, 2022

**Source of Report:**

**School Finance:** EPS reports and SAU fiscal data submissions

**ESEA Federal Programs:** Maine’s Model of School support allocations, CNAs, School Improvement plans

**Topic:** [LD 281 \(Resolve 2021, Chapter 35\)](#) – Resolve, Directing the Department of Education to Analyze Funding To Address Student Achievement Gaps

### **Context**

Identifying evidence-based practices to support students who are successful and ready to enter the workforce or continue their education remains central to the student-centric approach of Maine educators and the Department of Education.

During the 130<sup>th</sup> Legislature, [LD 281 – Resolve, Directing the Department of Education to Analyze Funding To Address Student Achievement Gaps](#) was signed into law by Governor Mills on June 10th, 2021 and directed the Department to conduct an analysis of current funding that is available through the Essential Programs and Services Act (EPS) related to student achievement gaps related specifically to race and income.

During the 128<sup>th</sup> Legislature, [LD 1026, An Act to Assist Student Achievement](#) was presented by Senator Mason of Androscoggin and Co-sponsored by Senator Volk of Cumberland as a concept bill proposing the exploration of ways to assist students in achieving academic success. This concept bill, however, received a final disposition of ought not to pass.

During the 125<sup>th</sup> Legislature, [LD 1503 An Act to Promote School Attendance and Increase School Achievement](#) focused on attendance as a symptom of lower student achievement and took steps to ensure necessary supports and restorative interventions were in place to support the student, increase attendance and subsequently impact student achievement including student graduation. These changes were enacted April 12, 2012.

[The EPS funding model](#) as originally enacted provides additional funding allocation to school units based on student profile. A weight of .15 for each economically disadvantaged resident student, as determined by the most recent available elementary free or reduced-price meals percentage, is provided to recognize additional educational supports needed in order for these students to achieve Maine’s learning results. Beginning in fiscal year 2019, an additional weight of .05 was enacted; this weight is targeted in that the school unit must certify, via the annual school approval process, that the targeted funds are used for direct support of learning via extended learning programs, summer school, and tutoring.

## **Findings**

There are mechanisms in place to augment EPS funds. For schools eligible to receive additional supports under Maine's federally mandated accountability system, financial supports, in addition to leadership coaching and professional learning opportunities are available at no cost to schools identified for additional support. These supports, when blended and braided within a comprehensive needs assessment process and school improvement plan, provide the resources to strengthen targeted supports within school collaboration to meet student, educator, and community needs. Through this collaborative community approach, a whole student approach can be utilized to support student achievement.

To determine if the increased funds provided from the additional .05 economically disadvantaged student adjustment resulted in increased spending in the categories set forth in statute, the School Finance Team reviewed SAU spending data prior to enactment of the targeted adjustment (FY 2016 through FY 2018) and spending data following the enactment of the targeted adjustment (FY 2019 and FY 2020). The team was able to identify very slight increases in overall spending on summer school programs and tutoring; spending data regarding after school programs was inconclusive.

The School Finance Team then reviewed the results from the 2021 summer educational offerings survey distributed by the Department's Office of Learning Systems Team. Survey results indicate that 39% of the 176 schools with programs offered were funded via Federal Emergency Relief funding, accounting for over 50% of the funds spent on this programming; 32.8% of the programs were funded via state and local funds, representing 27.8% of the total spent for this programming. The state/local amount reported as spent via the survey totals \$4.4 million dollars which is well under the total targeted disadvantaged allocation of \$27.3 million provided via the FY 2021 ED 279. However, the survey does indicate that of the over 15,000 students served by this programming, 53.5% of the students were economically disadvantaged.

The full results of the survey may be found in Appendix A of this report.

## **Recommendations**

MEPRI reviewed the economically disadvantaged component of the EPS model as part of the FY 2022 component review plan. It is recommended that the initial findings in this report serve to inform the work and determine if there is an underutilization of the targeted disadvantaged funds for the statutorily required purposes. Until more definitive information regarding how services are being provided and associated costs is available, it would be difficult for the Legislature to take meaningful fiscal action to address student achievement gaps.

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