



Maine Education Association

Jesse Hargrove *President*
Beth French *Vice President*
Jaye Rich *Treasurer*
Rebecca Cole *NEA Director*
Rachelle Bristol *Executive Director*

Testimony

In Support Of

LD 34: An Act to Increase the Minimum Salary for Teachers

John Kosinski, Government Relations Director, Maine Education Association

Before the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

February 26, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and other esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Jan Kosinski, and I am the Director of Government Relations for the Maine Education Association (MEA). The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators, including teachers and other educators in nearly every public school in the state, as well as full-time faculty and other professional and support staff in both the University of Maine and Community College systems. Thousands of retired educators continue their connection and advocacy work through the MEA-Retired program.

I offer this testimony today on behalf of the MEA in SUPPORT of LD 34, *An Act to Increase the Minimum Salary for Teachers*.

We believe this bill is among the most impactful pieces of legislation that you will take up this session to address one of the major issues plaguing public schools – namely, the shortages of qualified teachers and other certified professional staff. Sadly, the shortages are becoming a perennial, chronic issue facing our schools, and we hope we can make progress this session, despite our fiscal challenges, to prioritize lifting the starting teacher salary.

A simple search of the servingschools.com website will show there are currently hundreds of open teaching positions in Maine's public schools. Hundreds. When our schools are unable to find suitable candidates, they must rely on "emergency certified" teachers or others who do not have the experience to undertake the complex behavioral, academic, social, and emotional needs of children. Without formal training, these educators may lack the foundations in effectively delivering instruction, differentiating instruction for diverse learners, and educating the whole child. A recent Massachusetts study found that students taught by Emergency Licensed Teachers (ELTs) experienced significantly lower scores on math and science assessments than those with certified educators. Additionally, those with ELTs, had higher rates in absenteeism, disciplinary infractions, lower GPAs, and lower grade progressions. This emphasizes the need to put highly



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qualified and credentialed educators in Maine classrooms.¹

Maine is currently 37th in the country in average starting teacher salary. The average starting teacher salary in Maine is \$41,163. This puts us dead last in New England. Our average starting teacher salary is behind New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, and way behind Massachusetts. These are the states we compete with for teachers. An undergraduate from the UMaine system or one of the other teacher prep programs in Maine have options, and for too many teaching in Maine is not a viable option. We believe this is driven by the low starting teacher pay. In fact, Maine ranks among the lowest for average starting teacher salary on the entire eastern seaboard with only North Carolina and Georgia showing lower starting salaries than Maine.

Table 1: Teacher Average Starting Pay, New England – 2024²

State	Average Starting Teacher Salary	National Rank
Massachusetts	\$51,057	7 th
New York	\$49,315	11 th
Connecticut	\$48,784	13 th
Rhode Island	\$46,066	18 th
National Average	\$44,350	
Vermont	\$43,060	26 th
New Hampshire	\$41,590	34 th
Maine	\$41,163	37 th

Table 2: Teacher Starting Average Starting Pay, Eastern Seaboard – 2024³

State	Average Starting Teacher Salary	National Rank
District of Columbia	\$63,373	1 st
New Jersey	\$56,434	2 nd
Maryland	\$51,548	5 th
Massachusetts	\$51,057	7 th
New York	\$49,315	11 th
Pennsylvania	\$49,083	12 th
Connecticut	\$48,784	13 th
Florida	\$47,178	16 th
Virginia	\$46,250	17 th
Rhode Island	\$46,066	18 th

¹ Please see, Backes, B., Cowan, J., Goldhaber, D., & Theobald, R. (2024). *Good intentions, worrisome results: The impact of emergency teacher licensure in Massachusetts*. National Council on Teacher Quality.

² From Educator Pay Data, 2024, prepared by the Maine Education Association, April 18, 2024, Updated October 17, 2024, found here: [Educator Pay Data 2024 | NEA](#)

³ *Ibid*



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Delaware	\$45,188	20 th
National Average	\$44,350	
Vermont	\$43,060	26 th
South Carolina	\$42,026	33 rd
New Hampshire	\$41,590	34 th
Georgia	\$41,148	39 th
North Carolina	\$40,136	42 nd

It is important to note, according to the Economic Policy Institute, the living wage for one adult with one child in Maine is \$67,421.⁴ This means an entry level teacher is \$26,258 behind what is required for a basic living wage in our state if they have one child. Is it any wonder why so many teachers need to have second jobs just to make ends meet? And these second jobs take them away from their work of grading, preparing lessons and classroom plans, responding to parents, and take them away from their own children. We simply must do better.

