

Maine Education Association

Jesse Hargrove President | Beth French Vice President | Jaye Rich Treasurer
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Testimony

In Support Of

LD 1327: An Act to Improve and Expand Student Teaching Opportunities in Maine by Compensating Student Teaching

Jesse Hargrove, President, Maine Education Association

Before the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

April 25th, 2025

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

My name is Jesse Hargrove, I am a high school social studies teacher on leave to serve as Maine Education Association President. The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators. Our members include teachers and other educators in nearly every public school in the state, full-time faculty and other professional and support staff in both the University of Maine and Community College systems, and thousands of retired educators.

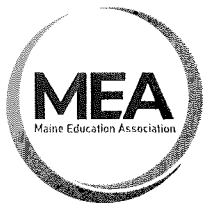
I offer this testimony today on behalf of the MEA in SUPPORT of LD 1327, *An Act to Improve and Expand Student Teaching Opportunities in Maine by Compensating Student Teaching*.

Teaching is a little bit art, a little bit science, a little bit entertainment. My student teaching mentor jokingly said once it was 90% thievery and 10% innovation. I would like to think I was more creative than that...maybe 60/40. Still, throughout my career I've made many mistakes--errors in classroom management, lessons that flopped, or times that I misunderstood some elements in a student's essay or project. I've always prided myself on owning up to these mistakes and improving.

So here I am confessing a big mistake and source of embarrassment from when I was a cooperating mentor teacher, working with a student intern. We had arranged to continue the placement, following the hundred-hour observation. I made mention to my mentee that they would need to devote time to unit planning, lesson plan development including formative activities and summative assessments, and of course student assessment review. I suggested that they reduce their hours at their part-time job to attend to these tasks and to be available to meet, review, reflect, and revise with me. The comment escaped faster than my brain could filter. What right did I have to tell another person to forego income? Yes, each of these components of teaching were necessary habits of a professional educator to develop, but I was completely unaware of this individual's financial circumstances. I redacted immediately, apologized, and vowed to do better.

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My statement to the student intern was based on my own experience taking out \$45,000 in loans for my educator preparation program and living expenses. Expecting future educators to go further in debt or be subsidized by family to engage in the most valuable aspect of their preparation program is incomprehensible.

MEA has an aspiring educator program, known as Student MEA, which is open to any student enrolled in or preparing for a program of study in an accredited program that qualifies them for a career in education. This past fall, I spoke with a group of these pre-service teachers enrolled in one of our state university education preparation programs who shared stories of colleagues who once aspired to be educators, but eventually made the decision to drop from the program or opted for a non-certification capstone program after realizing the additional costs - fuel, loss of income, and costs associated with completing their hundred-hour and student teaching experiences. In a rural state like Maine, many pre-service teachers commute thirty minutes and, in some cases, more than an hour to their cooperating school districts. As you can imagine this requires a significant transportation investment, while working full-time in their schools unpaid. The financial burden can be so burdensome that the group of pre-service educators I spoke with started a food pantry.

Student teaching interns and their cooperating teachers are doing the work. It takes considerable time to plan a unit, develop the lesson plans with daily learning activities, review the student work with feedback, assess and review. There is considerable research and organization as well as preparation that goes into teaching. When mentoring a student intern, planning periods are occupied by preview/review and reflection. That means much of the work is done outside of school for both the student intern and the cooperating teacher.

Cooperating teachers are compensated with about \$150 for the 8 weeks, despite the extra workload and loss of planning time. As a result, many practicing educators shy away from serving as a cooperative teacher. Student teaching interns receive no compensation, work on student teaching related tasks during the school day and beyond, passing up on other income earning opportunities, and also use their own resources such as fuel. In economics, we calculate the full cost of an economic decision by including the opportunity cost, that is, consideration for the next best possible use of resources, including time and labor. Since Maine is currently graduating only 400 educators for every 1400 educators who leave the profession, it is clear that people are choosing lower opportunity cost college programs.

This committee has heard a number of bills this session, bills to promote curriculum improvements, to support students' mental health, to mitigate challenging behavior, and improve training. These efforts should start at the beginning with student teaching experience. Lee Iacocca, Ford Auto Exec and Chief Executive Officer of Chrysler, once said "In a completely rational society, the best of us would be teachers and the rest of us would have to settle for something less, because passing civilization along from one generation to the next ought to be the highest honor and the highest responsibility anyone could have." Let's raise the prestige associated with education and draw people into the profession. I hope we can inspire the best of our students to become teachers, and the best teachers to work with those aspiring educators.

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