



Maine Education Association

Jesse Hargrove President | Beth French Vice President | Jaye Rich Treasurer
Rebecca Cole NEA Director | Rachelle Bristol Executive Director

Testimony

In Support Of

LD 2226, *An Act to Amend the Essential Programs and Services School Funding Formula*

Jan Kosinski, Government Relations Director, Maine Education Association

Before the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

March 9, 2026

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

My name is Jan Kosinski, and I serve as the Director of Government Relations for the Maine Education Association (MEA). The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators. Our members include teachers and other educators in nearly every public school in the state, full-time faculty, and other professional and support staff in both the University of Maine and Community College systems, and thousands of retired educators.

I offer this testimony today on behalf of the MEA in SUPPORT of most sections of LD 2226: *An Act to Amend the Essential Programs and Services School Funding Formula*.

First, I feel compelled to recognize the amazing work of Professor Amy Johnson and the entire team at the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI). I have followed every presentation to this Committee and commend the time, effort, and creativity they brought to this project. I have been following discussions in Maine's school funding scheme for almost two decades now. I was involved in the two-year Picus study conducted a decade ago. The analysis from MEPRI finally offers a potential road map for fixing chronic problems in Maine's school funding formula.

The MEA supports finally fixing the Labor Market Adjustments in the school funding formula (Section 18 of LD 2226). If nothing else, we hope the Committee will find a way to at least make this improvement to our state's school funding formula.

Fixing the labor market adjustments has been a priority of the MEA for over a decade and for good reason. The current labor market adjustments in the EPS funding are woefully outdated. As you know, they have not been adjusted since 2004, and we can all agree a lot has changed in Maine since 2004! In addition, the labor market adjustments have a multiplicative effect on state funding for schools. A lower labor market adjustment for a school district results in a reverberation throughout the funding formula's calculation for that district because these adjustments are used to calculate a per pupil rate. What is more, and as I show below, the

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labor market adjustments in the funding formula act as an anchor on teacher salaries in our state.

Below you will find a comparison of the districts with the highest starting teacher salaries versus those with the lowest starting teacher salaries in the state. While starting teacher salaries serve as just one metric for understanding the overall compensation package for teachers, we hope we can all agree it is an important metric. Anecdotally, we know districts with higher starting teacher salaries tend to receive more applicants for open jobs. Those districts with lower starting teacher salaries often struggle to find suitable applicants and sometimes serve as a training program for teachers to migrate to higher paying districts. Uneven starting salaries raise questions about equity for students.

As you can see in Table 1, 22 school districts have a minimum starting salary of \$50,000 and these districts are geographically clustered along the southeastern coast of Maine from Lincolnville to York with only two exceptions. (I have included the maximum salary on the scale at the bachelor's degree level and the number of steps to get to the top of the scale for your information, although it is not directly relevant to the analysis today.) I also included on Table 1 the current labor market adjustments, the mill rate expectation of the funding formula and the state share percentage for each district.

A stark picture emerges.

Of the districts with the highest starting teacher salary, only two of the twenty-two have a labor market adjustment of less than 1.0. Lamoine (.93) and Blue Hill (.95) have both decided to compensate their teachers better, even though the funding formula currently disadvantages them with a low regional market adjustment and its multiplicative effects. Every other district in this list of districts with the highest starting teacher salaries has a labor market adjustment of at least 1.0. In fact, eleven of the twenty-two districts, or 50% of the districts have a labor market adjustment of 1.8 or higher.