Maine initiated a minimum teacher salary of \$30,000 starting on July 1, 2007. It was not until July 1, 2022 that the \$40,000 minimum teacher salary was enacted. It took the state 15 years to adjust the minimum teacher salary to the current minimum of \$40,000 and I shutter to think about what would happen to this profession and our schools if we need to wait another decade to lift the minimum teacher salary to \$50,000. If the minimum salary in 2007 of \$30,000 had been pegged to inflation the minimum salary today would be \$45,387. Even just compared to inflation, starting teacher salaries are falling behind.

The Maine Public Employees Retirement System (MainePERs) remains the most comprehensive resource regarding teacher shortages in our state. MainePERs staff are regularly tracking the number of teachers retiring and quitting and the numbers remain alarming and underscore the dire teaching shortages our state faces.

As of October of 2024, approximately 800 teachers per year are retiring and leaving the profession.

Table 3: Annual Teacher Retirements, 2015-2023

Year	Cumulative Annual Total
2015	880
2016	844
2017	842
2018	880
2019	916

⁴ Ibid



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2020	843
2021	821
2022	928
2023	824

Source: Maine Public Employees Retirement System

At the same time, an additional 500 “classroom teachers” are quitting each year and leaving employment in a Maine public school. They are not moving to a different school. This figure represents the number of teachers who are quitting – resigning their position and moving to a different career. MainePERs refers to these as “non-retirement resignations” and this reflects classroom teachers, not administrators and not ed techs, who have left their jobs and therefore no longer pay into MainePERs, a requirement for all teachers in Maine’s public schools. As you can see the number of teachers quitting has more than doubled compared to eight years ago with record highs for teachers quitting in 2022 and 2023.

Table 4: Annual “Classroom Teacher” Non-retirement Resignations, 2015-2023

Year	Annual Total
2015	223
2016	262
2017	232
2018	256
2019	310
2020	293
2021	398
2022	575
2023	525

Source: Maine Public Employees Retirement System

Nearly 1,400 teachers are retiring or resigning each year. Even more alarming, according to the US Department of Education, while there are fifteen educator preparation programs in the state of Maine, collectively only 429 students completed the program in 2022.⁵ According to Educate Maine, the number of students completing an educator prep program in Maine has declined by half since 2011-2012.

Table 5: Number of Students Completing Educator Preparation Program in Maine 2011-2022⁶

⁵ Source: United States Department of Education, Title II Report found here: [Maine \(2023\) Public Reports](#)

⁶ Source: Maine’s Educator Workforce Data Landscape, 2024 page 13, found here: [EM-Educator-Workforce-Report-2024 \(3\).pdf](#)



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Year	Students Graduating from an Educator Preparation Program
2011-2012	863
2012-2013	728
2013-2014	679
2014-2015	554
2015-2016	569
2016-2017	551
2017-2018	417
2018-2019	411
2019-2020	444
2020-2021	404
2021-2022	429

So, let us do the math. 800+ teachers per year are retiring. 500+ teachers per year are quitting. And yet only 400+ are graduating from a program ready to enter the classroom in Maine's public schools. And there is our shortage.

In addition, we know anecdotally that some who complete educator prep programs are choosing to work in other, higher paying states to the south of us.

As you can see from the figures above, the shortages have only grown in recent years and will only intensify in the years ahead without action from you. It took years for the problem to get this bad, and it will only get worse unless we address the root cause of this issue. We must pay beginning teachers more.

The bill before you not only proposes to establish a new minimum, but also provides direct supplements from the state to help districts meet the new minimum. As each year progresses, the increases salary costs will be reflected in the state's Essential Programs and Services school funding formula, providing additional state aid to help districts with this cost.

Some may argue that we can not afford to lift the minimum teacher salary in Maine. We would argue we can't afford not to. Students get one chance to be in kindergarten. Once chance to be in first grade. One chance to be in second grade. Once chance to take physics or calculus in high school. We are failing our students and the future when we turn a blind eye to what is happening to what should be the most noble of professions. It is a disservice to our state, to our students and to our future if we ignore the real and present challenges our schools and our teachers face.

Thank you for your attention and for your service to the people of Maine. I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.