



STATE OF MAINE  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
23 STATE HOUSE STATION  
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JANET T. MILLS  
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COMMISSIONER

March 26, 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:

LD 974, Resolve, to Increase the High School Graduation Rate by Creating the Maine Promise Initiative, would direct the Department of Education (DOE) to create the Maine Promise Initiative, with the goal to raise high school graduation rates in Maine above 95% by the year 2030. To craft this initiative, the DOE would be directed establish a working group to develop the strategic plan and goals of this initiative, with a report due back to the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee by December 3, 2025.

The tables on the following pages show Maine's most recent high school graduation rate, broken down by 4-year, 5-year, and 6-year graduation cohorts.

There are numerous known barriers to graduation that our students face, including poverty, housing instability, involvement in the foster care system, and being a multilingual learner. When examining graduation rates through each of these lenses, we see a pattern emerge.

For students who are not economically disadvantaged, the graduation rates are around 95% already. For those who are economically disadvantaged, their graduation rate is approximately 15 points lower than their non-economically disadvantaged peers as indicated in Table 2. It is important to note that economically disadvantaged youth make up at least 45% of each cohort.

Table 3 demonstrates how experiencing homelessness has a dramatically negative impact on graduation rates. For each cohort, students experiencing homelessness have graduation rates of 25-30 points lower than their peers. Homeless youth make up between 3.5 and 5.5% of each cohort.

Experience in the foster care system also has a dramatically negative impact on graduation rates. For each cohort, foster youth have graduation rates approximately 25 points lower than their peers. Foster youth make up less than 1% of each cohort, as seen in Table 4.

Students who are designated as multilingual learners are learning English while engaging in all aspects of their school experience. These students' experience is shown on Table 5. This is another significant barrier for graduation rates, which are 12-20 points lower than their peers. Multilingual learners make up between 3 and 4.5% of each cohort.

All of the data shared above can be found on the Maine DOE website:

<https://www.maine.gov/doe/data-warehouse/reporting/graduation>.

At the Maine Department of Education, promoting high graduation rates is an ongoing priority. There are numerous initiatives and programmatic offerings with the intent to make a positive impact on high school graduation rates. Some of the strategies utilized by the Maine DOE include:

- Attendance and engagement work: The Office of School and Student Supports provides resources and guidance to help schools monitor and reduce chronic absenteeism. The office supports school attendance and intervention teams at Maine school administrative units, assists families in understanding school attendance requirements and exploring learning options, and partners with other agencies to coordinate a community approach to making school attendance a priority in Maine.
- Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR System): BARR is a system where schools adopt BARR's eight interconnected strategies, including: 1. focus on the whole student; 2. provide professional development for teachers, counselors, and administrators; 3. use BARR's curriculum to foster a climate for learning and relationship building; 4. create cohorts to cultivate connections; 5. hold regular meetings of the cohort teacher teams to discuss each student; 6. conduct "Community Connect" meetings that engage the community; 7. engage families, and 8. engage administrators. BARR schools report higher student and family engagement, which directly impacts graduation rates.
- Extended learning opportunities: The Office of Workforce Development and Innovative Pathways provides support for districts to utilize extended learning opportunities, which are credit-bearing experiences in which students explore careers of interest. Extended Learning Opportunities, along with other nontraditional approaches, help bolster student engagement in their learning and can lead to higher graduation rates.
- Supporting educators: The Office of School and Student Supports provides a train-the-trainer model that has anecdotally reduced teacher burnout and supported classroom management with the increased student behaviors seen since COVID. This model is a Tier-4 evidence-based approach The Regulated Classroom, founded and written by former New Hampshire school counselor Emily Reed Daniels. By educating school personnel on the science of regulation and trauma, Maine educators are equipping themselves with tools and strategies.
- Supporting families: The Office of School and Student Supports secured a partnership with Mid-Atlantic Equity (MAEC) in 2022 to create a Statewide Family Engagement Center. This Center for Engaging Families Across Maine (also known as CEFAM) has provided 5,000 licenses to families across Maine for a text-based curricula on child development and learning milestones; has awarded subgrants to CAP agencies and Maine

Parent Federation; has provided stipends to a parent advisory board; and has created resources to support all families in Maine.

Another consideration in this bill is the appropriation of \$100,000 to the Department of Education to support the creation of the Maine Promise Initiative. Beyond the convening of the stakeholder group and the determination of goals and strategies for the initiative, this allocation would require grant management activities such as managing the Grants4ME platform, engaging in an RFP process, and monitoring schools who receive this funding.

The Department will be available to provide additional information on LD 974 and respond to any questions during the upcoming work session.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

  
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Federal and State Legislative Specialist

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