



## Edgecomb Eddy School

To: Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and other members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

From: Heather Sinclair, Chair of Edgecomb School Board and AOS98 School Board, on behalf of Edgecomb Town Officials

Subject: Testimony in Tentative Support of LD2226  
(With additional comments on the ongoing disproportionate effects of EPS funding on certain communities and citizens)

My name is Heather Sinclair, and I am the chair of the school board in Edgecomb and AOS98. I am here on behalf of my board, as well as members of the budget committee and selectboard for the town of Edgecomb. I ask you to consider our tentative support for LD2226, as well as a strong request to develop broader steps to address the mechanisms for school funding in Maine.

### Support for 4 Proposed Changes:

We appreciate the work done by this committee and MEPRI to address the outdated nature of the current EPS formula. The three fully developed recommendations, including **aligning the regional adjustment with minimum local salaries** rather than the state average, **modifying a community's ability to contribute basis** to consider their relative poverty rate of community, and **updating the model of adequate services** all seem to potentially benefit most towns, including Edgecomb. As an area with a relatively high cost of living, our local salary scales must reflect these costs to attract skilled educators, particularly in these times of teacher shortages, so taking the local salary situation into account will benefit us. Including considerations of the level of poverty in all communities is a step toward equity, but does not go far enough, a topic I will return to in a few paragraphs. Finally, an updated model of adequacy will benefit towns with small schools like Edgecomb Eddy School. We may have a small student population of 107 students in grades preK through 6, but funding, for example, .3 of a principal as suggested by the EPS formula now does not meet the daily needs of those students and families. So, it is our position that **these 3 proposed changes are a good start, but do not address the full picture.**

The fourth and final recommendation put forth at this time offers a way to address the costs of special education. While **the proposal for regional special education centers** is not yet fully developed, and the practical nature of this change is not clear, it **may offer a solution to a constant challenge for smaller communities.** At this time, all districts are mandated to immediately provide any and all services identified through processes like the development of an IEP or the change in housing status of a family in the community. In a small school, the addition of a single student with high needs or a local house fire can create an immediate crisis of resources, which must be addressed by the immediate influx of funds. One special education out of district

placement, one IEP mandated 1 on 1 aide, or the need to transport one unhoused family with 3 students can cost between \$100,000 and \$250,000, money that must be found on an immediate and often ongoing basis. In small districts, that cost can represent more than 5% of the total budgeted expenditures, and in ways that cannot be publicly explained due to privacy needs. Under the current funding formula, it can take years for these immediate cost increases to be reflected in state subsidies. If the proposed regional centers take over the budgeting and funding of special education needs, it could help **remove this level of volatility from municipal budgets and spread the variability across a larger area, thus reducing annual fluctuations.**

### **Limited Effects of Proposed Changes for the Midcoast Region:**

According to the MEPRI report itself, **even the best outcomes of these proposed changes are likely to result in limited positive changes for the Midcoast region in particular.** From the February 2026 MEPRI report on *Recommended Parameter Updates for the Essential Programs and Services (EPS) Funding Model*:

#### **Level 1 Regional Adjustment**

“Effect by Region • The change benefits all regions of the state in terms of per-pupil subsidy. Some regions of the state, such as Aroostook and Washington Counties would benefit more than others. **The effect in areas such as the Midcoast and Kennebec region would be smaller.” (Midcoast increase of \$54 per pupil, by far the lowest) (page 11)**

#### **Level 2 Regional Adjustment and Ability to Contribute**

“Effects by region • While all regions would have increases in their aggregate per-pupil subsidy, **some areas such as the Washington County region would benefit more than others such as the Midcoast.” (Midcoast increase of \$103, by far the lowest) (page 17)**

#### **Level 3 Individual Simulation Results**

##### **3a - Transportation**

“Effect by region • All regions of the state would benefit from the recommended model in terms of their per pupil subsidy, though **in one region, Midcoast, the effect is negligible (\$2 per pupil).” (page 20)**

##### **3c - Economic Disadvantage Variable Weights**

“Effects by region • While most regions would have a positive effect on their aggregate per-pupil subsidy, especially areas such as Washington and Aroostook Counties. Some areas such as Cumberland and York Counties would have a small negative effect.” **(Midcoast in the middle range, increase of \$56 per pupil) (pages 23 and 24)**

**While we fully acknowledge the high needs in other regions of Maine, as elected officials we must advocate for our own Midcoast community, which seems as though it will receive minimal benefits from these proposed changes.**

### **Edgecomb's Unique Circumstances:**

Like many midcoast communities, Edgecomb is home to a mix of families, some who have lived here for generations and want to raise their children here, and some newer arrivals who seek the quiet beauty of waterfront Maine. For many years, this diverse group has struggled with the topic of school funding.

