



## Maine Education Association

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**Testimony**  
**Neither for Nor Against**  
**LD 258**  
**Before the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee**  
**May 16, 2023**

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs and other esteemed members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee,

My name is John Kosinski (he/him), and I am proud to serve as the Director of Government Relations for the Maine Education Association (MEA). The MEA represents 24,000 educators in the state of Maine, including teachers and other professionals in nearly every public school in the state and faculty and other professional staff in the University of Maine and Community College Systems.

I am here today to testify on behalf of the MEA to testify Neither for Nor Against Governor's proposed change package to LD 258.

We support Part JJJJ of the change package proposal which allows the Commissioner to dedicate unallocated balances towards the English Language Learner Hardship adjustment. Additional funding here is critical especially as some towns have seen an uptick in their English language learner population. These resources help these districts by providing additional aid so they can hire the additional staff and support they need to help new students with language barriers transition into public schools.

We also support Part FFFFF which calls for an additional \$50 million to support the School Revolving Renovation Fund. The Education Committee has heard repeatedly this session about the capital needs of schools and the addition funding proposed to be set aside in Part FFFFF will certainly help schools address critical needs such as leaking roofs, compromised drinking water, construction to help expand pre-K programs and much more.

But in addition to hearing about the capital needs of public schools, the Education Committee has repeatedly heard about human capital needs of schools, specifically the workforce shortages plaguing our schools. Teachers, ed techs and many other positions are in high demand with no supply. The private sector is far outpacing wages in the public sector, as the private sector can react more quickly to inflationary pressures.

The Education Committee has heard this message loud and clear and that is why I believe they unanimously passed LD 1064, *An Act to Increase the Minimum Teacher Salary*, sponsored by Senator Pierce, which is designed to gradually raise the minimum teacher salary to \$50,000 over four years. The Committee also unanimously passed LD 974, *An Act to Establish Minimum Pay for Educational Technicians and Other School Support Staff*, which as amended would lift the minimum wage for all

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hourly school personnel to 150% of the state minimum wage and 200% of the state minimum wage for all ed techs. The unanimous, bipartisan support demonstrates the dire need to address the shortages we are seeing and facing, and we are disappointed these proposals, or some variations thereof were not included in the Governor's budget proposal. We think both bills are critical to addressing the most important capital needs of our schools – the human capital needs.

We all know a great teacher makes all the difference. Ed techs and support staff are critical for the students they work with. We hope the Appropriations Committee will find a way to prioritize investing in the educators our state as part of your deliberations on LD 258.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.



To:	Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee
From:	John Kosinski, Maine Education Association
CC:	Representative Rebecca Millett, Representative Ed Crockett, Representative Ben Collings, Senator Jim Libby
Date:	May 8, 2023
Re:	PreK-12 Support Staff Wage Analysis, Maine

### **Minimum Wages for School Support Staff in Maine's Public Schools:**

During the public hearings on proposals to lift the minimum wage for all or some school support staff (LDs 955, 974, 1237, 1314), members of the Committee asked multiple questions about the current wages of school support staff. The MEA has a central database of all MEA-affiliated union contracts in our schools. Below is information gathered from the contracts database.

Because the questions were specifically targeted to concerns about the wages of ed techs, we have focused much of this analysis on this question, but we are happy to provide additional information to the Committee regarding the current wage scales for bus drivers, secretaries and clerical workers, food service workers, and custodians if requested.

According to our most recent data, the MEA shows we have collectively bargained wage scales in 117 school districts for Ed Tech Is, 124 wage scales for Ed Tech IIs and 123 wage scales for Ed Tech IIIs.

