

MAINE SCHOOL FUNDING THE ZIP CODE CRISIS

How Wealth, Not Need, Determines Educational Investment

***A child's zip code should not determine their educational experience. In
Maine today, it does.***

A Comprehensive Analysis of Maine School Districts

FY 2024-2025 Data

Jeremy Ray
Biddeford, Saco, and Dayton Schools

February 3, 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The data tells a consistent and undeniable story: **districts serving students with the greatest needs receive the fewest resources.** This pattern holds across every metric—per-pupil spending, student-to-teacher ratios, and state funding share. It is not an anomaly; it is systemic.

In Maine today, a child born in York will have access to \$27,427 in educational spending. A child born just miles away in Biddeford will receive \$16,467—a difference of nearly \$11,000 per year, compounded over thirteen years of schooling. This gap is not determined by student need. It is determined by property wealth.

The gap between Maine's highest and lowest spending districts exceeds \$14,000 per student—more than 100% difference.

Key Findings:

- York spends \$27,427 per student; Houlton spends \$12,958—a 112% gap between Maine's highest and lowest spending districts.
- The current EPS economically disadvantaged weight of 1.15 is woefully inadequate. Research supports weights of 1.30-1.40 to reflect the true cost of serving high-poverty students.
- Wealthy districts spend \$5,000-\$15,000 MORE per special education student than high-poverty districts—compounding inequity for the most vulnerable students.
- Some high-poverty districts receive LOWER state shares than wealthy districts due to property valuation—the 'Caught in the Middle' paradox.

Fair is fair. Every child in Maine deserves an educational opportunity, not determined by their community's tax base.

THE ZIP CODE LOTTERY: WHERE YOU LIVE DETERMINES WHAT YOU GET

The following table reveals the stark reality of Maine's educational funding system. Districts are ranked by per-pupil spending, with color coding showing the relationship between community wealth and investment in children.

The pattern is unmistakable: **green dominates the top of the list; red dominates the bottom.** Wealthy communities invest more in their children's education—not because their children need more, but because they can.

District	Per-Pupil \$	Poverty %	State %	Ratio	\$ vs Avg
York	\$27,427	21.8%	14.8%	11.1:1	+\$8,794
RSU 23 (OOB)	\$27,195	37.1%	16.4%	10.4:1	+\$8,562
Bar Harbor	\$26,234	28.4%	12.3%	10.9:1	+\$7,601
Rockland	\$24,741	52.8%	33.0%	11.9:1	+\$6,108
Falmouth	\$24,110	8.4%	34.4%	11.7:1	+\$5,477
Camden-Rockport	\$23,456	19.2%	18.9%	11.2:1	+\$4,823
Cape Elizabeth	\$23,278	9.5%	11.7%	12.3:1	+\$4,645
Deer Isle-Stonington	\$22,456	48.9%	45.7%	9.2:1	+\$3,823
Yarmouth	\$22,208	15.6%	36.9%	12.6:1	+\$3,575
RSU 21 (Kennebunk)	\$20,767	18.2%	14.7%	12.9:1	+\$2,134
MSAD 51 (Cumberland)	\$20,421	8.1%	50.7%	13.0:1	+\$1,788
Scarborough	\$20,421	20.6%	20.2%	12.8:1	+\$1,788
Brunswick	\$19,851	36.5%	48.1%	13.0:1	+\$1,218
Westbrook	\$19,284	67.5%	49.0%	13.3:1	+\$651
Portland	\$18,923	48.7%	38.5%	13.7:1	+\$290
RSU 14 (Windham/Raymond)	\$18,247	30.9%	43.8%	14.6:1	-\$386
Saco	\$17,872	34.4%	51.2%	13.5:1	-\$761
MSAD 6 (Bonny Eagle)	\$17,633	41.1%	50.0%	14.7:1	-\$1,000
Bangor	\$17,456	52.3%	59.1%	13.9:1	-\$1,177
MSAD 57 (Massabesic)	\$17,317	46.2%	41.0%	15.1:1	-\$1,316
South Portland	\$17,234	42.1%	35.8%	14.1:1	-\$1,399
Gorham	\$17,069	21.9%	62.7%	15.7:1	-\$1,564
Fort Kent	\$16,892	48.3%	87.2%	13.4:1	-\$1,741
Biddeford	\$16,467	64.3%	37.7%	14.9:1	-\$2,166
Augusta	\$16,234	57.9%	57.1%	14.9:1	-\$2,399
MSAD 37 (Harrington)	\$15,892	65.6%	48.8%	15.8:1	-\$2,741
Waterville	\$15,678	63.2%	68.5%	15.9:1	-\$2,955
Auburn	\$15,234	58.7%	65.2%	16.3:1	-\$3,399
RSU 34 (Old Town)	\$15,123	54.9%	48.9%	15.7:1	-\$3,510
Sanford	\$15,066	58.9%	76.4%	17.4:1	-\$3,567

Lewiston	\$14,892	71.2%	72.2%	16.2:1	-\$3,741
Caribou	\$14,567	55.1%	83.4%	16.1:1	-\$4,066
RSU 10 (Rumford)	\$14,567	54.9%	74.2%	15.9:1	-\$4,066
RSU 19 (Newport)	\$14,234	61.4%	51.2%	16.4:1	-\$4,399
Calais	\$14,123	59.8%	72.3%	16.9:1	-\$4,510
RSU 3 (Unity)	\$13,892	58.2%	71.5%	16.8:1	-\$4,741
Houlton	\$12,958	62.5%	78.9%	17.2:1	-\$5,675

Key: Green = Low poverty (<25%). Red = High poverty (>55%). Yellow = Biddeford. *State Average:* \$18,633 per pupil.