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Table 1: School Districts with Highest Starting Teacher Salary¹

Local Names	Schedule Min	BA Max	Steps to get to max	Labor Market Adjustment	Min Mill Rate Expectation (FY 26)	25/26 State %
AOS 98 - Edgecor	\$ 55,878.91	\$ 83,941.24	16	1.02	6.1	21%
Blue Hill	\$ 50,337.00	\$ 65,537.00	20	0.95	5.19	9%
Brunswick	\$ 51,500.00	\$ 88,739.00	25	1.02	6.1	48%
Cape Elizabeth	\$ 53,017.00	\$ 92,516.00	26	1.08	6.1	12%
Falmouth	\$ 53,095.80	\$ 95,572.44	26	1.08	6.1	34%
Five Town CSD	\$ 51,151.00	\$ 88,191.00	21	1	5.69	18%
Lamoine	\$ 50,352.00	\$ 72,292.00	22	0.93	6.1	13%
Lincolntonville	\$ 52,511.83	\$ 79,563.38	16	1.01	6.1	30%
Portland	\$ 50,000.00	\$ 94,300.00	31	1.08	6.1	16%
Portland	\$ 52,663.00	\$ 90,060.00	31	1.08	6.1	16%
RSU 01, Bath	\$ 50,440.00	\$ 93,661.00	21	1.02	5.42	53%
RSU 05, Freeport	\$ 50,809.98	\$ 85,868.87	27	1.02	5.99	27%
RSU 21, Kennebec	\$ 53,889.00	\$ 90,037.00	31	1.09	4.05	15%
RSU 28, Camden	\$ 51,151.00	\$ 88,191.00	21	1	3.73	13%
RSU 35, Eliot	\$ 50,946.00	\$ 83,364.00	19	1.06	6.1	52%
RSU 51, Cumberland	\$ 51,500.00	\$ 88,844.22	38	1.08	6.1	51%
Scarborough	\$ 50,554.00	\$ 88,829.00	26	1.08	6.1	20%
South Portland	\$ 50,168.00	\$ 85,864.00	20	1.08	6.1	30%
Wells-Ogunquit C	\$ 59,224.00	\$ 94,244.00	24	1.09	2.65	10%
Westbrook	\$ 50,378.00	\$ 84,378.00	42	1.08	6.1	49%
Yarmouth	\$ 53,222.00	\$ 95,267.00	34	1.08	6.1	37%
York	\$ 59,518.00	\$ 92,506.00	20	1.06	3.49	15%
AVERAGES	\$ 52,377.57	\$ 87,353.01	25.32	1.0450	5.5277	27%

To compare, I present Table 2 with a list of the districts with the lowest starting teacher salaries in the state. I included the salary at the top of the scale in the bachelor's degree lane and the number of steps to get to the top as well, along with the current labor market adjustment, the mill rate expectation and the 25/26 state share percentage for each district.

¹ It is important to note, I purposefully removed CTE centers and town academies from this table because their funding mechanism is different. There is one town academy with a minimum salary of \$50,000 (Thornton Academy) and one CTE center (Region 10 in Brunswick) but because of their unique funding scheme they are not included in this analysis.



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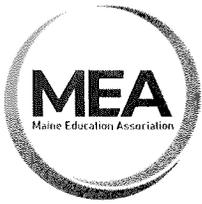
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Here, what we find is the districts struggling to pay teachers more are hampered by a labor market adjustment that penalizes their districts. Only four of the twenty-two districts with the lowest starting teacher salaries in the state have a labor market adjustment of 1.0 or more – the other eighteen districts all see labor market adjustments below 1.0.

