

YES !

LD 955

LD 974

LD1237

LD 1314

LD 70

&

LD 1096

and

MORE

Good Afternoon, Members of our Education & Cultural Affairs Committee,

I am John Whitten, a retired public school Music Director, now living in Oakland, but almost 40 years of my career was spent in eastern Maine teaching in M.S.A.D.#37, and I am here to urge you to "positively consider" ALL OF THE ABOVE 2023 bills.

During my teaching and association with the various departments within a school (and it's district) I've had the opportunity to witness the 'attitude' of techs, assistants, and teacher aides. Teacher "Attitude" in a classroom has a direct bearing on the class's enthusiasm to learn or explore new concepts that are presented, it sort of 'rubs' off on the individual pupil. A strong, positive 'instructor - attitude' along with high morale, allows everyone to "Look Ahead" with the lesson, life's plans, and also to future years teaching and to retirement.

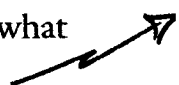
Yes, larger salaries ARE IMPORTANT and all these bills begin to address that, but our school "instructors" (the teachers, the ed-techs the support staff & assistants - - all the people who deal with a child's learning) need various 'resources', AND they need TIME in the schedule! to address various learning situations.

In S.A.D. #37 I saw a positive change in attitude a few years after the school board began annual negotiations with the different support staff. There was a sense of equality and 'value' not evident before.

Too often our schools are asked to do ever more and more 'things' (that are important - yes) but dilute the time within each day for teaching. (Brushing teeth, leaving the classroom to take medications, - any manner of activities that take-away or break the mood and concentration of "the moment" within the lesson; each diminishes the work of the teachers.) Our schools should only be charged with duties that pertain to the three 'R's. Too often, our schools are asked to 'add' items into the instructional day that are not lesson related.

I believe that everyone in our government who asks our schools to do more, needs to be a specialist in school psychology and/or learning; (if they are not specialist in education, than their 'suggestions' need to be examined via pilot programs to ensure that they do not take-away: instructional time, instructor preparation time or student absorption/digestive/ "Oh I get it" time. (Do you know that the color of the classroom walls affects learning? Can you guess what colors are 'pro-learning' ?)

I additionally believe, our school-personnel shortages are largely due to infringements on a teacher's time, and teachers are now feeling stressed for lack of it. They need time to do what



they originally were hired to do. If teachers work to fill vacant instructors responsibilities, than are asked to help out the administration by completing reports and filings requested by Augusta, as well as teacher meetings and school accreditation requirements - - the list is endless - - then, we need to expect to lose people. (A balloon can only hold so much "extra" air before it bursts.)

My old district had a stipulation (1970's), that no one could teach outside their certification unless in an emergency, and then only for a set number of days. We didn't have teacher burn-out or staffing shortages (and we had a retirement system that was promising should we endure these 'occasional' disruptions to our normal teaching routine).

It was a happy time for both the instructors and our students.

Each of the bills before you today, as well as the C.O.L.A. retirement bills: LD 70 and LD 1096 will help better the ed-techs, the various workers and school staff 'attitudes' and hopefully stem the tide of growing shortages that is pleagueing our schools right now.

Please know that school instructors, bus drivers, custodial staff etc. are all 'long range' thinkers (it is the nature of their jobs). AND, if they do not have a promising future to look forward to, then they will seek better paying positions elsewhere, and our school positions will continue to become more vacant.

I used to display on my classroom board a sign that read:

Do What You Have To Do,
So You Can . . .
Do What You Have To Do !

and the students responded appropriately. My music lessons and classes were always successful. ☺

With the ever increasing personnel shortages in our Maine schools, it is imperative that you "Do What You *Have* To Do ! To do anything less than full implamentation of these bills will only create a bigger, longer-lasting problem, later. (Please THINK long-range ! We do not need a generation of adults (20 years from now) who are lacking skills due to under-staffed schools because our legislature failed, and instructor/staff employees, departed our schools.)

I hope that I have helped you see, somewhat, the larger 'educational picture' and have convinced you that the bills you are considering, are just part of the solution to Maine's school shortages.

Thank you all for holding these hearings and gathering the information that allows you to move forward and make 'good educational decisions'.

Respectfully submitted. 🎵

John B. Whitten