WHAT FUNDING BUYS: THE STAFFING REALITY

Per-pupil spending translates directly into classroom experience. **Higher spending enables districts to hire more teachers, reduce class sizes, and provide more individualized attention for students.**

The student-to-teacher ratio is the clearest measure of what money buys. In York, each teacher serves 11.09 students. In Sanford, each teacher serves 17.38 students—56% more students per teacher. The table below shows what high-poverty districts could achieve if they could staff at the same ratios as wealthy districts.

These are not abstract numbers. Each additional teacher represents smaller classes, more intervention specialists, more individualized attention for students who need it most.

Current Reality: High-Poverty Districts Have Larger Classes

District	Poverty Rate	Students	Student: Teacher	Current Teachers
Biddeford	64.3%	2,412	14.94:1	161
Westbrook	67.5%	2,615	13.28:1	213
Sanford	58.9%	3,166	17.38:1	148
MSAD 37 (Harrington)	65.6%	623	15.82:1	39
Houlton	62.5%	1186	17.23:1	52
Calais	59.8%	412	16.89:1	24

What Wealthy Districts Can Afford: Lower Ratios, More Teachers

District	Poverty Rate	Per-Pupil \$	Student: Teacher	Their Advantage
York	21.8%	\$27,427	11.09:1	35% more teachers/student
Falmouth	8.4%	\$24,110	11.67:1	28% more teachers/student
Cape Elizabeth	9.5%	\$23,278	12.25:1	22% more teachers/student
Scarborough	20.6%	\$20,421	12.82:1	17% more teachers/student
RSU 21 (Kennebunk)	18.2%	\$20,767	12.88:1	16% more teachers/student
Bar Harbor	28.4%	\$26,234	10.89:1	37% more teachers/student

Staffing High-Poverty Districts at Wealthy District Ratios

The table below shows how many **additional teachers** each high-poverty district would have if they could afford to staff at the same student-to-teacher ratio as wealthy districts. This is what adequate funding would buy.

High-Poverty District	York (11.09:1)	Falmouth (11.67:1)	Cape Elizabeth (12.25:1)	Scarborough (12.82:1)	RSU 21 (Kennebunk) (12.88:1)	Bar Harbor (10.89:1)
Biddeford (2,412 students)	+56	+46	+36	+27	+26	+60
Westbrook (2,834 students)	+43	+30	+18	+8	+7	+47
Sanford (2,567 students)	+83	+72	+62	+52	+51	+88
MSAD 37 (Harrington) (623 students)	+17	+14	+12	+10	+9	+18
Houlton (892 students)	+28	+24	+21	+18	+17	+30
Calais (412 students)	+13	+11	+10	+8	+8	+14

How to read this table: If Biddeford (2,412 students at 14.94:1) could staff at York's ratio of 11.09:1, they would have 56 additional teachers. If Sanford (2,567 students at 17.38:1) could staff at Cape Elizabeth's ratio of 12.25:1, they would have 62 additional teachers.

What Additional Teachers Would Mean:

- BIDDEFORD (+56 teachers at York's ratio): Reading specialists in every grade, class sizes reduced by 25%, dedicated ELL support for all 388 English learners, counselors, intervention specialists.

- WESTBROOK (+79 teachers at York's ratio): Transform services for 531 ELL students—the highest concentration in the region—with dedicated language specialists and dramatically smaller intervention groups.
- SANFORD (+83 teachers at York's ratio): Address chronic staffing shortages, expand career and technical education, and provide wraparound services for a 59% poverty population.
- HOULTON (+30 teachers at York's ratio): Maine's lowest-spending district could finally offer course variety, electives, and support services that wealthy suburban students take for granted.

Districts with lower poverty consistently have more teachers per student—precisely backwards from what common sense would suggest.

THE SPECIAL EDUCATION GAP: COMPOUNDING INEQUITY

The funding disparities documented in this report extend to special education—and the **consequences for vulnerable students are profound**. Wealthy districts spend significantly more per special education student than high-poverty districts, creating a two-tiered system of support for Maine's students with disabilities.

Special education services are expensive. They require specialized staff, smaller caseloads, therapeutic services, assistive technology, and often out-of-district placements. When a district has more resources overall, it can invest more in special education. When a district is already stretched thin, special education funding competes with every other need.

Maine's special education funding formula provides up to \$2,500 MORE per special education student to wealthy districts than to high-poverty districts.