Table 2: Districts with the Lowest Starting Teacher Salaries

	Schedule Min	BA Max	BA Steps to Max	Labor Market	Min Mill Rate Expectatio n (FY 26)	25/26 State %
Cherryfield	\$ 40,000.00	\$ 60,000.00	26	0.84	6.1	39%
Caswell	\$ 40,780.00	\$ 48,780.00	11	0.9	6.1	81%
RSU 32, Ashland	\$ 41,150.00	\$ 72,549.00	25	0.9	6.1	80%
RSU 56, Dixfield	\$ 41,280.00	\$ 68,331.00	17	0.93	6.1	71%
RSU 89, Patten	\$ 41,840.00	\$ 67,842.32	25	0.88	6.07	70%
RSU 67, Lincoln	\$ 42,000.00	\$ 67,500.00	27	0.86	6.1	63%
East Millinocket	\$ 42,025.00	\$ 66,826.69	27	0.88	6.1	82%
Otis	\$ 42,134.00	\$ 66,243.00	21	0.93	4.72	12%
Easton	\$ 42,200.00	\$ 72,140.00	19	0.9	6.1	24%
RSU 58, Phillips	\$ 42,445.00	\$ 70,155.00	18	0.96	6.1	66%
AOS 94 - SAD 46, Dexter	\$ 42,465.00	\$ 75,376.00	29	0.94	6.1	75%
RSU 13, Seacoast	\$ 42,473.00	\$ 76,375.00	20	1	5.96	33%
AOS 90 - SAD 30, Lee	\$ 42,500.00	\$ 64,900.00	30	0.86	6.04	75%
RSU 79, Presque Isle	\$ 42,500.00	\$ 73,756.00	19	0.9	6.1	75%
Calais	\$ 42,585.00	\$ 68,374.21	21	0.96	6.1	75%
RSU 14, Windham	\$ 42,770.65	\$ 75,328.79	31	1.08	5.76	40%
RSU 50, Southern Aroostook	\$ 42,800.00	\$ 70,288.00	17	0.88	6.07	69%
RSU 09, Farmington	\$ 42,864.00	\$ 70,849.00	18	0.96	5.85	69%
AOS 93 - Bristol	\$ 42,906.85	\$ 71,883.94	16	1.03	2.73	11%
RSU 20, Searsport	\$ 42,970.00	\$ 67,677.00	17	1.01	6.1	48%
AOS 96 - Cutler	\$ 43,000.00	\$ 59,800.00	25	0.84	6.1	52%
AOS 96 - Jonesboro	\$ 43,000.00	\$ 62,200.00	25	0.84	6.1	55%
AVERAGES	\$ 42,213.11	\$ 68,053.41	22.00	0.9218	5.85	58%

Across the districts with the highest starting teacher pay, we see on average a lower mill rate expectation and on average a lower reliance on state aid when compared to the districts with the lowest teacher pay.



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This demonstrates districts with the lowest salaries rely MORE on state aid to fund their schools, while also relying MORE on property taxes to pay for public schools yet are penalized by the lower labor market adjustments.

Across the top paying districts, we see an average mill rate expectation of 5.52 with a low of 2.65 found in Wells-Ogunquit and an average state share of 27%.

Across the low paying districts, we see an average mill rate expectation of 5.85 and an average state share of 58%, with three districts relying on state aid for 80% or more of their school budget (Caswell, RSU 32 – Ashland and East Millinocket).

The beauty of Section 18 of LD 2226 is that not only is the proposal to raise up the bottom by increasing the minimum labor market adjustment. This will certainly help those districts that are struggling to pay teachers a living wage. But the proposal from MEPRI would also rely on the MIT Living Wage Index to ensure the adjustments reflect reality into the future for all districts. Hopefully, this will avoid a re-creation of our current system, whereby nearly everyone can agree that the current adjustments are outdated but fixes elude us.

This is a win-win. Those struggling to raise enough to support teachers will win as their labor market adjustments are adjusted up, while those experiencing higher cost of living will see new adjustments that reflect that higher cost of living.

As described by MEPRI, this change alone will result in nearly \$40 million more in state aid specifically for teacher salaries each year. This will be extremely helpful in lifting salaries for novice and veteran teachers all over the state.

I want to express concern about the language in Section 18 and the lack of specificity. The language currently reads, "The regional adjustment must be based on the regional differences in the cost of living, as computed by a statewide education policy research institute using a nationwide index or combination of nationwide indices." While we understand the intent, we want to encourage the Committee to consider providing more specificity and clarity with this language, if possible. I know there are policies and concerns about listing specific organizations in statute, and I understand the hesitation to be too prescriptive, I worry the current language is vague and could be left open to board interpretation in a new administration.

