



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Representative Michael Brennan introducing
**LD 1510, An Act to Provide Grants to Promote Innovative Learning
Strategies**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty and fellow distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. I am Michael Brennan, and I represent House District 115, which includes a portion of Portland. I am here to introduce **LD 1510, An Act to Provide Grants to Promote Innovative Learning Strategies**.

This bill provides \$2 million over the next two years to establish an Innovative Learning Fund. The fund would award grants to local school districts that utilize innovative teaching strategies that use interdisciplinary, project-based or accelerated learning methods.

Grants would be awarded with special consideration given to school administrative units that intend to address academic achievement gaps of students who are economically disadvantaged students of color and students adversely impacted by COVID-19.

The recently-released Maine Kids Count Report points out that “COVID-19 forced education disruptions and widened income-based disparities in proficiency levels. The learning losses were more profound in Maine than most other states. Notably, Maine was last in New England in fourth grade reading proficiency and in eighth grade math.”

Furthermore, chronic absenteeism in Maine schools increased and graduation rates fell. We know students need to be in school to learn and that “teachers are the most important in-school factor impacting student success.”

This bill will give teachers the support and tools to promote innovative approaches to learning strategies in and outside the classroom. It will allow the Maine Department of Education to encourage best teaching practices in local school districts.

In this committee, we spend a considerable amount of time discussing and debating issues related to funding formulas and certification issues. I think we should spend more time focused

on how to support teachers and school staff to engage students in creative and innovative approaches that develop critical skills.

Renowned educator John Dewey spoke to the importance of having teachers teach to their knowledge as well as their passions. He extolled the virtues of utilizing the community as a classroom and creating a variety of learning opportunities and environments for students.

Please join me in supporting this bill.

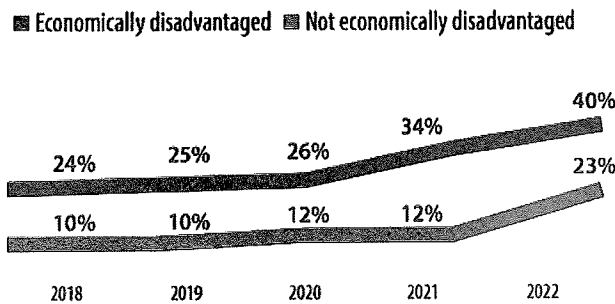


Chronic Absenteeism, defined as missing 18 or more days of school in a year [↗](#)

School attendance is critical to student success

Chronic absenteeism increased from 34 percent to 40 percent for economically disadvantaged students and from 12 percent to 23 percent for other students, as the pandemic affected everyone's attendance in the 2021-2022 school year

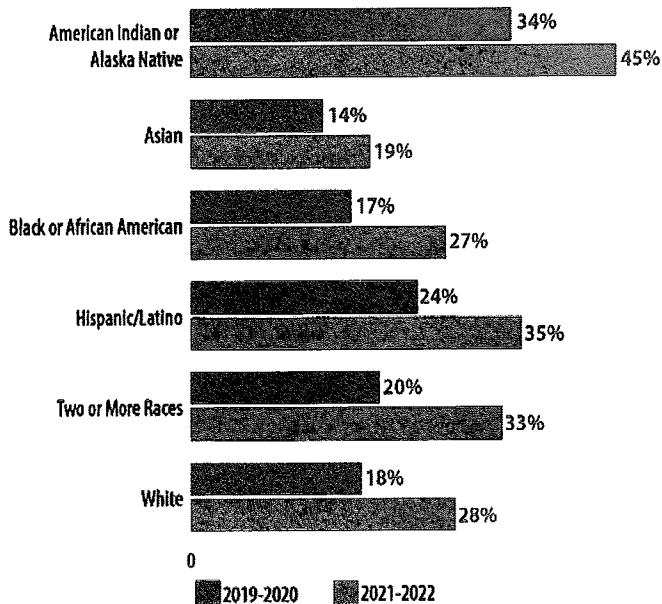
Percent of chronically absent students by economic status¹³



Source: [KIDS COUNT chronic-absenteeism](#)

Chronic absenteeism increased 10 or more percentage points for most races and ethnicities

Percent of chronically absent students by race/ethnicity, 2021-2022 compared to two years before, 2019-2020



Source: [Maine Department of Education ESSA Data Dashboard](#)

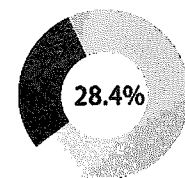
WHY IT MATTERS

Students who regularly attend school have better academic outcomes. When students believe that teachers and other adults care about them they are more likely to feel included and engaged and less likely to be chronically absent.¹⁴

HOW MAINE IS DOING

Due to COVID-19, education was disrupted for multiple years and resulted in increases in student anxiety and depression.¹⁵ In 2021-2022, students often were not able to attend school if they were exposed to COVID-19 and typically there was not a remote school option. Chronic absenteeism was more prevalent for economically disadvantaged students and county data indicates it was also more prevalent in rural counties.¹⁶ Establishing a positive school climate is important to recover from these high rates of chronic absenteeism, as is implementing strategies to work directly with students and families to address specific barriers to regular attendance.

48,651 students were chronically absent in 2021-2022



"Inclusivity in schools to me means no one being left out and everyone feeling that they belong and are safe."

-Student, Cumberland County