

DATE: February 26, 2025  
TO: Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs  
FROM: Samantha Warren, UMS Chief External & Governmental Affairs Officer  
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RE: ***LD 34, An Act to Increase the Minimum Salary for Teachers***

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Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs: The University of Maine System (UMS) **is the state's largest producer of classroom-ready teachers, having awarded nearly 4,300 education degrees or certificates in the past five years.** We are proud that since 2015, eight of Maine's top teachers have been our alumni, including the current Maine Teacher of the Year, Becky Hallowell, a graduate of both the University of Maine at Farmington and the University of Southern Maine (USM).

With this tradition of excellence and experience in preparing thousands of talented Maine teachers and informed by the findings of the System-based nonpartisan Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI), UMS has long supported increasing compensation for Maine's early childhood and public PK-12 educators.

Leaders of our educator preparation programs note that nationally, public school teachers are more likely than other workers to experience higher levels of anxiety, stress, and burnout, and 44% quit the profession within their first five years. This mirrors the Maine findings of a [2021 MEPRI report about educator recruitment and retention](#), which found that more than half of experienced teachers had "seriously considered leaving the profession in the prior year." [Past MEPRI reports](#) also provide evidence about the connection between teacher turnover and lower student achievement — especially in high-poverty schools — and the very real cost to districts and taxpayers to fill these vacancies.

The need for higher compensation is continually cited by educators as a barrier to recruitment and retention to the profession, with evidence of higher retention among teachers with higher pay. According to MEPRI, Maine's teacher salaries in 2018 were the lowest in New England. After adjusting for inflation, **Maine teacher salaries in 1999 were actually higher than in 2018.** While Governor Mills and the Legislature recently raised the minimum salary to \$40,000, Maine still [ranks 37th in the nation](#) in starting teachers salaries — lagging our New England peers and most other states.

UMS universities are working together and with the field to ensure multiple pathways to high-quality educator preparation and the workforce are accessible. This includes a high-impact "grow your own" statewide teacher residency led by USM and funded initially by Congressionally Directed Spending secured by U.S. Sens. Susan Collins and Angus King. We are appreciative of the one-time appropriation requested by Sen. Teresa Pierce and provided by the 131st Legislature to extend this successful program for at least another year.

As we have shared with the Committee before, **UMS has been a national leader in college affordability** and the debt load of our graduates who have debt is well below the New

England average. Yet even relatively small amounts of student debt can be difficult to discharge for those in professions that are essential to our economy and communities but that provide low wages, like early childhood education, teaching, and social work.

In contrast to Maine's demographics and the System's overall enrollment trends, enrollment in UMS education programs (see table below) increased 8.8% from five years ago and 19.5% from 10 years ago, with 3,854 students enrolled this academic year (2024-25). However, during that 10-year period, UMS undergraduate enrollment has actually declined, and overall enrollment gains have been driven by graduate enrollment, typically by those already in the field who are furthering their education and career opportunities. For example, UMF's Master of Science in Education degree programs now enroll a total of 181 students, a 64.5% increase from five years ago.

Unduplicated Headcount of UMS Students in All Education-Related Degree/Certificate Programs										
Degree/Credential Type	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Associate	1	0	1	1	1	2	3	1	1	0
Bachelor	1,942	1,857	1,814	1,754	1,795	1,863	1,998	1,817	1,744	1,749
Certificate	200	222	238	257	312	268	483	364	440	443
Doctorate	55	65	59	78	67	86	81	77	84	83
Education Specialist	0	0	0	0	*	*	*	89	93	66
Masters	1,057	1,094	1,094	1,176	1,234	1,408	1,580	1,585	1,518	1,543
<b>Unduplicated Headcount</b>	<b>3,226</b>	<b>3,190</b>	<b>3,155</b>	<b>3,209</b>	<b>3,338</b>	<b>3,561</b>	<b>4,016</b>	<b>3,910</b>	<b>3,862</b>	<b>3,854</b>

Note: Data include only students in degree/certificate programs with a Classification of Instructional Program code of 13 (Education). This includes early childhood, elementary, and secondary education, as well as postsecondary education (such as Adult or Higher Education) as well as educational psychology, and education administration/leadership. Data do not include concentrations, courses of study, specializations, or education minors. Counts are unduplicated (students are counted only once in the Unduplicated Headcount). \*Certificate includes Education Specialist until 2022-23.

Our System's educator preparation programs believe they could **recruit more qualified candidates into their undergraduate programs and the teaching profession if salaries were commensurate with expected education and experience**. Feedback from our own students supports this. In 2023, MEPRI released [a report](#) based on an online survey of UMS undergraduates that explored how students choose their college majors and their perceptions about K-12 teaching as a career. Informed by more than 600 respondents, MEPRI found:

- 81% of respondents said pay was a drawback to choosing teaching as a career (no other drawback was selected by more than 40% of respondents).
- 88% of respondents agreed that a starting salary for teachers of \$40,000 was too low and 54% said it was "far too little."

As one UMS educator preparation program leader noted, "In an age where emergency certification reinforces the age-old adage that 'anyone can teach,' it is important that we continue to emphasize that teaching is a profession that requires specialized knowledge and expertise. Ensuring that teachers receive appropriate pay for the service they provide to students, families, and communities is one reflection of this."

Thank you for your support of Maine's public universities and your commitment to strengthen and grow the state's teacher workforce.