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THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

Testimony of Senator Nicole Grohoski in support of
LD 1639, An Act to Codify Minimum Instructional Hours in the State's Schools
Before the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
May 1, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Nicole Grohoski, and I am honored to represent the 22 communities of Senate District 7, which is most of Hancock County. Thank you for the opportunity to present LD 1639, "An Act to Codify Minimum Instructional Hours in the State's Schools."

Purpose of the Bill

This bill does not seek to impose new obligations on our school administrative units. Instead, it simply codifies in statute what is already articulated in Maine Department of Education (DOE) rule: that students should receive at least **900 hours of instructional time per school year**. It is an effort to make public education policy **more transparent, accessible, and accountable** to the communities we serve.

Right now, the public can only find the standard about hours per day in the depths of Chapter 125 of DOE Rule (the relevant page of the rules is attached) and then consider that in relation to the number of days per year that is required in law.¹ Codifying the existing requirement in statute helps clarify what we expect from our schools and what families should be able to rely on.

Many comprehensive, national resources do not acknowledge that Maine has an instructional hour requirement because of how hard it is to piece together. For example, the "50-State Comparison" provided by the Education Commission of the States lists Maine as having an unspecified minimum number of hours.² The fact that our requirements are hidden from the view of interested citizens does no favors to the hard-working educators who regularly go above and beyond the minimum in many ways.

¹ **Title 20-A, §4801. School days**

1. Number. A school administrative unit shall make provision for the maintenance of all of its schools for at least 180 days a year. At least 175 days shall be used for instruction.

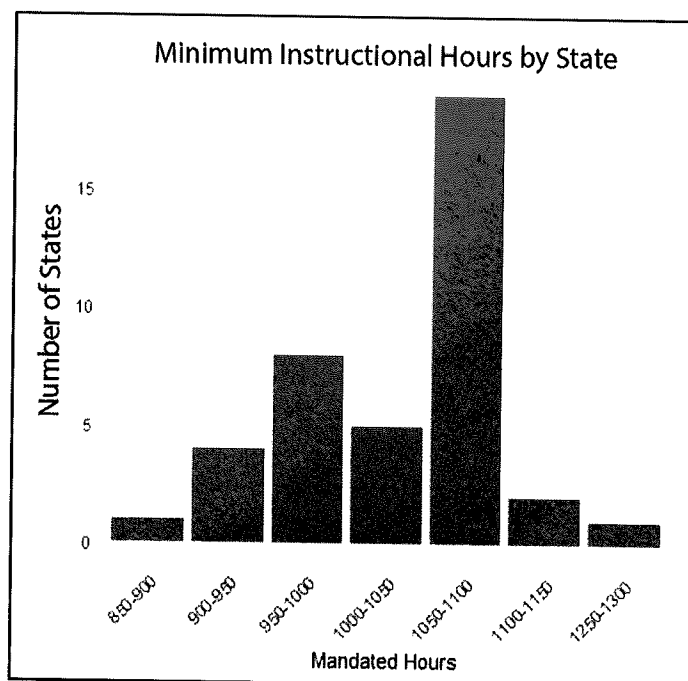
² <https://reports.ecs.org/comparisons/instructional-time-policies-2023>

STATE ↑	What is the state's requirement for minimum number of days in a school year?	What is the state's requirement for minimum number of hours/minutes in a school year?
Filter		
Maine	180 days	Not specified in state policy.

Why Instructional Time Matters

Although this bill maintains the current baseline of 900 hours and does not extend the school day or year, it is still an important moment to talk about **why instructional time matters**.

Maine is one of only 18 states that require just 900 instructional hours annually, a threshold that places us near the bottom nationwide. According to the Maine Education Policy Research Institute, Maine ranks 47th in the country for the average number of hours in a school year at 1,144 hours, which is above the state's minimum requirement, but is significantly below the national average of 1,231 hours.³



Data Source: Education Commission of the States

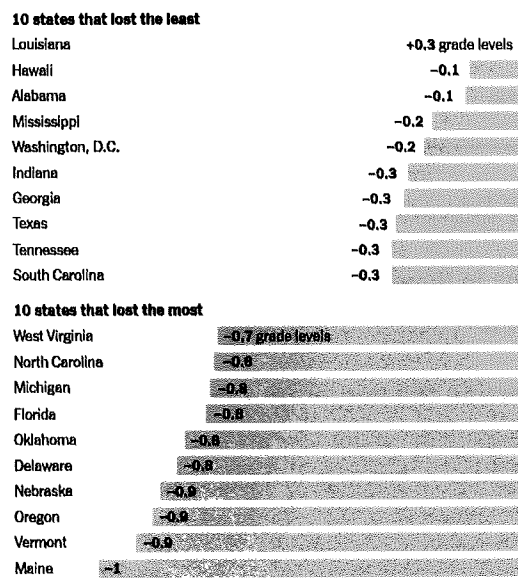
³

<https://bpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/wpsites.maine.edu/dist/e/97/files/2024/02/MEPRI-Rpt-on-School-Schedules-Jan-2024-68e1670247ffb88d.pdf>

This matters because **the amount of time students spend engaged in learning is a critical factor in academic success**, especially when baseline instructional hours are already low. Research shows that increasing time spent on high-quality instruction can lead to improved outcomes in core subjects like math and language arts—but only if that time is used wisely.⁴ At the same time, we know that learning losses during the COVID-19 pandemic have not yet been fully recovered.

