



Essential Learning Solutions, Inc.

LD 210 An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds, and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027

Joint Standing Committees on Appropriation and Financial Affairs Committee & Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

February 7, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Rotondo, Senator Rafferty, Representative Gattine, Representative Murphy, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Education and Cultural Affairs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on LD 210, the Governor's Biennial Budget, *An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds, and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027.*

My name is Catherine Cote. I am the Owner/Director of Essential Learning Solutions Preschool located in Livermore. We are a Special Purpose Private School, that serves the 3 to 5 year old population. More specifically, we specialize in serving the most profound special needs young children across a radius of 30-40 miles from Livermore. Most of our students have a diagnosis of Autism Level 2, mostly level 3 with accompanying diagnoses and engage in frequent and often times severe problem behaviors daily. A little history, back in August 2022, I had to close 2 preschools (one in Lisbon and one in Livermore). We had supported hundreds of the most severely impaired children in those two programs prior for approximately 8 years prior to our closing.

During the year that we closed (2022-2023), MaineCare increased their rates for section 28 services and CDS/DOE instilled a daily tuition rate. Luckily for me, one of my previous preschool buildings in Livermore did not sell during that timeframe. Thus, with the rate increase and tuition rate, I decided to give it another shot and re-open the program in Livermore. We have been re-opened for approximately a year and a half and have been able to support approximately 20+ children over that timeframe.

Given that information.....I want to thank you to the members of both committees for your work over the last two years which assisted in directing the Department to establish an equitable payment for incredibly critical educational services that special purpose preschools provide to hundreds, if not thousands of THE MOST vulnerable children every year.

I'm here today to ask you to restore funding for the CDS Daily Tuition for 3-5 year olds Special Purpose Preschools in the Biennial Budget. It is absolutely making a difference. During the last year and a half, as mentioned, we have served approximately 20+ children and their families. We have been able to provide our staff with more trainings and support in the classroom for the children with more significant

Mailing Address
PO Box 1722
Lewiston, ME 04241
elsinc2014@gmail.com

Livermore Preschool
1472 Federal Rd.
Livermore, ME 04253
207-500-2281



Essential Learning Solutions, Inc.

behavioral issues. We have had a significantly easier time recruiting staff due to wages that we can offer that are competitive with other organizations and schools.

Being able to provide extra support within the classroom, has an incredible benefits for the staff (aids in staff burn out, builds more confident staff, provides for in the moment training) and the students that are hard to quantify or measure. But, you hear positive comments from the staff. And we see the results with our students.

In addition, and this is a HUGE addition, we HAD plans to expand at our Livermore location in order to serve more children in immediate and surrounding areas. We HAD plans to build an additional building to serve another 25+ students given the incredible need in the area for these children. Unfortunately, that has all been put on hold due to the possibility of the tuition payments being discontinued.

In addition, if we do lose the tuition reimbursement, we would also be closing our current preschool program. Without the tuition money, there would be no way to sustain a program without it. Which will mean, having to call families and provide them with this horrifying news (again), thus potentially leaving 10+ children with severe disabilities without programming AGAIN.

At a time when hundreds of families and children are already on waitlists for specialized early education services, we cannot afford to lose any programs and hundreds of spots that could change the lives and trajectory for children with disabilities.

Please restore the funding for the daily tuition rate for Special Purpose Preschools in the biennial budget. Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully Submitted,

Catherine Cote

Catherine Cote, M.A., BCBA
ELSINC2014@GMAIL.COM

Mailing Address
PO Box 1722
Lewiston, ME 04241
elsinc2014@gmail.com

Livermore Preschool
1472 Federal Rd.
Livermore, ME 04253
207-500-2281