



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
23 STATE HOUSE STATION
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March 19, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Senate Chair
Representative Murphy, House Chair
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Distinguished Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

L.D. 437, An Act Directing the Department of Education to Develop Pilot Programs to Place Child Care Facilities in Selected School Administrative Units, would require the Maine Department of Education (DOE) to conduct a study of the value of placing childcare facilities in schools and establish 8 pilot programs designed to last 6 years. During this 6-year time period, the DOE is directed to submit 3 reports to the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee regarding findings of the initial study, the progress of the pilot programs, and recommendations for further legislation. Further, LD 437 lays out specific criteria for the pilot program that the Maine DOE must abide by.

LD 437 not only supports a staffing incentive for educators who can access childcare in their schools, but it also increases high quality childcare options for families so that children can have continuity of care and become part of their school community from birth.

Currently, Subchapter 8: Child Care Services and Parenting Education in Part 3: Chapter 223 of Title 20-A authorizes school administrative units (SAUs) to establish childcare programs for children of students and staff. Additionally, if an SAU establishes a childcare, the SAU is also required to offer a one-semester course on parenting and child development to secondary students. The statute further directs the DOE and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to provide support should an SAU establish childcare programming.

Through this authorization, different models of childcare programs have been established. Several Maine SAUs are developing or already operate childcare programming in their school. MSAD 54 is currently constructing a new elementary school which, in partnership with KVCAP, will be serving children from birth through grade 5. This program could serve as a model to help inform the pilot program proposed in this bill.

Additionally, Maine currently has one Educare program, Educare Central Maine, which provides high-quality childcare for families in the central Maine area. The Educare model promotes a 2-generation approach to early care and education, including comprehensive services for children and families, from birth through preschool. Educare Central Maine is attached to the George

Mitchell School in Waterville, but the enrollment process for families is open to any family living in the Central Maine area, with preference given to families with greater economic need. Funding for Educare comes through a variety of public and private resources.

There are several considerations when establishing a pilot program of this nature. In order to open a childcare facility in a public school, the SAU would need to obtain a license through DHHS childcare licensing. This may create barriers for some SAUs based on the age of the building and compliance with licensing and fire safety requirements. Conducting a pilot of this size, with the level of complexity inherent in the establishment of a childcare center, will require DOE and DHHS staffing and coordination, and/or contracting with an outside organization to help design, implement, and manage the pilot. Additional funds would most likely be needed to evaluate the pilot. Other financial considerations include the cost of purchasing furniture and materials for classrooms, which costs approximately \$25,000 per classroom, renovations that may be required for bathrooms as well as age-appropriate playgrounds for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers that meet licensing requirements and staffing for childcare and how that interfaces with other district educational staff.

Another aspect to consider is the number of overlapping strategies currently in place to provide childcare and Pre-K in a mixed-delivery system. Some SAUs may have access to childcare run by career and technical education (CTE) programs that have Early Childhood Education programs. Additionally, adding childcare in schools could affect the mixed-delivery system of early care and education in the catchment area of the SAU. It would be important to coordinate any addition of childcare in a SAU with the early care and education system in the catchment area. Leveraging resources like the Child Care Affordability program and Head Start programming to help maximize fiscal resources would also be important.

The Maine Department of Education can be available to provide additional information on L.D. 437, An Act Directing the Department of Education to Develop Pilot Programs to Place Child Care Facilities in Selected School Administrative Units, and to answer any questions during the upcoming work session.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:
Lee Anne Larsen

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Lee Ann Larsen

Director of Early Learning

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