- In a review of the current hourly wage scales in the state in November of 2022, MEA data shows that we had 63 contracts with wage scales below the state minimum wage of \$13.80 per hour. Given the increase in the state minimum wage effective January 1, 2023, these wage scales were required to be adjusted to at least \$13.80 per hour.
- The lowest wages for Ed Tech IIIs are in Deer Isle-Stonington, where the starting wage for an Ed Tech III is \$14.10 per hour (although there have been recent negotiations in this district).
- There are nearly 30 districts with wage scales less than \$13.80 per hour for Ed Tech Is, according to the November 2022 data. For example, here are the beginning wages for Ed Tech Is in the following districts: RSU 19 Newport - \$12.49, RSU 26 Orono - \$12.75, Hermon - \$13.25, RSU 78 Rangeley - \$13.39, and Wiscasset - \$13.75.
- From the same data from November of 2022, we show four contracts with beginning bus driver pay starting at less than \$13.80 per hour. Cutler, Eastport, Harmony and RSU 19 – Newport all have beginning wage scales that begin at less than \$13.80 per hour. The RSU 19 bus driver wage scale begins at \$12 per hour.

It is important to note, the information above is from November of 2022 and some of the districts may have bargained new wage scales since, and all school districts regardless of the wage scale are required to pay the minimum wage of \$13.80 effective January 1, 2023.

Average Starting Wages		
Ed Tech I	Ed Tech II	Ed Tech III
\$14.82	\$16.09	\$17.70

Average Max Wages		
Ed Tech I	Ed Tech II	Ed Tech III
\$18.98	\$20.78	\$22.55

Minimum Steps to Max		
Ed Tech I	Ed Tech II	Ed Tech III
1	1	1

Maximum Steps to Max		
Ed Tech I	Ed Tech II	Ed Tech III
41	41	41

#### **Earnings Categories for Full-Time Support Staff:**

According to the National Education Association's recent Estimates and Rankings report, nearly 18% of the school support staff in Maine earn less than \$15,000 per year. Another 26% earn between \$15,000 and \$24,999 per year. 44% of the support staff in our schools earn less than \$25,000 per year and 72% earn less than \$35,000 per year.

#### ***K-12 ESP Work Force in Maine, 2021-2022***

<b><i>K-12 ESP</i></b>	<b><i>Under \$15,000</i></b>	<b><i>\$15-24,999</i></b>	<b><i>\$25-34,999</i></b>	<b><i>\$35-44,999</i></b>	<b><i>\$45,000</i></b>
<b><i>100.0</i></b>	<b><i>17.9</i></b>	<b><i>26.1</i></b>	<b><i>28.0</i></b>	<b><i>17.2</i></b>	<b><i>10.8</i></b>

**The highest max wages for Ed Tech I, II, and III.**

**Ed Tech I**

Southern Aroostook Region 2	\$26.36	31 steps
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**Ed Tech II**

RSU 17, Paris	\$27.60	21 steps
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**Ed Tech III**

Acton	\$30.36	31 steps
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**The following are the best paid wages with the smallest number of steps taken into consideration. The locals are above average in each category and at the highest pay.**

<b>Ed Tech I</b>	<b>Pay</b>	<b>Steps</b>
Portland	\$23.59	17

<b>Ed Tech II</b>	<b>Pay</b>	<b>Steps</b>
South Portland	\$25.38	15

<b>Ed Tech III</b>	<b>Pay</b>	<b>Steps</b>
West Bath	\$29.31	15

**The lowest max wages for Ed Tech I, II, and III.**

<b>Ed Tech I</b>	<b>Pay</b>	<b>Steps</b>
East Millinocket	\$14.09	3

<b>Ed Tech II</b>	<b>Pay</b>	<b>Steps</b>
East Millinocket	\$14.92	3

Ed Tech III	Pay	Steps
RSU 45, Washburn	\$16.11	11

**Impact of Low Wages from MainePERS Data:**

The low wages are hurting our efforts to recruit and retain ed techs, specifically. Since Ed Tech IIs and IIIs are in the Maine Public Employees Retirement System we are able to track retirements and resignations for these job classes.

- There has been a slight uptick in retirements among Ed Tech IIs and IIIs. In 2017, 842 ed techs retirement, as calculated on an annualized basis. Yet in 2022, 927 Ed Tech IIs and IIIs retired. This is certainly exacerbating ed tech shortages in public schools.
- But more troubling is the number of ed techs quitting. In 2015, 229 Ed Tech IIs and IIIs quit according to recent data from MainePERS. But in 2022, the number of ed techs quitting nearly doubled to 478. This too is contributing to shortages and is driven by challenging working conditions and low pay.