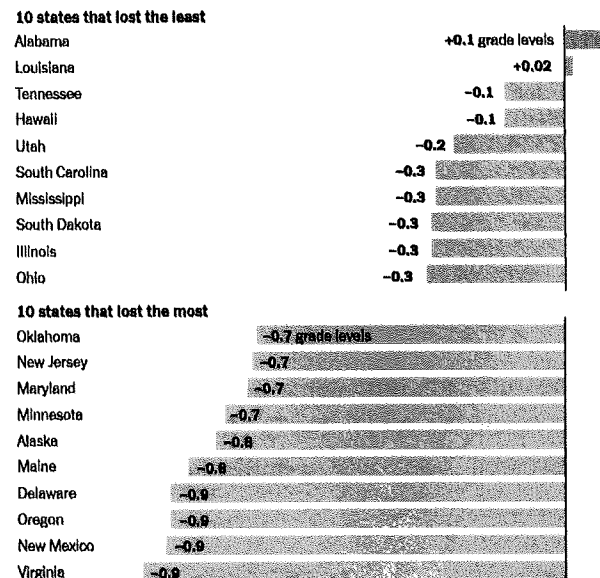
A recent study by Harvard, Dartmouth, and Stanford researchers shows that Maine students are a full grade level behind pre-pandemic reading performance, ranking last in the country for reading recovery. In math, Maine students lost about 0.8 grade levels, again ranking among the worst-performing states in the country.⁵ These setbacks are especially severe for students who were in critical developmental years when schools shut down, such as today's 4th and 8th graders.

Changes in reading achievement, 2019 to 2024



Source: Education Recovery Scorecard By The New York Times

Changes in math achievement, 2019 to 2024

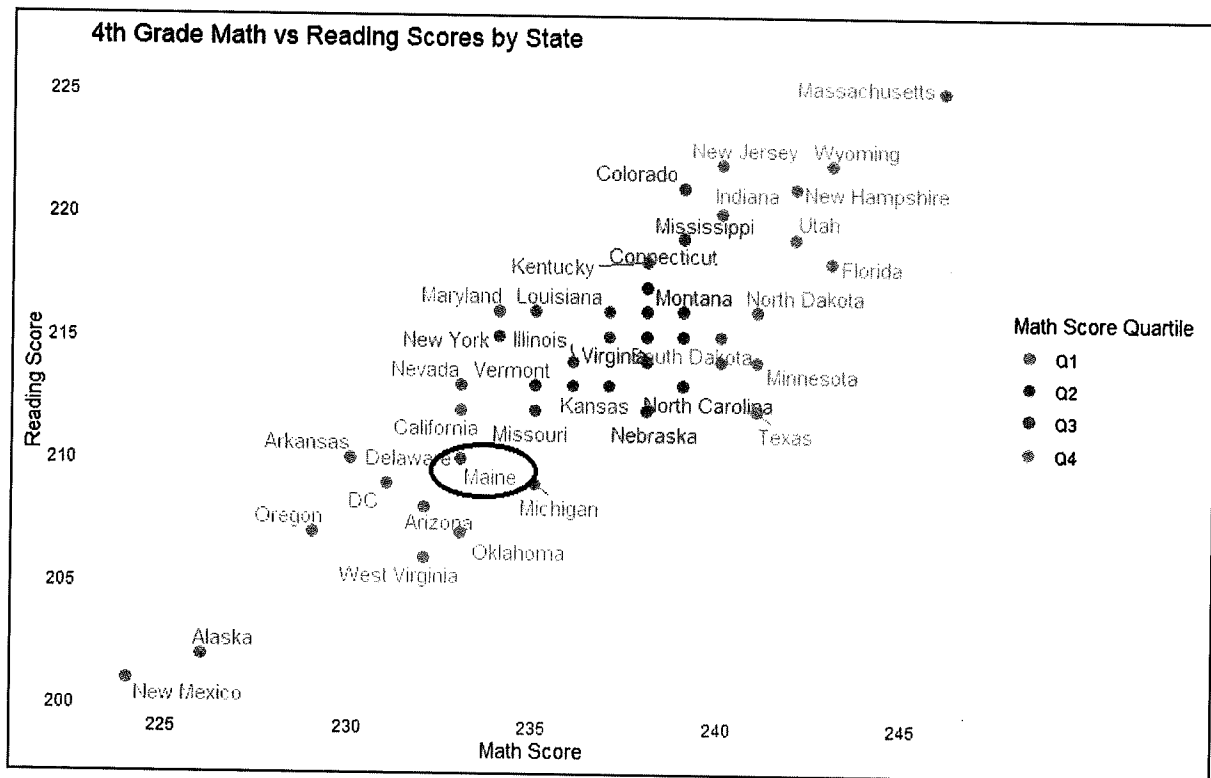


Source: Education Recovery Scorecard By The New York Times

⁴

https://edworkingpapers.com/sites/default/files/Kraft%20Novicoff%20-%20Time%20In%20School%20-%20Feb%202024_1.pdf

