

**TESTIMONY BY JASON JUDD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, EDUCATE MAINE
JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS**

IN SUPPORT OF LD 1689

**“AN ACT TO IMPLEMENT THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMISSION TO
STUDY EXPANSION OF PUBLIC PRESCHOOL AND EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION”**

MAY 1, 2025. 10 A.M.

Chairs Rafferty and Murphy, and distinguished members of the Committees, I am Jason Judd, Executive Director of Educate Maine. I am pleased to offer testimony in support of LD 1659, which seeks to continue the implementation of public PreK expansion based on the recommendations of the Commission to Study Expansion of Public Preschool and Early Care and Education.

We appreciate the work of Rep. Hasenfus, Sen. Pierce, Sen. Libby, Rep. Murphy, Rep. Brennan, Rep. Crockett, Senate President Daughtry and Speaker Fecteau to bring this bill forward this session.

Educate Maine is a business-led education organization which champions career readiness and education attainment of Maine people by supporting education along the full continuum of life – from early childhood through adulthood. We also offer research and Maine-specific data to help inform your decisions on key education issues.

As members of this Committee know well, PreK has been part of Maine’s public education system for decades and is one of the fundamental building blocks in our state’s continuum of education. While there has been steady progress to expand public PreK in Maine for several years, only 52% of Maine 4-year olds are currently enrolled in preschool programs, and too many of these programs – 58% -- offer programs that are 25 hours a week or less.

Attached for your information is a fact sheet Educate Maine created that offers a snapshot of public PreK across our state.

Education is the single most important investment that can be made to ensure successful participation in the new, knowledge-based economy. Postsecondary education and training are critical to increasing productivity, income, and career advancement. High-quality early education and K-12 education are essential building blocks to ensure postsecondary success. Moving each and every Mainer along the educational continuum to their highest educational potential is imperative. We all have seen the charts and know that there is a huge difference in lifetime earnings between a college graduate and someone who drops out of high school: \$1.6 million per drop out. These staggering earnings losses translate into

less spending power, fewer contributions to the tax base, and lower productivity. Education is a critical investment in Maine people and in our economy and must be treated as such through a coordinated approach with priorities and benchmarks from start to finish. Public PreK programs help students by laying the foundational education children need for later academic success.

Decades of research, across numerous states, show the short- and long-term benefits of high-quality preschool for children's development, particularly for children from families with low incomes. Children who attend high-quality preschool are more likely to arrive at kindergarten ready to learn, with enhanced early math, language, and literacy skills. They are also less likely to be held back in school or to need special education, and more likely to be proficient in reading and math. Preschool participants also have an increased probability of graduating from high school.

Here are some examples:

- The Chicago Child Parent Center PreK program reported a 29 percent increase in high school graduation rates by age 20 among its participants;
- Michigan's Great Start Readiness program reported a 35 percent increase in graduates, and
- Students who attend the Tulsa, OK PreK program were eight percentage points more likely to graduate from high school on time.

Overall, research shows us that children in high-quality, universal PreK programs are more likely to graduate from high school on time, 12% more likely to enroll in college, and be more civically engaged.

The benefits exceeded the costs across all programs, with ROI ranging from \$11 to 1 (Chicago Child Parent Centers) to \$4 to 1 (<https://www.wsipp.wa.gov/BenefitCost/Program/270>). This is for preschool overall, for low income kids) to \$2.65 to 1. (Tulsa preschool program, 10-year study of over 4,000 students)

We are pleased to see that LD 1689 proposed to address two of the major building blocks needed for future public preschool expansion – the alignment of early childhood providers across all settings' credentialing, procedures, policies, standard and rules; and the creation of regional coordinators to work with public schools and community partners to address the unique needs within communities to start or expand public preschool. We are also pleased that the sponsor's amendment includes provisions to expand Maine's mixed delivery system of public preschool, recognizing the unique variation of needs within communities and parent choice.

If Maine wants to build long-lasting economic security, we need to support our businesses today and ensure we have an infrastructure that will attract skilled workers and new businesses. One of the best ways to do that is to have quality early learning programs in place. Just as a quality K-12 system and great colleges and universities attract skilled workers and new businesses, so also does a quality early care and education system. It deserves an equal place at the education table in Maine.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide you all with our comments and urge the Committee to continue to support and expand voluntary public PreK in Maine.

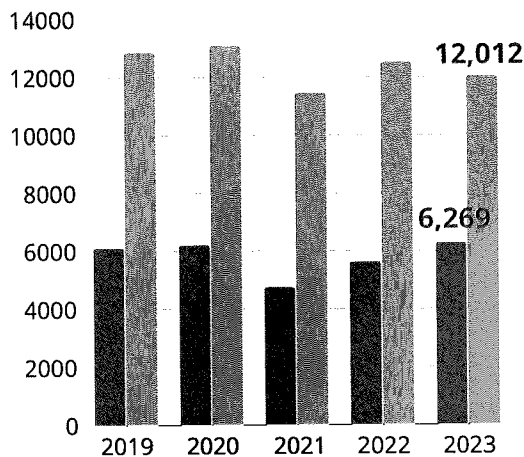
Thank you.

Public Pre-K in Maine

MAINE HAS BEEN EXPANDING ACCESS TO PRE-K SLOWLY OVER TIME.

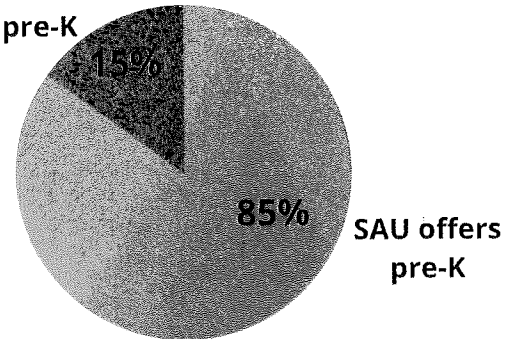
Voluntary universal pre-K in Maine will be achieved when every interested 4-year-old across the state can attend publicly funded education in their community.

Pre-K enrollment across Maine is 52% of the total enrollment for Kindergarten.



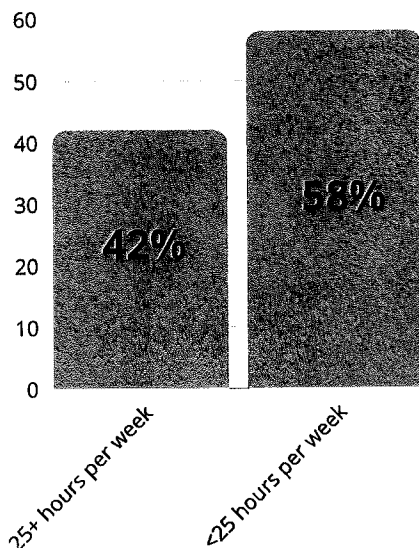
85% of school administrative units offer some form of public pre-K.

SAU does not offer pre-K



Fewer than half of pre-K programs are "full time" (25+ hours/week).

Even full-day pre-K (5 hours/day) falls short in meeting working parents' needs.



- **Access by Geography:** 87% of 4-year-olds in Washington County are in public pre-K, compared to 27% in Cumberland County
- **Partnerships:** 24% of public pre-Ks operate with a community partner; all 11 Head Starts are community partners

Recommendations to achieve universal pre-K by 2026:

1. **Provide incentives and increase funding** for ongoing, start-up, and pre-K/child care partnership costs.
2. **Increase flexibility** in early childhood education credentialing.
3. **Use statewide and regional coordinators** to facilitate public preschool partnerships.
4. **Align standards and rules** for early childhood educators to reduce barriers.