Per-Pupil Special Education Spending by District Wealth:

District	Overall Per-Pupil	SPED Per-Pupil	Poverty Rate	SPED Gap vs Avg
York	\$27,427	\$32,500	21.8%	+\$9,500
Bar Harbor	\$26,234	\$30,500	28.4%	+\$7,500
Falmouth	\$24,110	\$29,800	8.4%	+\$6,800
Cape Elizabeth	\$23,278	\$28,900	9.5%	+\$5,900
Camden-Rockport	\$23,456	\$28,100	19.2%	+\$5,100

Biddeford	\$16,467	\$19,800	64.3%	-\$3,200
Sanford	\$15,066	\$18,500	58.9%	-\$4,500
Houlton	\$12,958	\$16,200	62.5%	-\$6,800
Lewiston	\$14,892	\$18,200	71.2%	-\$4,800
RSU 3 (Unity)	\$13,892	\$17,200	58.2%	-\$5,800

What This Means for Students: A special education student in York receives services funded at \$32,500 per year. A special education student in Houlton receives services funded at \$16,200—*half the investment for the same legal entitlement to a free and appropriate public education.*

The implications are stark: wealthy districts can afford more specialized staff, lower caseloads, better assistive technology, more therapeutic services, and more robust transition programming. High-poverty districts must stretch inadequate resources across students with the same needs but far less support.

THE DEMOGRAPHIC CRISIS: DECLINING ENROLLMENT DEMANDS ACTION NOW

Maine faces a demographic reality that makes funding reform not just important, but urgent. **Enrollment is declining across the state, and the districts losing students fastest are often the ones already struggling most.**

Over the past decade, Maine has lost more than 15,000 K-12 students statewide. Rural districts have been hit hardest—Aroostook County has seen enrollment drops exceeding 25% in some communities. But the decline is not limited to rural areas. Even regional service centers like Bangor, Lewiston, and Augusta face enrollment pressure as young families leave for economic opportunity elsewhere.

Declining enrollment creates a vicious cycle: fewer students mean less funding, which means program cuts, which make districts less attractive, which accelerates the decline.

The Enrollment Crisis by Region:

- **AROOSTOOK COUNTY:** Districts like Caribou, Houlton, and Fort Kent have lost 20-30% of their enrollment over the past decade. Fixed costs remain while per-pupil funding drops.
- **WASHINGTON COUNTY:** Calais, Machias, and surrounding districts face some of the steepest declines in the state, compounding already severe poverty challenges.
- **CENTRAL MAINE:** Even larger districts like Augusta and Waterville see enrollment erosion as families relocate to southern Maine or out of state.
- **MILL TOWNS:** Former industrial centers—Rumford, Millinocket, Lincoln—face the dual challenge of declining enrollment and aging infrastructure.

Why This Makes Reform Urgent:

Every year we delay reform, the problem compounds. **Districts losing enrollment cannot wait for another study. They are making cuts NOW—eliminating programs, increasing class sizes, deferring maintenance, and losing teachers they cannot replace.**

The current funding formula was designed for a different Maine—one with stable or growing enrollment, one where property values roughly correlated with community wealth, one where local control meant local capacity. Maine no longer exists in much of the state.

We Cannot Study This Problem to Death:

The data is before us. We do not need another commission. We do not need another task force. We do not need to wait for the next MEPRI study to confirm what this report documents: the system is broken, the inequities are clear, and children are being harmed every day we fail to act.

The path forward is not to study and then act—it is to **act and continue to study.** Implement reforms based on the evidence we have. Monitor outcomes. Adjust as needed. But do not let the perfect be the enemy of the good. Children in Biddeford, Lewiston, Houlton, and Calais cannot wait for perfect data while their educational opportunities erode.

We know where past decisions have led us. It is not time to slightly adjust our course—it is time to chart a new one.

CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE: THE CRUELEST PARADOX

Maine's EPS funding formula claims to account for student need. The theory is simple: districts with higher poverty should receive higher state shares. **In practice, property valuation overrides student need—and some high-poverty districts are left with the worst of both worlds.**

These 'Caught in the Middle' districts face a cruel paradox: **they serve high-poverty student populations requiring intensive services, but receive state funding shares similar to or lower than wealthy districts with few challenges.**

The formula asks 'What can a community afford?' rather than 'What do students require?' This is fundamentally backwards.