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/11/briefing/covid-learning-losses.html>



*Data Source: The National Assessment of Educational Progress*⁶

The most recent NAEP scores show record lows for Maine in three out of four tested subjects, with only **26% of 4th and 8th graders reading at grade level**, down from 36% pre-pandemic.⁷

Instructional time alone won't close these gaps, but **protecting the minimum time we do have is essential**. As Dr. Sarah Novicoff of Stanford University puts it, "a big takeaway from our research is not only to think about expanding time when you can, but also to protect the time you currently have."⁸

Maine's Rural and Local Control Realities

We also know that Maine's unique geographic and policy context affects how instructional time plays out. Local control is a deeply valued principle in our education system. And for good reason: what works in York may look different in Fort Kent or Eastport. But with that local control must come a shared foundation, and that's what this bill provides.

⁶ <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/ndecore/landing>

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<https://mainemorningstar.com/2025/01/29/maine-students-score-lowest-in-three-decades-on-nations-report-card/>

⁸

<https://www.mainepublic.org/education-news/2025-02-25/maine-k-12-students-spend-almost-1-5-years-less-in-class-than-in-other-states>

Moreover, rural transportation logistics, staffing patterns, and infrastructure constraints – like lack of air conditioning or long bus rides – mean that longer days or school years may not be practical for many districts. This bill respects those realities while still **affirming a uniform baseline for educational access.**

Conclusion

Codifying the 900-hour requirement in statute is not a dramatic change, but it is a meaningful one. It helps ensure the public knows what to expect from our school system and that the Department of Education has the tools to ensure the minimum standard is met for all students.

At a time when learning loss is deep, this bill provides a modest but important step toward protecting the instructional time our children need and deserve.

Thank you for your time and consideration of LD 1639. I'd be happy to answer any questions.

Section 5. OTHER MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

This Section establishes minimum requirements in areas required under 20-A M.R.S. §4502(5).

5.01 Instructional Time, Including a Minimum School Day and Week

- A. A school week is the five days Monday through Friday. Exceptions occur when schools are closed because of holidays, inclement weather, or other extenuating circumstances.
- B. A "school day" means a day in which school is in operation as either an instructional day as defined in this Section, or a non-instructional day that may be used for in-service education of teachers, administrative meetings, parent-teacher conferences, records' days or similar activities.
- C. "Instructional day" means a school day during which both students and teachers are present, either in a school or in another setting, and engaged in instructional time.
- D. "Instructional time" means that portion of a school day devoted to the teaching-learning process, but not including extra-curricular activities, lunchtime, or recess. Time spent on organized field trips related to school studies may be considered instructional time, but the instructional time counted for extended field trips shall not exceed a normal school day for each day of the field trip. Alternative education programs, multiple pathways, extended learning opportunities, and other innovative programs may allow students to attend outside of the regular instructional day, as outlined in the SAU Comprehensive Education Plan.
- E. An instructional day for grades K-12 must be a minimum of three hours in length, and for grades 1-12 must average five hours in length over any consecutive two week period. Plans to use school days of varying length must be reflected in the Comprehensive Education Plan submitted by the school administrative unit pursuant to 20-A M.R.S. §4502(1). The instructional day may be extended for students who need more than the minimum day to meet the content standards of the system of Learning Results.
- F. Instructional days that are canceled must be rescheduled to meet the minimum school year requirements contained in 20-A M.R.S. §4801.
- G. School administrative units may not schedule make-up instructional time on days identified in 20-A M.R.S. §4802. Acceptable methods of rescheduling cancelled instructional days include:
 - 1. Rescheduling or shortening scheduled vacation periods;
 - 2. Postponing the scheduled closing date of school;
 - 3. Providing up to 25 one hour extensions of the instructional day to equal a maximum of five 5-hour make-up instructional days in a school year in accordance with a plan approved by the commissioner;
 - 4. Conducting classes on the weekend; and/or
 - 5. Developing other ways to make up school days missed due to weather or emergency closures not included above, which will be incorporated into a plan approved by the Commissioner.
- H. If an instructional day must be shortened due to circumstances that involve student health or safety, the day is considered a full day if school has been in session for at least 2.5 hours.

20-A M.R.S. §§ 4502(5)(A), 4801.