

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 1398: An Act Regarding Behavioral Health Support for Students in Public Schools

Jan Kosinski, Government Relations Director, Maine Education Association

Before the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

April 23rd, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and other 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 1398, *An Act Regarding Behavioral Health Support for Students in Public Schools*.

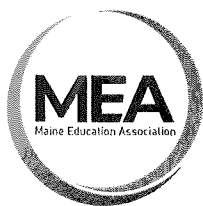
Once again, today you are hearing about the mental health challenges that face our students and the ongoing concern we hear from teachers and educators about the need for more mental health supports for students available during school hours.

LD 1398 aims to increase the staffing that will help with addressing the extensive and more prevalent needs we are seeing in our students today. The key element of this proposal is recognition of the need for mental health professionals in our schools by first adding in a new mental health clinician ratio and while also adding a new school counselor ratio, in addition to the current guidance staffing ratio in the funding formula. These changes will help to better address the incredibly challenging behaviors and the needs of our students because they will result in schools hiring more counselors and more mental health staff to work with students. For children to be able to learn and grow, they must feel safe and well. Our schools need more support for that to happen. The proposed funding formula changes may not provide all that our students need. Nonetheless, LD 1398 is an important part of the solution to help develop and provide the supports that are necessary to help more students.

This legislation takes a systemic approach and proposes changes to the school funding formula to accurately reflect this need – a need that we would argue is not currently captured by the current school funding formula. Our state sends a lot of money through the school funding formula, and while there have been numerous studies over the years to evaluate the funding formula, we question whether we have looked at what is missing from our funding formula. Without question we believe the current

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formula lacks the necessary mental health and counseling supports our students need. The truth is many schools are finding ways to hire mental health staff in our public schools. Because these costs are not (or barely) reflected in our school funding formula, local property taxpayers are paying for these programs and services, even in our state's highest receiving districts.

This bill is similar to LD 829, *An Act to Improve Behavioral Health Support for Students in Public Schools*, which was heard by this Committee last session. That bill was more expansive, and the amended version hoped to include ratios for school psychologists and mental health clinicians, while also reducing the student-counselor ratio. LD 829, even after being pared down, had a fiscal note of over \$80 million. It was passed by the chambers but died when it failed to receive funding. This year's bill, LD 1398 is pared back even more. The need for more mental health supports is greater than ever and shows no sign of subsiding. While we know the state budget picture is bleak, we hope we can find a way to make some progress to address the needed mental health supports our schools need.

I am including with my testimony a sample 279 analysis I pulled from the Department of Education's school funding page this morning. As you can see, the funding formula reflects teachers, librarians, health, library techs, ed techs, clerical staff, and school administration. Line 2 under "staffing" includes guidance where we have a ratio of 350:1 in grades prek-8 and then 250:1 in high school. This guidance line covers what the state shows as needed through the funding formula for mental health supports for students – at least this is what the funding formula reflects is needed to help all students have the opportunity to meet the Learning Results.

The current funding formula does not meet the needs of today's schools or students when it comes to mental health supports. This issue is not going away. We need long-term, systemic approaches to address the needs of our students and issues educators face. LD 1398 will not provide immediate solutions. While it could take time for school districts to adjust staffing, find suitable and qualified mental health clinicians, and otherwise integrate more of these supports in our schools, we want to strongly advise against kicking the can any further down the road. The longer it takes to find the funding to help solve this problem, the more challenging the issues will become. We hope to avoid a scenario where every session this bill or a similar bill is proposed, yet legislators shudder at the expected cost and find other piecemeal or inadequate approaches. Given the concerns we are constantly hearing, we hope the Legislature will help find a path to a better path to approach this growing issue.

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

STATE CALCULATION FOR FUNDING PUBLIC EDUCATION (PreK-12) REPORT

ORG ID : 14

Auburn Public Schools

2025 - 2026

Section 1: Computation of EPS Rates

Section : 1

A) Attending Counts:

	PreK-K		1-5		6-8		PreK-8		9-12		Total
1) Attending Pupils (October 2023)	326.0	+	1,055.0	+	724.0	=	2,105.0	+	1,014.0	=	3,119.0
2) Attending Pupils (October 2024)	345.0	+	1,106.0	+	694.0	=	2,145.0	+	1,032.0	=	3,177.0
3) Attending Pupils Average	335.5	+	1,080.5	+	709.0	=	2,125.0	+	1,023.0	=	3,148.0
							67.50 %		32.50 %		100.00 %