High Poverty, Low State Share: Districts Caught in the Middle

District	Poverty	State Share	Per-Pupil	ELL Students	The Paradox
Biddeford	64.3%	37.7%	\$16,467	388	2nd highest poverty, 37.72% state share
MSAD 37 (Harrington)	65.6%	48.8%	\$15,892	12	Rural poverty meets coastal valuation
RSU 34 (Old Town)	54.9%	48.9%	\$15,123	23	Paper mill legacy inflates capacity
Portland	48.7%	38.5%	\$18,923	1,834	Urban poverty meets high valuation
Rockland	52.8%	33.0%	\$24,741	34	High poverty, tourism-driven values
Bangor	52.3%	59.1%	\$17,456	156	Regional center, moderate support
Augusta	57.9%	57.1%	\$16,234	89	Capital city poverty overlooked
RSU 19 (Newport)	61.4%	51.2%	\$14,234	8	Rural need, insufficient support

The State Share Paradox: Similar Poverty, Vastly Different Support

District Comparison	Poverty Rate	State Share	Per-Pupil \$	Gap vs Biddeford
BIDDEFORD	64.29%	37.72%	\$16,467	—
Caribou (similar poverty)	55.12%	83.37%	\$14,567	+45.65 pts
Sanford (similar poverty)	58.94%	76.44%	\$15,066	+38.72 pts
Gorham (LOW poverty)	21.91%	62.74%	\$17,069	+25.02 pts
MSAD 51 Cumberland (LOW)	8.10%	50.67%	\$20,421	+12.95 pts

Read this carefully: Biddeford has HIGHER poverty than every district listed—yet receives a LOWER state share than all of them. Gorham has 22% poverty and receives 62.74% state share. Biddeford has 64% poverty and receives 37.72%. **This is not a formula that prioritizes student needs.**

THE PATH FORWARD: COMPREHENSIVE REFORM

The data demands structural reform. **Half-measures will not address the systemic inequities documented in this report. Maine needs comprehensive changes to how it funds education.**

INCREASE THE ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED WEIGHT TO 1.30-1.40

The current EPS economically disadvantaged weight of 1.15 is woefully inadequate. **Research consistently demonstrates that educating students from low-income families costs 30-40% more than educating students from higher-income families—not 15% more.**

Students experiencing poverty face documented barriers to learning: higher rates of chronic absenteeism due to health issues, food insecurity, and housing instability; less access to early childhood education; fewer educational resources at home; and greater exposure to trauma. Addressing these barriers requires intensive intervention, smaller class sizes, wraparound services, and extended learning time—all of which cost money.

A weight of 1.15 provides minimal additional support per ED student. A weight of 1.35 would provide significantly more funding—the difference between token acknowledgment and meaningful support.

What an Adequate ED Weight Would Mean:

- BIDDEFORD (1,551 ED students at 64.29%): Significantly more funding annually to support intervention, wraparound services, and smaller class sizes
- LEWISTON (2,937 ED students at 71.23%): Significantly more funding annually to address the highest-need student population in the state
- SANFORD (1,513 ED students at 58.94%): Significantly more funding annually to provide the resources these students deserve

The research is clear. The need is documented. **An ED weight of 1.30-1.40 is not aspirational—it is the minimum necessary to reflect the actual cost of providing equitable educational opportunity.**

USE FUNDING DATA FOR ALL STATE ALLOCATION DECISIONS

The State of Maine must examine this data when making ALL decisions that direct taxpayer dollars to local communities—**not just operating subsidies, but construction projects, competitive grants, PreK programs, and every other state-funded initiative.**

School Construction Funding:

When a community already invests \$25,000 per student while another struggles to provide \$16,500 per student, sending state construction dollars to the higher-spending district compounds existing inequities rather than addressing them. State construction aid should prioritize communities that demonstrate need AND lack local capacity—not reward communities that already enjoy advantages their neighbors cannot match.

Competitive Grants:

Grant programs that award funding based on application quality often favor districts with staff capacity to write competitive applications—which correlates directly with district wealth. The state should weight competitive grant scoring to prioritize high-need, under-resourced districts, or create set-asides ensuring equitable distribution.

PreK and Early Childhood Programs:

Early childhood investment yields the highest returns for students from low-income families. State PreK funding should flow disproportionately to high-poverty districts—not equally to all districts regardless of need.

State tax dollars collected from all Maine citizens should not disproportionately flow to communities that already have the local capacity to fund schools at levels exceeding statewide norms.

ADDITIONAL STRUCTURAL REFORMS

Cap Property Valuation Impacts: Create a mechanism to prevent coastal property values from creating an artificial 'ability to pay' that ignores the actual income and wealth of community residents. Tourism-driven valuations should not penalize students.

Create a 'Caught in the Middle' Supplement: Establish supplemental funding for districts meeting both criteria: poverty rate above 50% AND state share below the poverty-adjusted expected level. This directly addresses the paradox facing Biddeford, Portland, Rockland, and similar communities.

Address Small School Inefficiency: Establish per-pupil spending caps or require regional consolidation for districts below minimum enrollment thresholds. Current policy allows structural inefficiency that diverts resources from larger districts serving more students with greater needs.

Increase Overall State Investment to 65%: Maine currently funds education at approximately 55%. This is insufficient when property values create such dramatic disparities. Establish 65% state funding as the new target, with revenue sources that reduce reliance on local property taxes.

CONCLUSION: FAIR IS FAIR

The data presented in this report speaks for itself. Maine's school funding system does not allocate resources based on student need. It allocates resources based on property wealth. The result is a system where children in affluent communities receive more—not because they need more, but because their communities can afford more.

