

Dr Erin Beal LD 34 Testimony

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and other esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Dr Erin Beal. I work at Lyman Moore Middle School in Portland as an instructional coach. I grew up in West Kennebunk and now live in Windham. I am here today to testify in support of LD 34, An Act to Increase the Minimum Salary for Teachers.

Maine is hemorrhaging money in teacher turnover events due to its low starting salaries. On average, a turnover event costs a school district approximately \$20,000 (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). This is a hefty price tag considering that teacher turnover in Maine is nearly double what it was a decade ago. Every year, Maine has 1400 teachers leave the profession. This means annually, teacher turnover costs Maine \$28,000,000. While 1400 teachers leave, only 429 students are graduating educator preparation programs annually. Of these new graduates, half will leave their jobs or the profession entirely within five years (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

In 2023 I wrote my dissertation titled “EXPLORING THE PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-EFFICACY BY BEGINNING TEACHERS IN MAINE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY.” In my research, I asked participants how schools in Maine could retain effective educators. The consensus? Greater resources. Primarily salary, yet also including mentorship programs and planning time. Teachers make 23% less than other college-educated professionals, despite being twice as likely to have a master’s degree (Allegretto & Mishel, 2016). In Maine, they work an average of 51.9 hours per week (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004) for an average starting salary of \$41,163 (National Education Association, 2024). This amounts to \$21.67 per hour. Yikes.

As an instructional coach, I know that teacher turnover events have even deeper ramifications for students. They continually diminish our institutional knowledge. Requiring significant time, effort and resources be dedicated to maintaining rather than increasing base level of institutional knowledge. It is no coincidence that as turnover events are increasing, student test scores are decreasing. If we want to increase student learning outcomes, we must increase teacher retention and pay.

But bills like this are not just about numbers or student performance. They are personal for teachers like me. When the salary scale for educators starts low, it affects all teachers above them. Salary increases for the rest of our careers depend on those early years. Despite having my doctorate and over ten years of teaching in Maine, I still can't afford housing with a second bedroom. And in Maine, without a second bedroom, I cannot realize my deepest dream of becoming a foster mom. Under the current salary scale, I can help Maine children professionally, or I can help them personally. It is fiscally impossible, even with the highest level of education and experience, to do both. Please do not make me choose.

References

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