



PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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March 9, 2026

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Testimony in support of LD2226

Good morning, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Ryan Scallon, and I am the Superintendent of the Portland Public Schools. I am here today to testify in support of LD 2226.

Common Sense and Data-Driven Reform

The changes proposed in this legislation are common-sense adjustments that follow a set of rigorous reports from the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI). These reports confirm that the state's current cost calculation is not representative of the actual cost of staff. In Portland, our starting salary for teachers is \$50,000 and the average is between 70 and 80,000. Changing the regional adjustment is a necessary correction to help districts remain competitive and ensure that the state formula is closer to the actual salary for staff.

Furthermore, while the formula attempts to balance state allocation with a district's ability to pay, property valuation alone is an incomplete metric. Moderating this by considering a community's poverty rate is a sensible adjustment. This calculation is not only a measure of a local community's financial capacity; it is also representative of the students and families it serves.

The Realities of Scale, Mobility, and Poverty

LD 2226 increases the multiplier for districts supporting large numbers of low-income students, which is aligned with research showing that family income has a larger impact on student outcomes than even the quality of the school itself. In Portland, 52 percent of our students are economically disadvantaged, and 8 percent are currently experiencing homelessness.

When students are homeless or experiencing economic hardship, they are often more mobile, moving schools more often than other students. As of February 15th, Portland has served 6,954 unique students, which is 11 percent higher than the October 1 enrollment count typically used to determine our state funding. This is due to student mobility and the services we provide to other schools in our city. These students require intensive, specialized support that exceeds the current funding model.

Expanding Research-Based Strategies in the Strategic Plan

We are in year two of a five-year strategic plan that is already producing improved outcomes for students, but limited funding forces us into difficult trade-offs. With the investments from LD 2226, we can expand these proven strategies:

- **Literacy Instruction:** We have implemented a research-based, rigorous literacy curriculum that includes explicit phonics instruction. We have also piloted early literacy education technicians supporting literacy instruction in kindergarten classes in Title I schools. This pilot has produced positive outcomes as



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measured in both school culture and reading test results. Limited funding, however, means these strategies are currently restricted to only some schools and only in Kindergarten. These funds would allow us to hire literacy education technicians to lower staff-to-student ratios and expand this approach districtwide and up to third grade.

- **High-Quality Math:** We will be able to fully implement high-quality math curriculum and instructional materials across all grades.
- **Mental Health Support:** We will increase the number of social workers in our buildings to address the escalating mental health needs of our students.
- **Community Schools:** We currently have two community schools. This funding would allow us to expand the number of schools and implement a two-generation approach of support, providing resources that benefit both parents and students.
- **Academic Enrichment:** This investment will allow us to expand summer school and after-school academic enrichment, which are research-based strategies specifically designed to support low-income students.

A Request for Fiscal Stability

While we support this bill, I suggest that the committee add a component to the formula that limits the percentage of state funding a district can lose in a single school year. In Portland, a mere 10-cent change in the mill rate results in a 2 million dollar shift in state funding. Districts cannot effectively plan for these swings because we lack visibility into the broader system and cannot control the costs of other districts or shifts in minimum receivership.

This year, Portland faces a \$4million reduction in state funding. Approximately \$800,000 of that is from declining enrollment. \$3million is from changes in the state's relative valuation of Portland's property and the state funding formula's calculated mill rate. This unanticipated reduction has caused us to reduce our staffing for next year, delay a decrease in the use of our fund balance, and proposed property tax increases higher than we had originally anticipated or budgeted.

Limiting the reduction in state funding to 10% from year to year will provide districts with more stability in long term budgeting.

Conclusion

These changes are directionally positive. While Portland currently receives only 16 percent of its funding from the state, LD 2226 is a vital step forward that will benefit districts and students across the state. I urge the committee to move this legislation forward.

Thank you.