This is not about making excuses. **It is about context.** Educators in high-poverty districts perform exceptionally under exceptional circumstances. They deserve recognition, resources, and advocacy—not judgment based on comparisons that ignore the fundamental inequities of the system.

This is not a partisan issue. **It is a fairness issue.** Children in some communities get more resources than children in others—not because they need more, but because of where they live. The question is whether we have the courage to fix it.

A child's zip code should not determine their educational experience. In Maine today, it does. Fair is fair. The time for change is now.

A Challenge to Our Elected Officials: We know where past decisions have led us. It is not time to slightly adjust our course—it is time to chart a new one. Future elected officials and the public must know they elected leaders with the long view in mind—leaders willing to make the structural changes necessary to ensure that every Maine child, regardless of zip code, has access to a quality education.

— END OF REPORT —

LD 2226: Maine School Funding Reform

An Act to Reform the Essential Programs & Services Formula

Maine Legislature
Joint Education Committee

FROM THE TESTIMONY OF SUPT. JEREMY RAY

"In Maine, a child's educational opportunity is determined not by their potential, not by their drive — but by the zip code they were born into. That is a fact. And it is a moral failure we have the power to correct."

"The very institution we have charged with providing every child an equal shot — the public school — is itself an instrument of inequality. A child in Biddeford or Sanford goes to school in a building doing its absolute best. And its absolute best is not the same."

"This is not a complicated question. It is not a partisan question. It is a moral one. The data leaves no room for doubt."

"LD 2226 delivers over \$41.8 million in additional resources to Maine children — benefiting 164 school districts across this state. This is a start. It doesn't come close to fixing the problem. But it is action."

"The top-most affluent communities spend as much as \$24,110 per student or more. Machias spends \$12,081. Houlton spends \$12,958. That is an \$11,152 gap between Under LD 2226, Falmouth would see a reduction of \$495 per student. Machias gains \$941 per student. Houlton gains \$769. MSAD 37 in Milbridge gains \$1,012. The children who need the most are in the schools that spend the least — and this legislation begins to close that gap."

THE ZIP CODE CRISIS: PER-PUPIL SPENDING vs. STATE AVERAGE (\$18,633)

District	Per-Pupil Spending	Econ. Disadvantage Rate	vs. State Average
York	\$27,427	21.8%	+\$8,794
RSU 28 (Camden)	\$25,741	26.9%	+\$7,108
Falmouth	\$24,110	8.4%	+\$5,477
Cape Elizabeth	\$23,278	9.6%	+\$4,645
Yarmouth	\$22,208	15.6%	+\$3,575
RSU 21 (Kennebunk)	\$20,767	18.2%	+\$2,134
Scarborough	\$20,421	20.6%	+\$1,788
MSAD 51 (Cumberland)	\$20,421	8.1%	+\$1,788
★ Maine State Average	\$18,633	—	\$0
RSU 06 (Bonny Eagle)	\$17,633	41.1%	-\$1,000
South Portland	\$17,234	43.3%	-\$1,399
Biddeford	\$16,467	64.3%	-\$2,166
Augusta	\$16,234	57.9%	-\$2,399
MSAD 37 (Harrington)	\$15,892	65.6%	-\$2,741
Waterville	\$15,678	71.9%	-\$2,955
Sanford	\$15,066	58.9%	-\$3,567
Lewiston	\$14,892	66.1%	-\$3,741
MSAD 55 (Hiram)	\$13,943	58.8%	-\$4,690
Houlton (RSU 29)	\$12,958	75.5%	-\$5,675

▲ 164 Districts

~130,000 students
students benefit

\$41.8M

in new resources
74% of Maine
students

● 55 Districts

~17,000 students
students unaffected

\$0

no change
10% of Maine
students

▼ 39 Districts

~28,000 students
students in high-wealth districts

-\$5.3M

modest reduction
16% of Maine
students

LD 2226: Regional Impact by County

Simulation — Gains, Losses & Net Impact Across All Maine Regions

Maine Legislature
Joint Education Committee

STATEWIDE TOTALS

243 Districts Analyzed **243**

Total Gains to High-Need Districts **+\$41.85M**

Total Reductions (High-Wealth) **-\$5.27M**

Net Statewide Impact **+\$36.58M**

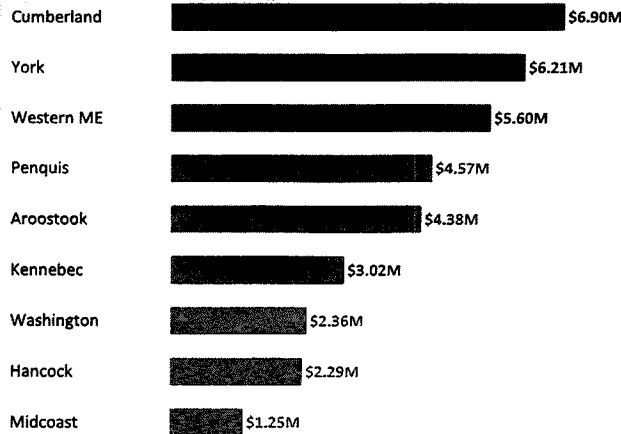
0.840 Washington County's old adjustment — lowest in Maine