While the tables above represent a mere example of the salary scales in school districts, I am confident that dividing the scales into subgroups (i.e., Quintiles), the same themes will emerge.



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We Support Increased State Support for Financially Disadvantaged Students:

Section 6 of the bill responds to the concerns of superintendents from high poverty districts and the research that shows the struggles of schools with high concentrations of student poverty. The proposal in Section 6 of this bill would allow for an increased adjustment from the current .15 up to .35 with the details left to a statewide policy group, presumably MEPRI, to fashion an unimpeachable metric. Like other sections of the bill, we encourage the Committee to consider tightening the language in the proposed bill to ensure clarity for all, but we support the underlying goal of increasing aid to school districts that see a higher share of students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

We OPPOSE Section 10 (Professional Development):

We oppose Section 10 of LD 2262 and ask the Committee to remove this section.

Section 10 proposes to repeal 20-A MRSA §15680, sub-§1, ¶E. This language includes “professional development” as an additional cost component for purposes of calculating a per pupil rate in the EPS funding formula. We are unclear why the proposal includes a removal of this section. If anything, we hear from educators that they need and want more high-quality professional development and we should increase the amount the state contribution for professional development.

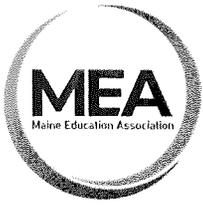
We are Neither for nor Against the Special Education Changes:

LD 2226 includes many proposed changes to the special education components of the school funding formula, but we recommend removing these sections of the bill and postponing implementation of these proposals until the committee has a complete analysis and clear recommendations from MEPRI.

Just last week, the staff from MEPRI provided additional analysis for this committee and the analysis opened up more questions – important questions – that need further interrogation, debate, and consideration.

We are concerned that the changes found in special education components of LD 2226, found in Sections 1, 2, 3, 13, 14 and 15 of the bill should be considered as part of a global approach to the special education funding components of the formula.

What is more, next January our state will have a new Governor and potentially a new Commissioner of Education. This new administration will have only weeks between inauguration and the introduction of a two-year budget for the fiscal year beginning on July 1,



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2027. The special education funding changes could pose policy and fiscal challenges for a new administration, and we caution against implementing these changes without a complete picture of the impacts on schools.

What's Missing? Mental Health Supports!

While we support many provisions in this bill, and we appreciate the efforts to address longstanding issues in our state's school funding formula, we must recognize that the bill does not address one of the major concerns we hear about from educators constantly – the mental health needs of students. In the past two years, you have heard many bills that are directly related to this concern. Restraint and seclusion (LD 1248), expulsion and suspension (LDs 165, 2204), grants to mental health providers (LDs 858, 1203), more mental health clinicians in schools (LD 1398), mentoring (LD 470), dangerous behavior trainings and best practices (LDs 1097, 1626) – all of these bills and others relate to the constant concern we are hearing from educators about the behavioral issues and mental health challenges that educators see from students on the daily.

Districts need help and support to address what they are facing. We contend the current funding formula ignores this dire need. We have a counselor ratio of 350:1 in grades preK-8 and 250:1 in grades 9-12. This ratio, which we argue is the ONLY demonstration of support for mental health needs of students in the formula, is woefully insufficient and out of step with the world we live in.

The whole design of the funding formula is to help all students meet the Learning Results – but we know students will struggle to meet the Learning Results if they are experiencing mental health struggles and many of the behavioral challenges students demonstrate directly relates to underlying mental health or other concerns they are facing – yet the funding formula doesn't reflect the current reality.

We understand that the bill before you may not be the right vehicle for this discussion, but we hope the Committee will consider further study and analysis such as the efforts that led to the creation of this bill today to find actionable recommendations to make progress on this important issue.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.