

From: Catrina Spruce, Bar Harbor

To: Education and Cultural Affairs Committee meeting on May 1, 2025

Testimony in favor of LD 1639, An Act to Codify Minimum Instructional Hours in the State's Schools

Abstract: My goal in submitting testimony is to stress that Maine is at the very bottom of the US in terms of state educational requirements which is translating into us being at the very bottom of national academic performance.

Introduction: I am a mother of two born and raised in Maine. We made it through COVID remote learning and since then have not recovered academically. Adding to this, more than half of our school weeks now are not full weeks due to a combination of vacation/holidays/teacher in-service days and an increasing number of half-days on Fridays. Our middle school is one of the best in Maine and I am pleased and impressed with the quality and dedication of the teachers in our school. My children are average or slightly above average academically, are normal socially and emotionally, and generally perform in the upper half of their class. Yet my concern is that they are dropping farther behind their peers nationally and will not have the skills they need to be successful on whatever path they choose in the future.

Research: The Maine minimum school days is already below the national average (Maine requires 180 days but that includes 5 teacher in-service days). Only 6 states require fewer school days than Maine (<https://reports.ecs.org/comparisons/instructional-time-policies-2023-01>). More importantly, all but 9 states also have minimum hour requirements, with most states requiring over 1,000 hrs (median=1,060 hrs). Without minimum instructional hours, our children's already limited school days are being eroded by weekly half-days and early dismissal/late start snow days that are not made up at the end of the year.

In addition, half-days encourage chronic absenteeism which has risen with the number of half-days, further retarding academic progress (<https://barharborstory.com/2025/01/05/chronic-absenteeism-still-plaguing-maine-schools-including-mount-desert-elementary>). In terms of economic and social impact, half-days place an outsized burden on working parents and the limited resources of the public after-school programs like the YMCA.

Due to the loss of instructional hours, Maine has fallen behind the nation academically, a drop directly correlated with loss of time in school (<https://www.bangordailynews.com/2025/01/29/state/state-education/maine-students-score-lowest-in-three-decades-national-report-card>). Some of the drop can be attributed to school closures during COVID, which were also higher than average in Maine, but this only emphasizes that children's achievement is dependent on time in school (<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/11/briefing/covid-learning-losses.html>). In order to recover to pre-COVID levels, our children need more time in school to catch back up.

Conclusion: The 900 hr requirement proposed in LD 1639 is equivalent to 180 days of 5 hrs of instructional time and only serves to reinforce existing state requirement that has been circumvented by half-days. For Maine to keep pace with the rest of the nation, we would need to increase the minimum hours to the national median of 1,060 hrs. My hope is that if we can start by simply enforcing the intent of the current requirement, perhaps in the future we can vote to increase the number of hours to the national standard of 1,060 hrs.