1.000+ Minimum floor for all districts under LD 2226

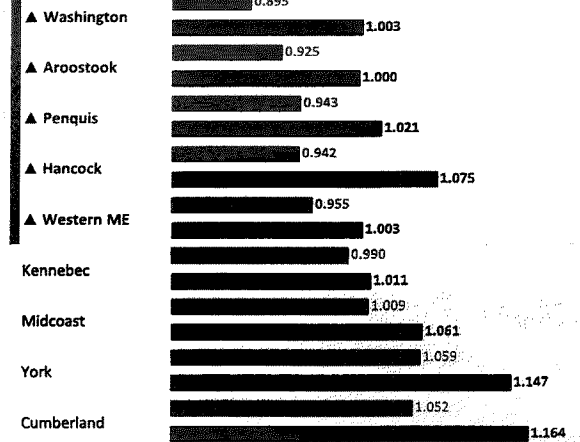
\$13.9M New resources to rural regions from this fix alone

LD 2226 - NET IMPACT BY REGION

NET IMPACT BY REGION (Simulation 2)



REGIONAL COST ADJ. | Before vs. After LD 2226 (1.0 = Parity)



\$41.85M

Total gains to high-need districts

-\$5.27M

Modest reductions (high-wealth)

72 of 75

Rural districts penalized before LD 2226

0.840

Washington County's lowest old adjustment

+\$36.58M

Net new resources to Maine students

9 of 9

Regions positive on net — no region loses

1.000+

Minimum floor guaranteed under LD 2226

\$13.9M

New resources to rural regions from this fix

WHAT IS THE REGIONAL ADJUSTMENT?

Maine's EPS formula includes a **Regional Cost Adjustment** — a multiplier applied to the teacher salary component of the formula. It is supposed to account for real differences in labor market costs across the state.

A multiplier below 1.0 means a district receives less per teacher than the state baseline — effectively penalizing rural districts for being rural.

LD 2226 recalibrates this index using actual wage data, establishing a fair floor and ending the structural penalty on rural Maine.

Source: LD 2226 Simulation 2 fiscal analysis. ▲ = Rural regions previously penalized by Regional Cost Adjustment. Regional adj. data from Simulation 1 (Columns L & M).

Dayton Consolidated

March 9, 2026

Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Re: Support for LD 2226 — An Act to Reform Maine's Economically Disadvantaged Student Weight

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

I write to you today not only as Superintendent of Schools for Biddeford, Saco, and Dayton, but as someone who has spent fourteen years watching the gap between what Maine's children deserve and what they actually receive grow wider with each passing budget cycle. I write as a human being who believes, and a professional who sees the extreme need of students, that what **LD 2226** offers is simple: the chance to do what is right.

This is not a complicated question. It is not a partisan question. It is a moral one. And the data — your data, the data you asked for, the data that has been presented and studied and analyzed — leaves no room for doubt.

The Zip Code Crisis Is Real — And Measurable

In my report, *Maine School Funding: The Zip Code Crisis*, I documented a simple and damning truth: in Maine, a child's educational opportunity is determined not by their potential, but by their zip code. That is a moral failure we have the power to correct.

Districts in more affluent communities like Cumberland/MSAD 51 (8.1%), Falmouth (8.4%), Cape Elizabeth (9.6%), and Yarmouth (15.6%) can leverage substantial property wealth to spend well above the state formula floor. Meanwhile, Portland (58.0%), Machias (69.5%), Ellsworth (54.8%), RSU 39 (55.5%), and RSU 67 (55.0%) are fighting with one hand tied behind their back. A child in Biddeford or Milbridge goes to school in a building doing its absolute best — and its absolute best is not the same as these more affluent communities can provide.

What LD 2226 Does — In Real Numbers

LD 2226 strengthens the weight applied to economically disadvantaged students in Maine's EPS funding formula. The simulation data developed to model this legislation tells a clear and compelling story. Under Simulation 2 — incorporating both the regional adjustment and the ability-to-pay component — this legislation delivers over \$41.8 million in additional resources to Maine children, benefiting 164 school districts across this state.

