

State of Maine
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Testimony of Lee Ann Larsen, Director of Early Learning, Department of Education

In Support of: L.D. 1526

An Act to Provide Grants to Support Reading Proficiency Programming in Schools

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Sponsored by: Representative Brennan

Co-Sponsored by: Senator Rafferty and Representatives Dodge, Gattine, Gramlich, Malon, Perry, Salisbury, Shagoury, and Zager

Date: May 2, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Lee Anne Larsen, and I am here today representing the Department speaking in support of L.D. 1526, An Act to Provide Grants to Support Reading Proficiency Programming in Schools. This bill proposes to create a Reading Proficiency Grant Fund to award grants to school administrative units (SAUs) for programming to strengthen reading proficiency.

The Maine Department of Education (DOE) continues to focus on improving reading achievement among Maine's students to ensure they are proficient with literacy skills. Reading achievement is an issue of equity; it is directly connected to learning, wellness, and civic engagement. In order to successfully navigate today's world, students must build and apply strong reading and literacy skills. Many of the DOE's teams share responsibilities related to promoting reading achievement, including Early Learning, Interdisciplinary Instruction, ESEA Federal Programs, Special Services and Inclusive Education, Assessment, and Adult Education.

The Maine DOE's State Literacy Team, a stakeholder group composed of Maine educators and DOE specialists, and its Literacy for ME initiative, help implement the Department's state literacy plan which identifies key strategies to strengthen literacy education efforts across Maine. An example of these strategies is the DOE's recently launched Maine Association for Improving Literacy Network (MAIL), which provides opportunities for Maine educators to learn about and share promising literacy practices. The DOE has also developed a guidance document outlining tenets of high-quality, evidence-based literacy instruction for Pre-K to Grade 3 students.

This bill would support a key recommendation outlined in the Department's Reading Proficiency Report of December 2022, specifically targeted support to schools working to improve students' beginning reading achievement. In this report, the DOE asserted that without adequate reading/literacy abilities, students' attainment of a well-rounded education is significantly compromised. The report also noted that science in the field of reading reading/literacy has grown tremendously in the past quarter century, illuminating instruction and assessment practices that promote brain development. Another key finding included in the report was the call from Maine educators for timely access to professional learning in beginning reading/literacy practices grounded in current research, including brain science, foundational reading skills, interdisciplinary and whole student approaches, and culturally responsive practices, particularly for multilingual learners.

The Department has one suggestion to strengthen LD 1526. As written, lack of a specific grade span focus may not ensure that grant funding is directed at the intended audience. The DOE suggests including a targeted grade span so that the limited funding may be dispersed in the most beneficial ways. Based on the findings in the Reading Proficiency Report, the DOE recommends focusing on the K-3 grade span.

The Department of Education supports L.D. 1526, An Act to Provide Grants to Support Reading Proficiency Programming in Schools. I am happy to answer any questions the Committee may have, and I will be available for work sessions on this bill.