

Val Caruso
Augusta
LD 181

Valerie Caruso

As a professional educator for over 30 years, I have seen the impact of school districts that face annual challenges in passing budgets to fully fund local education. This should not happen and changes in funding must be proactively implemented.

The way Maine calculates pupil counts plays a crucial role in determining funding for MSADs. However, the current formula does not always reflect the true financial needs of schools, especially those with fluctuating enrollments, high numbers of students requiring additional support, or rural districts facing unique challenges. To ensure fair and adequate funding, Maine should modify the calculation of pupil counts to better reflect the actual costs of educating students.

First, the current method of counting students does not fully account for those who require additional resources. For example, students with special needs, English language learners, and economically disadvantaged students often require extra support services, such as specialized instruction, counseling, and transportation. Simply counting all students equally ignores these added costs. A weighted funding system—where students with greater needs count more toward the total—would provide a more accurate reflection of each district's financial burden.

Additionally, fluctuating enrollments create budgeting challenges for many districts. Schools with declining populations may lose funding under the current system, even though many of their operating costs (such as building maintenance and staff salaries) remain fixed. Likewise, districts experiencing rapid growth may struggle to accommodate new students without immediate funding adjustments. A more flexible formula that considers multi-year enrollment trends or guarantees baseline funding levels would help districts plan more effectively.

Some may argue that altering the pupil count calculation could complicate the funding process or create disparities between districts. However, the goal should be equity, not just simplicity. By refining the way Maine counts students for funding purposes, the state can ensure that resources are allocated based on actual need, not just raw enrollment numbers.

In conclusion, Maine must modify its pupil count formula to reflect the real costs of educating students. A weighted funding system and adjustments for enrollment fluctuations would provide a fairer, more sustainable approach to school funding. Investing in an accurate and equitable funding model will ultimately lead to stronger schools and better outcomes for all students.