Let me say that again: **over \$41.8 million — flowing to children in high-poverty communities from York County to Washington County, from the Kennebec Valley to the St. John Valley.**

District	Econ. Dis.	New Funding	Per Pupil	Students Served
Portland	58.0%	+\$3,958,175	+\$603/student	6,563
Sanford	58.9%	+\$2,153,348	+\$680/student	3,167
Westbrook	67.5%	+\$1,616,780	+\$701/student	2,308
Biddeford	64.3%	+\$1,113,184	+\$468/student	2,379
RSU 79/MSAD 01 (Presque Isle)	56.2%	+\$901,404	+\$538/student	1,676
Ellsworth	54.8%	+\$810,095	+\$762/student	1,062
RSU 55/MSAD 55	58.8%	+\$853,226	+\$867/student	984
RSU 67 (Penquis)	55.0%	+\$755,553	+\$905/student	835
RSU 29/MSAD 29	75.5%	+\$929,188	+\$769/student	1,209
RSU 39 (Aroostook)	55.5%	+\$637,980	+\$609/student	1,048
South Portland	43.3%	+\$640,642	+\$221/student	2,902
RSU 37/MSAD 37 (Milbridge)	65.6%	+\$591,231	+\$1,012/student	585
RSU 06/MSAD 06	41.1%	+\$589,180	+\$179/student	3,288
MSAD 46 (Dexter)	76.7%	+\$486,514	+\$612/student	796
RSU 14	30.9%	+\$408,006	+\$129/student	3,159
RSU 73 (Western Maine)	65.2%	+\$398,169	+\$289/student	1,376
RSU 71 (Midcoast)	60.3%	+\$350,760	+\$252/student	1,393
Machias	69.5%	+\$274,185	+\$941/student	292

Source: LD 2226 Simulation 2 (Regional Adjustment + Ability to Pay)

A Story From Every Corner of Maine

The data table above represents 18 districts — but this legislation touches 164. From the coast to The County, from the Lakes Region to the Kennebec Valley, communities across Maine stand to gain. A few worth noting specifically:

- **RSU 37/MSAD 37 (Milbridge)** — 65.6% economically disadvantaged, Washington County coast, where out-of-state property purchases generate no income tax and programs have been cut and not replaced. Gains \$591,231 — \$1,012 per student.
- **Machias** — 69.5% economically disadvantaged, just 292 students. Gains \$274,185 — \$941 per student. In a district this small, that is a program. That is a lifeline.
- **Ellsworth** — 54.8% economically disadvantaged, a working community overshadowed by wealthier Hancock County neighbors. Gains \$810,095 — \$762 per student.
- **MSAD 46 (Dexter)** — 76.7% economically disadvantaged, one of the highest poverty rates in the state. Gains \$486,514 — \$612 per student.
- **RSU 79/MSAD 01 (Presque Isle)** — The County's largest city, 56.2% economically disadvantaged. Gains \$901,404 — \$538 per student. The County cannot be an afterthought.
- **RSU 39 (Aroostook)** — 55.5% economically disadvantaged. Gains \$637,980 — \$609 per student.
- **RSU 55/MSAD 55** — 58.8% economically disadvantaged, rural Maine doing everything it can with what it has. Gains \$853,226 — \$867 per student.
- **RSU 67 (Penquis)** — 55.0% economically disadvantaged. Gains \$755,553 — \$905 per student.
- **RSU 73 (Western Maine)** — 65.2% economically disadvantaged, poverty rates that rival urban districts without the tax base. Gains \$398,169 — \$289 per student.
- **RSU 71 (Midcoast)** — 60.3% economically disadvantaged, where the beauty of the coast masks real hardship. Gains \$350,760 — \$252 per student.
- **RSU 06/MSAD 06 (York County)** — 41.1% economically disadvantaged, neighboring wealthier communities but facing a very different fiscal reality. Gains \$589,180 — \$179 per student.
- **RSU 14 (Lakes Region)** — 30.9% economically disadvantaged, demonstrating the formula reaches communities across the economic spectrum. Gains \$408,006 — \$129 per student.

A Word About the Communities That Give a Little

I want to address the reduction side of this ledger directly and honestly — because the data demands it, and because I believe every member of this committee deserves the full picture.

Under Simulation 2, **39 of Maine's districts see an actual reduction in state subsidy** (6 additional districts show a change of exactly \$0). The total reduction across all 39 is **\$5.3 million** — compared to **\$41.8 million flowing to 164 districts** serving Maine's highest-need students. The districts absorbing reductions are, overwhelmingly, the communities best positioned to do so.

The districts seeing the largest reductions are among the lowest-poverty, highest-spending communities in Maine. These figures are actual per-pupil expenditures — what communities truly invest in their schools, above and beyond any state formula:

District	Econ. Dis.	Actual \$ / Pupil	Subsidy Change	Change / Pupil	vs. State Avg.
Falmouth	8.4%	\$24,110	-\$977,603	-\$495/pupil	+\$5,477 above avg.
Cape Elizabeth	9.5%	\$23,278	-\$261,033	-\$173/pupil	+\$4,645 above avg.
Yarmouth	15.6%	\$22,208	-\$344,177	-\$210/pupil	+\$3,575 above avg.
RSU 21 (Kennebunk)	18.2%	\$20,767	-\$344,327	-\$144/pupil	+\$2,134 above avg.
Cumberland (RSU 51)	8.1%	\$20,421	-\$379,501	-\$172/pupil	+\$1,788 above avg.
Scarborough	20.6%	\$20,421	-\$914,366	-\$319/pupil	+\$1,788 above avg.

