

Dr Erin Beal LD 470 Testimony

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and other esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Dr Erin Beal. I work at Lyman Moore Middle School in Portland as an instructional coach. I grew up in West Kennebunk and now live in Windham. I am here today to testify in support of LD 34, An Act to Require School Administrative Units to Adopt Mentoring Programs for Teachers and to Improve Existing Programs.

I used to work for the University of Southern Maine, running weekly seminars for college students completing their teacher internships. I saw firsthand the time, effort, and money they were pouring into their first years in the field of education. However, when I learned that statistically almost half of these same students will drop out of the profession in less time than it took them to earn their degree, and still tens of thousands of dollars in debt, I decided to conduct my doctoral research on how Maine can retain early career educators (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Research participants named strong mentorship programs as the most helpful type of support they could receive from their district (National Institute for the Excellence of Teaching, 2023).

Studies show that effective mentorship programs can increase teacher retention by more than 10% (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, National Institute for the Excellence of Teaching, 2023). In fact, having an assigned mentor teacher who taught the same subject was a reliable predictor of a first year teacher returning for a second, third, fourth, and fifth year (Maready et al., 2021). Mentor programs do not only increase the retention of early career educators, but they increase their effectiveness as well. For beginning teachers with strong mentors, the reading and math scores of their students increased, on average by 4 and 8 percentage points respectively (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). In the research, educators who are new to a district need and benefit

from the same level of mentor support as early career educators (National Institute for the Excellence of Teaching, 2023).

To optimize the effectiveness of mentorship programs, mentors and mentees need to meet bi-weekly, and they need to include regular classroom observations (Maready et al., 2021). Early career educators in Maine specifically stated that what would likely help keep them in the profession was monthly classroom observations by mentors. Current mentorship programs are nearly as robust as bi-weekly meetings and monthly classroom observations. This is due in part to a lack of state-level standards and professional development for mentorship programs. This is also due to the incredibly low stipends we offer mentor teachers. In Portland, the largest district in the state, mentor teachers earn only \$750 per year for their efforts. The National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (2023) found that in effective mentoring programs, mentors spent **at least** five hours per week working with their mentees, or an additional 195 hours of work minimum per school year. At current levels of pay, that works out to \$3.85 per hour.

Strong, regulated, well-funded and supported mentorship programs help our most vulnerable educators, those in their first five years, improve the effectiveness of their instruction and classroom management. This not only increases student learning and performance outcomes, but it increases the retention of those teachers by increasing self-efficacy, reducing their burnout, improving their job satisfaction and sense of personal accomplishment. Solving the teacher shortage in Maine requires a multi-pronged approach, but a \$50k starting salary and the implementation of robust mentoring programs would certainly go a long way in helping.

References

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