



Regional School Unit 34 Alton, Bradley, and Old Town

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Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the committee,

Thank you for your service to our state. I write in support of LD 2226, *An Act to Amend the Essential Programs and Services School Funding Formula*. I have spent my career (26 years and counting) in the Old Town School Department and its successor, RSU 34. As my perspective has expanded to include regional and then state-wide issues, and as I have learned about other districts in the state through my dissertation research, accreditation visits, and partnerships, it has become increasingly clear to me how much the zip code and resources of a community impact the educational resources its children receive. It has further become increasingly clear to me that in many communities there is a disconnect between community valuation and the ability of its citizens to pay, and that we must update the subsidy formula.

I do not view LD 2226 as the final perfect revision to the state funding formula, and I appreciate how complex it is to navigate how to approximate adequate resources for numerous districts in a diverse state, combined with approximating a community's ability to pay. I think LD 2226 will break the logjam of badly needed revisions, and show recognition that if EPS is truly to reflect adequate resources for every Maine student to achieve the Learning Results, change to the formula is needed.

In my district, like many, there have been lower birth rates thus lower enrollment. Thus, some gradual reduction in force is appropriate to adjust our staffing to the number of students we serve. However, due to a series of challenging budgets, we have had to reduce 32 FTE over the past three years, and close a small school, in order to pass budgets by a narrowing margin. In planning the FY2027 budget, we are making additional painful cuts, and the tax impact in Old Town will still be high enough that we worry if the voters will approve it at referendum, when they do not get a direct vote on the county or municipal budgets.

When EPS was formulated, its authors had no way of foreseeing how drastically property values would one day diverge from a community's ability to pay, or that assessing the true economically-disadvantaged rate in a community would be obscured by lack of incentive to fill out forms. Its authors did not know that these challenges would coincide with severe workforce shortages which raise competition for staff (and thus raise costs), and would coincide with a period of dramatically-increasing prices for everything from construction to instructional materials. Its authors could not foresee that the funding formula would over time result in

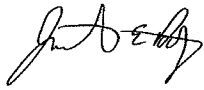
Every student deserves to make continuous progress in school.

greatly diverging subsidy for Special Education students, with much wealthier districts provided well more than double the subsidy per IEP student through that formula than in my district.

Simply put, we need help in order for our students to have equitable access to achieve the Maine Learning Results. We don't want to have to choose between larger class sizes and the arts, or between our system of supports and world languages, etc. In order for students to have equitable access to achieve the Maine Learning Results, no district in Maine should have to choose whether or not to fund the content areas of the Maine Learning Results.

We need to begin making steps toward a more equitable funding formula; I urge you to begin that work by supporting LD 2226.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jon Doty", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jon Doty

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