



Maine School Superintendents Association



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TESTIMONY NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST

L.D. 345

AN ACT REGARDING EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Eileen King, executive director of the Maine School Superintendents Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committee of the Maine School Superintendents Association, neither for nor against L.D. 345.

Supporting the transition of CDS services and responsibility for 3 and 4-year-old students to public schools is a commendable initiative with the potential to greatly benefit early childhood education. We commend the Department of Education on the thoughtful approach to the process, the plan they have developed and the hours of time they took to solicit feedback from the field. MSSA is neither for nor against as there are some considerations that must be addressed to ensure its successful implementation.

Superintendents support the approach that is being recommended to fund this transition. Providing FAPE to younger students requires adequate financial resources to support various aspects of their education, including curriculum development, classroom materials, and specialized equipment tailored to their developmental needs.

We also support the voluntary 4 year “ramp up” as it allows school districts who are not ready to accept these students to prepare to do so. It is our hope that SAU’s that engage in the earlier transition of CDS services for these students will serve as role models for other districts to learn from.

Our concerns lie with staffing and the certification of staff, modifying the physical plant and transportation.

Staffing presents a significant concern. Finding certified educators trained in early childhood development and education is essential in meeting the unique needs of these students. Recruiting and retaining skilled personnel is already posing challenges and many districts report that these jobs are currently not being filled. Superintendents remain very concerned about meeting the needs of these students if they don’t have the staff to do so.

Leading for equity, excellence and opportunity for all Maine Students

Finding space available in existing schools to accommodate these children as well as modifying the physical classroom is another important consideration. Classrooms must be designed and equipped to accommodate the unique learning styles and developmental needs of these students to ensure a safe and nurturing environment. Should districts need to add on to their existing schools or if significant modifications to the physical plant are needed, we are unsure if there are enough funds available to cover these costs.

CDS often needed to turn to parents to provide transportation for their child. Superintendents anticipate that transporting these students will become their responsibility and will want to ensure that it is done safely. The cost of purchasing the equipment to ensure that the busses are equipped to transport these students safely is a concern that needs to be addressed.

Superintendents know that the expansion of FAPE to include 3 and 4-year-old students in public school settings holds great promise for improving early childhood education outcomes. These years are crucial for cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. We believe that by working collaboratively in finding solutions to these concerns, we can create inclusive learning environments where all young children can thrive and reach their full potential.