- By 2016, the percent of town taxes spent on education had risen to 62.4%, and pressure grew to find ways to increase revenue to offset costs
- In 2017, Edgecomb added a full day pre-K program to support local children AND to attract students from nearby towns with school choice
- Between 2017 and 2022, \$950,000 in tuition revenue was returned to the town to reduce costs, which was greatly appreciated during the height of the COVID pandemic
- In 2023, unanticipated costs arose in the form of a significant increase in SpEd services required for a new and unanticipated student, and a damaged well and well pipe
- This resulted in draining our reserve accounts, and passing on a large increase in expenditure and assessment to taxpayers the following year
- The 32% increase in local taxes in 2024 was caused by both this huge shift in assessment due to education AND the need to pay to re-evaluate property values for the first time in years
- The re-evaluation significantly increased the annual taxes for many properties, many of which have been in local families for generations
- Since then, local voters have been increasingly vocal about both the increases in and volatility of the costs of local taxes

### **Edgecomb Compared to other Midcoast Communities:**

When compared to other towns in the Midcoast region, some of Edgecomb's data points stand out as a prime example of the extremes in EPS funding allocation, and offer a lens to understanding the inequity in depending on property value to drive the search for equity.

- In FY2026, **Edgecomb was responsible for 79.3% of the EPS minimum, a higher %** than all of Midcoast except Nobleboro, with most communities paying between 40% to 60%, down to a low of 29.9% for Appleton
- **Edgecomb's additional local share of 46.2% was higher** than most (behind only Wiscasset) with all others below 42% and down to low of 30%
- **Edgecomb received only 11.16% of total expenditure**, the lowest of all other communities in the region
- Other than Nobleboro at 11.27%, all other towns received above 20% and up to 41.25%
- Median income data from 2021 shows Edgecomb in the middle of local communities, but lower than Appleton - \$62,333 compared to \$64,400
- **Edgecomb has the lowest affordability index score at .59**, with a local average of .68

These statistics create two uncomfortable truths for Edgecomb and other towns:

- Many local families are being priced out of remaining in their generational homes, resulting in financial stress on our students and their families and ultimately leading to fewer students in our community schools.

- Many residents with larger, newer, or waterfront homes, who do not benefit directly from the local school system, carry the largest financial burden.

These unhappy truths lead to an untenable financial situation for residents and an equally untenable political situation for local officials such as myself. Many Mainers may not be able to speak with their federal or even state legislators easily, but most can find me in my driveway, or at Hannaford, or at my son's swim meets. Public pressure being applied is to cut taxes, sometimes by any means necessary, in discussions that can damage both educational success and civic engagement at the most basic level.

**Additional Recommendations to Support Success in Edgecomb:**

- Further modify the model of adequacy to better meet the baseline of need for small schools, and ensure that ALL such schools receive additional state funding
- Consider the impacts of Level 3b of the MEPRI report, in which the updated adequacy model for Instructional Staff Support, Supplies and Equipment, and Instructional Technology is predicted to have the largest effects on "non-K-12 resident SAUs such as some CSDs and their member towns, which have offsetting effects depending on SAU resident gradespan responsibility"(page 22). This suggestion seems to overlap with the larger issue of tuition.
- Address the formula for calculating tuition expectations from sending towns to better meet the rising costs of all aspects of education, with a special focus on special education costs. The current tuition values can be used to actively discourage towns from housing schools and encourage further outsourcing of education, directly working against the ideals of local control.
- Ensure that a municipality's ability to pay is both sufficient for local educational costs and clearly identified as a state mandate rather than the whim of the local schools.
- Identify further opportunities for direct financial support for all communities to reduce the burden of local taxes on those residents with the lowest ability to pay. The use of property value alone places a disproportionate impact on some of the longest standing members of communities such as Edgecomb.

Thank you for your efforts on behalf of all Mainers, and your consideration of this important topic.

*Heather M. Sinclair*

Heather M. Sinclair, on behalf of the Edgecomb School Board  
with the support of Jack Brennan of the Edgecomb Budget Committee  
and Forrest Carver of the Edgecomb Select Board