

Good Morning. Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. I am Norman Higgins, a former three term State Representative from Dover-Foxcroft. I want to thank Senator Guerin for sponsoring LD 512, An Act to Provide Educational Opportunities for Students in Secondary Schools with 200 or Fewer Students.

In the past two decades we have experienced a dramatic decline in enrollment at our secondary schools in rural Maine. As a former teacher and high school principal, I have experienced the challenge of providing a comprehensive curriculum in a rural high school. Today, we know that due to diminished enrollments, resulting in reduced funding allocations, rural high schools are not able to provide the academic opportunities that are available at larger schools. It is well documented that in math, science, foreign languages, the arts and advanced level courses that access is limited in rural high schools. The result has a negative impact on student aspirations and access to higher education. Student success at this level, due to lack of opportunities at the high school level, is challenging.

In 2007 the Maine Legislature passed legislation to promote school administration consolidation and with the intent to reduce the number of small high schools. I was the Project Manager for four years on behalf of the Maine Department of Education. I facilitated numerous public meetings attended by hundreds of citizens in rural Maine. The results were a robust rejection especially in rural Maine. The only high school merger was between Jay and Livermore. In 2017, the Regional Integrated High School Construction initiative

was launched. Four regional proposals were submitted and in December of 2024 the final applicant withdrew their application. While common sense informs us of the need to provide equitable academic opportunities for high school students the ability to change the system has not happened.

The process of utilizing the Superintendent Agreement is not an effective response to the current situation. Its interpretation by school boards and Superintendents varies from school district to school district. The appeals process is cumbersome and consumes significant time at the DOE and the State Board of Education. In addition, the process must be repeated on an annual basis.

This legislation proposes an alternative process to allow students to transfer to another high school to address their academic needs. The bill is targeted and specific and not intended to address the issue of school choice. This legislation provides increased opportunity for students to have equitable access to academic programs regardless of their geographic residence.

I will be at the work session and welcome the opportunity to work with the Department of Education and this committee on this legislation.

List of Public Secondary Schools Under 200 Student
Enrollment- School Subsidy Report (279) October 1, 2024

North Haven	20	Washburn	90
Vinalhaven	28	Deer Isle-Stonington	94
Jackman	33	Shead / Eastport	96
Isleboro	34	Central Aroostook	103
Greenville	40	Madawaska	104
East Grand	41	Southern Aroostook	108
Rangley	53	Schenck/E. Mill.	109
Van Buren	58	Searsport	118
Wisdom	59	Richmond	121
Jones/Beals	59	Wiscasset	125
Bingham	60	Penobscot Valley	125
Easton	66	Stearns	130
Ashland	69	Hodgdon	136
Katahdin	75	Ft. Fairfield	139

Piscataquis	150	Woodland	150
Buckfield	160	Boothbay	171
Carrabec	173	Madison	173
Machias	173	Telstar	177
Penquis	183	Old Orchard	186

Summary Data 16 High Schools Under 100
 28 High Schools Under 150
 38 High Schools Under 200