



Maine Education Association

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

In Support Of

LD 1571: An Act to Modify Certification Standards for Full-time Teachers in Public Charter Schools and for Educational Technicians

Mallory Cook, Training and Early Educator Engagement Director, Maine Education Association

Before the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

April 25th, 2025

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

My name is Mallory Cook, and I have the pleasure of serving the nearly 24,000 members of the Maine Education Association as the Director of Training and Early Educator Engagement. I am here today to testify in support of LD 1571: *An Act to Modify Certification Standards for Full-time Teachers in Public Charter Schools and for Educational Technicians*.

As a part of my role at the Maine Education Association, I am assigned to attend the Charter School Commission meetings. It is in these meetings that I observe the reports from the School Performance Committee – the committee that focuses on student achievement as it relates to the Commission’s Performance Framework. These performance expectations focus on students reading at grade level, state testing, graduation rates, post-secondary readiness, the performance of subgroups on testing, and rates of absenteeism. Should a charter fall below a certain threshold within the Performance Framework, as it relates to student achievement or other sections, they could be at risk of a corrective action plan or revocation of the charter. You may recall this happening in 2022, when Harpswell Coastal Academy was forced to close due to chronic absenteeism and academic performance.

From the public comments I have heard at Commission meetings, and from the Commission’s mission that states: “provide alternative learning environments for students who are not thriving in traditional school settings, and encourage the use of different, high-quality models of teaching and other aspects of schooling, it is clear that there are students who can find success in the unique charter school environment, but we do not believe that means students should work with educators who are not certified. MEA’s vision is a great public school for every Maine student, and we believe that starts with fully-certified staff at the helm. Presently, in statute, if charter school teachers are not certified, they can take up to three years to obtain certification, OR if they have an advanced degree, professional license, or unique experience or expertise in the area they teach, they don’t need a teaching certificate. Unique experience is not defined in the statute. The table below indicates the number of educators working in Maine charter schools (as of January 2025) who held a valid certification and those who did not.

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| Charter School | Certified Classroom Teachers (Includes professional, conditional, emergency) | Uncertified Classroom Teachers and/or Working Outside Cert |
|----------------|---|--|
| Charter 1 | 10 | 4 |
| Charter 2 | 16 | 9 |
| Charter 3 | 20 | 3 |
| Charter 4 | 6 | 6 |
| Charter 5 | 10 | 3 |
| Charter 6 | 10 | 4 |
| Charter 7 | 9 | 7 |
| Charter 8 | 22 | 0 |
| Charter 9 | 24 | 3 |

It should be noted that charter 8 and charter 9 have the highest number of fully certified staff; these charters are also the highest performing both academically and in terms of attendance rates.

No matter what someone's experience, there is a level of pedagogical knowledge that is required to transfer and assess skills. This is why we believe it is important for charter school educators, regardless of unique experience, advanced degree, or work experience to engage in the same educator preparatory work as their colleagues working in more traditional public schools. There are a number of pathways by which a charter school educator could obtain certification including the emergency certificate, conditional certificate, and the professional certificate.

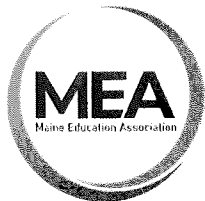
There has been a concern among the Commission's Performance Committee about adding a tenth charter when the charters we currently have are not meeting their performance expectations. As an example, 40% of the brick-and-mortar charter schools are above the state's chronic absenteeism rate of 23.5%; three of which are above 35%. We believe that hiring credentialed personnel is a step toward achieving those improved academic performance outcomes.

Section two of this bill addresses a certification hurdle for education technicians. Once an individual applies for an education technician certification and is entered into Maine's Educator Identification System, they remain in the system for life. So, as an example, if an education technician works in a school for three years, leaves the profession, and their certificate lapses, they must complete three semester hours or 45 contact hours to reapply for certification. This requirement is problematic because it makes it easier for individuals without any experience to enter the profession than for those who wish to return. An individual with no experience can apply and enter.

Last August, a member faced this issue. He was offered a job but couldn't sign on until his certificate was finalized. He had only a week to complete the required hours at his own expense. Consequently, he chose to work in the school's kitchen instead of as an education technician to avoid this hurdle.

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Amid a shortage, when we face a dire need for education technicians, removing this financial and laborious requirement would allow experienced individuals to return to the classroom more quickly. Job-embedded professional learning could be required to ensure the individual is equipped with best practices, as this type of training would likely be far more beneficial than standalone training done in isolation.

Thank you for considering these important certification bills, and I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.

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