B) Staff Positions	PreK-K EPS FTE	Student to Staff	+	1-5 EPS FTE	Student to Staff	+	6-8 EPS FTE	Student to Staff	+	9-12 EPS FTE	Student to Staff	=	EPS FTE Total	÷	Actual FTE Total	=	% Of EPS	x	SAU Data in EPS Matrix	=	Adjusted EPS Salary	=	Elementary Salary	Secondary Salary
1) Teachers	22.37	(15: 1)	+	63.56	(17:1)	+	41.71	(17:1)	+	63.94	(16:1)	=	191.57	÷	203.9	=	0.94	x	12,366,954	=	11,619,001	=	7,843,195	3,775,806
2) Guidance	0.96	(350: 1)	+	3.09	(350:1)	+	2.03	(350:1)	+	4.09	(250:1)	=	10.16	÷	17.0	=	0.60	x	1,067,036	=	637,927	=	430,621	207,306
3) Librarians	0.42	(800: 1)	+	1.35	(800:1)	+	0.89	(800:1)	+	1.28	(800:1)	=	3.94	÷	1.0	=	3.94	x	74,021	=	291,273	=	196,619	94,654
4) Health	0.42	(800: 1)	+	1.35	(800:1)	+	0.89	(800:1)	+	1.28	(800:1)	=	3.94	÷	6.0	=	0.66	x	392,550	=	257,450	=	173,787	83,663
5) Education Techs	2.94	(114: 1)	+	9.48	(114:1)	+	2.27	(312:1)	+	3.24	(316:1)	=	17.93	÷	30.0	=	0.60	x	856,138	=	511,705	=	345,417	166,288
6) Library Techs	0.67	(500: 1)	+	2.16	(500:1)	+	1.42	(500:1)	+	2.05	(500:1)	=	6.30	÷	5.0	=	1.26	x	146,971	=	185,066	=	124,925	60,141
7) Clerical	1.68	(200: 1)	+	5.40	(200:1)	+	3.55	(200:1)	+	5.12	(200:1)	=	15.74	÷	16.5	=	0.95	x	696,671	=	664,582	=	448,614	215,968
8) School Admin.	1.10	(305: 1)	+	3.54	(305:1)	+	2.32	(305:1)	+	3.25	(315:1)	=	10.21	÷	14.0	=	0.73	x	1,417,977	=	1,034,599	=	698,387	336,212

C) Computation of Benefits:

	Percentage		Elementary Salary		Secondary Salary		Elementary Benefits	Secondary Benefits
1) Teachers, Guidance, Librarians & Health	26.00%	X	8,644,222		4,161,429	=	2,247,498	1,081,972
2) Education & Library Technicians	40.00%	X	470,342		226,429	=	188,137	90,572
3) Clerical	40.00%	X	448,614		215,968	=	179,446	86,387
4) School Administrators	21.00%	X	698,387		336,212	=	146,661	70,605

D) Other Support Per-Pupil Costs:

	PreK-8	9-12	Elementary Students		Secondary Students		Elementary Support	Secondary Support
1) Substitute Teachers (1/2 Day)	52	52 X	2,125.0		1,023.0	=	110,500	53,196
2) Supplies and Equipment	433	599 X	2,125.0		1,023.0	=	920,125	612,777
3) Professional Development	74	74 X	2,125.0		1,023.0	=	157,250	75,702
4) Instructional Leadership Support	36	36 X	2,125.0		1,023.0	=	76,500	36,828
5) Co- and Extra-Curricular Student	48	144 X	2,125.0		1,023.0	=	102,000	147,312
6) System Administration/Support	135	135 X	2,125.0		1,023.0	=	286,875	138,105
7) Operations & Maintenance	1267	1504 X	2,125.0		1,023.0	=	2,692,375	1,538,592

E) Other Adjustments:

1) Regional Adjustment for Staff & Substitute Salaries					Regional Index =	0.98		-207,441	-99,865
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Section 1: Totals

Divided by Attending Pupils:	÷	3,148.0	1,023.0
Calculated EPS Rates Per Pupil:	=	8,076	8,575

Preliminary FY 2025-26 Governor's Recommended Funding Level Budget – Adjustments may be made to these printouts throughout FY 26