Now look at what Maine's highest-poverty communities actually spend on their students — and the per-pupil gain they receive under LD 2226:

District	Econ. Dis.	Actual \$ / Pupil	New Funding	Gain / Pupil	vs. State Avg.
Houlton (RSU 29)	62.5%	\$12,958	+\$929,188	+\$769/pupil	-\$5,675 below avg.
Machias	69.5%	\$12,081	+\$274,185	+\$941/pupil	-\$6,552 below avg.
Sanford	58.9%	\$15,066	+\$2,153,348	+\$680/pupil	-\$3,567 below avg.
MSAD 37 (Milbridge)	65.6%	\$15,892	+\$591,231	+\$1,012/pupil	-\$2,741 below avg.
Biddeford	64.3%	\$16,467	+\$1,113,184	+\$468/pupil	-\$2,166 below avg.
Waterville	63.2%	\$15,678	+\$555,825	+\$350/pupil	-\$2,955 below avg.
Auburn	58.7%	\$15,234	+\$827,451	+\$258/pupil	-\$3,399 below avg.

Let that sink in. The top-most affluent communities spend as much as **\$24,110 per student**. Machias spends **\$12,081**. Houlton spends **\$12,958**. That is an **\$11,152 gap between** Under LD 2226, Falmouth would see a reduction of \$495 per student. Machias gains \$941 per student. Houlton gains \$769. MSAD 37 in Milbridge gains \$1,012. The children who need the most are in the schools that spend the least — and this legislation begins to close that gap.

The communities seeing reductions — Falmouth (\$24,110/pupil), Cape Elizabeth (\$23,278), Yarmouth (\$22,208), Scarborough (\$20,421), Cumberland (\$20,421) — spend **between \$1,788 and \$5,477 above the state average per student**. A modest reduction in state subsidy would not put their core or expanded programs at much risk. What it does is ensure that Maine's limited state education dollars flow a slightly more toward the children who have the least to begin with and the most to gain. — not the communities that are already spending significant above state average.

Reduction Range	# of Districts	Notable Districts
Over \$100,000	12	Falmouth (\$977K), Scarborough (\$914K), RSU 22 (\$400K), Cumberland (\$380K), Yarmouth (\$344K), Cape Elizabeth (\$261K)
\$50,000–\$99,999	7	RSU 38 (\$98K), RSU 63 (\$95K), Glenburn (\$85K), RSU 54 (\$85K), Brewer (\$75K)
\$25,000–\$49,999	6	Hope (\$36K), Veazie (\$31K), Whiting (\$29K), Lincolnville (\$29K), Nobleboro (\$25K)
\$15,000–\$24,999	1	Winthrop (\$16K)
\$1–\$14,999	13	13 small and rural districts, ranging from \$2,327 to \$14,128

Source: LD 2226 Simulation 2 (Regional Adjustment + Ability to Pay)

This Is the Opportunity Gap — In Every Classroom

Outside of school, children in poverty face food insecurity, housing instability, limited access to healthcare, and the accumulated stress of economic precarity. We know this. And yet the school — the one place charged with leveling that playing field — is itself unequal. The child who needs the most support is in the district with the least capacity to provide it. The reading specialist, the counselor, the enrichment programs — that child is in the zip code that cannot afford them.

This is not abstract. This is a third-grader in Houlton. A fifth-grader in Dexter. A sixth-grader in Biddeford who is brilliant and full of potential, and who deserves the additional programming that this shift in the funding formula could provide.

This Is a Beginning — Not a Solution

LD 2226 is *not* a complete solution. It does not close the opportunity gap or make Biddeford's, MSAD 37, Dexter, Machias, or Houlton's per-pupil resources equal to those of other, more affluent communities. But it is **action** — grounded in the data you asked for, the studies you commissioned, the analyses laid before you with clarity. It is Maine saying, through law, that we see the inequity and we are going to do something about it. Forty-one million dollars directed to 164 districts is a down payment on the Maine we want to be.

A Call Across the Aisle

This should not move forward on a party line vote. It should pass unanimously — because its reach is statewide, its data is undeniable, and its moral foundation is one every legislator, regardless of party, was elected to uphold.

Education funding equity is not a liberal value or a conservative value. It is a Maine value. For those who believe in fiscal responsibility: directing dollars to where need is greatest is good governance. For those who believe in the strength of rural Maine: RSU 37 in Milbridge, Machias, Dexter, Presque Isle — these communities have been asking the formula to see them clearly for years. This bill does that.

This is one of those rare moments when data, morality, and the opportunity to lead all converge. **Vote yes together.** Show the people of Maine that when the evidence is clear and children are counting on you, this legislature does what is right.

Vote yes. Not because the politics demand it. Because the children do.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeremy Ray

Superintendent of Schools – Biddeford, Saco, Dayton

Data Note:

District-level figures cited in this letter are drawn from LD 2226 simulation modeling (Simulation 2: Regional Adjustment + Ability to Pay). Statewide totals reflect \$41,849,924 in new funding flowing to 164 Maine school districts. Per-pupil figures are based on FY26 enrollment data. Economic disadvantage percentages reflect FY26 enrollment as reported in the state EPS model.