

The Oxford Hills School District M.S.A.D. #17

Heather Manchester, *Ed.D, Superintendent of Schools*,
Steve Ciembroniewicz, *Assistant Superintendent*
Elizabeth King, *Director of Student Services*
Carrie Colley, *Director of Finance and Operations*
Cynthia Remick, *Director of Curriculum*



232 Main Street, South Paris, ME 04281
Phone (207) 743-8972 fax (207) 743-2878
www.msad17.org

Harrison * Hebron * Norway
Otisfield * Oxford * Paris
Waterford * West Paris

March 10, 2026

Re: Testimony to the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, in support of LD 2226, *An Act to Amend the Essential Programs and Services Funding Formula*

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

My name is Heather Manchester, and I am the Superintendent of Schools for MSAD #17 in the Oxford Hills. I support LD 2226, *An Act to Amend the Essential Programs and Services Funding Formula*. If adopted, this bill will improve the situation for the students in districts across Maine and in the Oxford Hills. While this bill may not go far enough, it is a good start.

The current EPS funding formula does not meet the current needs in our schools, as evidenced by the amount of money local districts are contributing over and above the required local share. In MSAD#17, this number creeps up every year as our district strives to pay a living wage to our employees, take care of our aging facilities, and serve students whose needs have grown far beyond what was anticipated when the funding formula was originally established. When I review the Over/Under Reports listed on the maine.gov website, it is clear that most districts are putting in more than the required local share, that makes MSAD#17's 19% over EPS contribution pale in comparison. This tells me that we are not allocating enough money to our schools. The \$39 million that LD 2226 adds in state funding is much needed; districts should have received this funding all along.

LD 2226 provides \$11 million to support economically disadvantaged students and \$7 million to support transportation, which would support the demographic in MSAD#17. When I analyze spending in each cost center over the last five years, the Instruction and Leadership cost centers are largely flat, with decreases in enrollment offsetting the increases in salaries. In Special Education, Other Instruction, Transportation, and Facilities we have seen percentage increases in the double digits over five years. We have fewer students in our district, but, post-Covid, many of their needs are even more significant. Our kids need social workers, nurses, and school counselors, they need specialized transportation and programming, and they need to learn in buildings that are safe and warm. Funds provided in LD 2226 would support our district in meeting the needs of our students.

Each year, it becomes more challenging to build a budget that our local taxpayers will pass. While our community supports our schools, the annual increases are becoming unsustainable at the local level due to the increasing home valuations in our community. While property values continue to rise, our voters do not have more money in their pockets commensurate with the increases in valuation. In MSAD#17, for example, for the last two years, we have cut over 25 positions and closed two schools, but in our most recent budget, the increase to our local taxpayers was 20%, even though the budget to budget increase was 7%. If passed, LD 2226

would incorporate our community's income into the formula, which would help to show what our taxpayers are truly capable of paying.

The bill to amend the Essential Programs and Services Model will be a good first step to improving school funding in the State of Maine. It will provide an opportunity for more equal opportunities in our schools. I urge you to vote yes on LD 2226.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and your service to the students and educators of our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Heather Manchester".

Heather Manchester
Superintendent of Schools, MSAD#17