



Maine Education Association

Grace Leavitt President | Jesse Hargrove Vice President | Beth French Treasurer
Rebecca Cole NEA Director | Rachelle Bristol Executive Director

Testimony

In Support

LD 343: An Act to Invest in an Educational Technician Training Program to Address Shortages in Public Schools.

LD 1366: An Act to Address the Educational Technician Shortages in Public Schools by Establishing an Alternative Certification Pathway.

Mallory Cook, Director of Training and Early Educator Engagement,

Maine Education Association

Before the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

April 20, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and other esteemed members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Mallory Cook (pronouns she/her/hers), and I am the Director of Training and Early Educator Engagement at the Maine Education Association, and a certified English teacher and Building Administrator. I am here to provide testimony in support of both LD 343: An Act to Invest in an Educational Technician Training Program to Address Shortages in Public Schools and LD 1366: An Act to Address the Educational Technician Shortages in Public Schools by Establishing an Alternative Certification Pathway.

MEA has stood before you many times this session, expressing our concerns about the critical educator shortage, which spans all roles in our schools. To illustrate, a quick Serving Schools search for Ed. Tech. III openings in Maine yields nearly 400 results. As you are hearing today, compensating our support staff a living wage is certainly the best recruitment tool; in addition to this, continuing our investment in Eastern Maine Community College's Learning Facilitator Program will also help to address these vacancies. This rigorous, competency-based program affords participants the opportunity to enhance their abilities to provide quality support and instruction for students. Upon completion of the program, these individuals are eligible for Ed. Tech. III certification through the Department of Education, so it makes sense that most of the participants currently hold Ed. Tech. I and II certificates. This program provides significant financial incentives for those who complete it. A starting Ed. Tech. I in Houlton makes \$14.12 per hour; a starting Ed. Tech. III makes \$20.16; that is a difference of \$6.12 an hour. In addition to the financial incentive, the program is also sought by those who already hold Ed. Tech. III certification, indicating that the program emphasizes the foundational skills needed to succeed in a school. This is no surprise given the program's focus on Learning Foundations, Inclusive Practices, Developmentally Appropriate Practices, Positive Guidance, Effective Observation, Instructional Strategies, and a Teaching Apprenticeship.

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In addition to equipping education technicians with the skills needed to meet student needs, this program also has the potential to cut in half the current Serving School Ed. Tech. III vacancies. In May of 2022, Eastern Maine Community College reported 250 people on their Learning Facilitator waiting list, with more coming in daily. At present, individual applicants rely on the Department-funded spots to take advantage of the program; however, there are districts who have funded cohorts of their own, as they have identified how the program will benefit their students and staff. As the program gains more traction, it is likely the demand will grow. LD 1366 would enable the Commissioner to approve more programs like Eastern Maine's. Should those programs follow the Learning Facilitator model, we could expand access to those who want to improve their skills.

Last week, you heard testimony on LD 1217 which aims to create an alternative teaching certification pathway, targeting underrepresented demographic groups. In that testimony MEA emphasized the importance of diversifying our workforce. Investing in this program is another way in which we can support that priority. Julia Hazel, Portland Public School's Director of BIPOC Career Pathways and Leadership Development commended the Department on their approval of the Learning Facilitator Program. Portland Public Schools have had 12 educators participate in the program; 9 of whom are BIPOC, and 8 of those 9 are immigrants. This program has created an accelerated pathway, which removes a structural barrier.

Also of note is data from the first Learning Facilitator cohort that shows participants' growing interest in professional development and career advancement. In 2021, 21 participants noted an interest in pursuing teacher certification; 8 participants enrolled in degree programs during their time in the program.

I had the pleasure of observing a Learning Facilitator Program online class, and I was exceptionally impressed by the work of these educators. The investment made by the Department to support this effort should continue, as the program is strong, effective, and addresses a critical need in our educator workforce.

Thank you and I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.