

My name is Rick Beaulé, and I have the distinct honor to teach Band, Choir, and General Music at Gardiner Regional Middle School in MSAD #11. I appreciate your time today.

"Alors, il faut commencer maintenant!"

Napoleon Bonaparte said that to his generals when he expressed his wishes that his armies be able to march comfortably in the shade. The generals had replied that to do such a thing would take twenty years for the trees to grow tall enough.

"Alors, il faut commencer maintenant!"

"Then, we must start now."

The same words of advice apply to the education profession in Maine, but for a much different and more perilous reason.

Our education system is already cracking.

In 2021, my wife and I moved back home to Maine, where I was born. We were the exception to the trend. Maine teachers were leaving in droves.

They still are.

As I'm sure you know, Maine is hemorrhaging teachers at a 3-to-1 departure to entry rate into the profession.

And I'm sure you know Maine had a shortage of up to 700 teaching positions this year. But you may not know over 350 ADDITIONAL positions are currently being taught by persons not fully certified for what they're teaching. Together those two numbers equate to about 7 percent of the teaching force.

For the entire State.

How do we teach effectively with 1 out of every 14 teachers missing?

We don't. We're less effective no matter how hard we try.

It gets worse. Less than 10 percent of Maine teachers are under 30 years of age and less than half of new teachers teach beyond five years. With Maine already having one of the oldest educator workforces at 46 (and I'm well beyond that at 54), a majority of Maine educators will retire or leave the profession in the next 10-20 years. Ladies and Gentlemen of the committee, the education crisis is not looming. It is already upon us. We need to act decisively, and act now.

There's more. I know you've heard and talked ad nauseam about living wages and salaries. But that's only for basic living expenses. You may not know that a living salary for teachers also includes student loan debt repayments of nearly \$350 a month, on average, BEYOND those basic living expenses. And that's WITHOUT children or any other family members. Sometimes that number goes as high as \$1000/month.

Can you see that even a 50k starting salary three years away doesn't provide much in the way of relief for educators when you get down to it?

Even worse, educators earn salaries nearly 27% LOWER than comparable degree holders in some cases. And educator degrees don't cost any less than other degrees, so we're getting it coming and going.

Like it or not, salaries are one of the biggest issues educators in Maine face along with job and mental health supports. I am here to remind you that those dollars aren't just numbers. They are names and faces of people who give their utmost every day and just want to not worry so much about buying food or paying bills. Names and faces of people I hear talk more and more about how much longer they can hold on.

"Alors, il faut commencer maintenant."

Please fully fund our schools.