

OFFICE OF POLICY AND LEGAL ANALYSIS

Date: April 20, 2021

To: Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

From: Samuel Senft, Legislative Analyst

LD 651 “An Act To Stabilize Student Count in Maine’s School Funding Formula” (Millett)

SUMMARY

This bill requires the Department of Education to use a 3-year average for pupil counts when a school administrative unit experiences a decrease of 10% or more of total school administrative unit student enrollment in a single year.

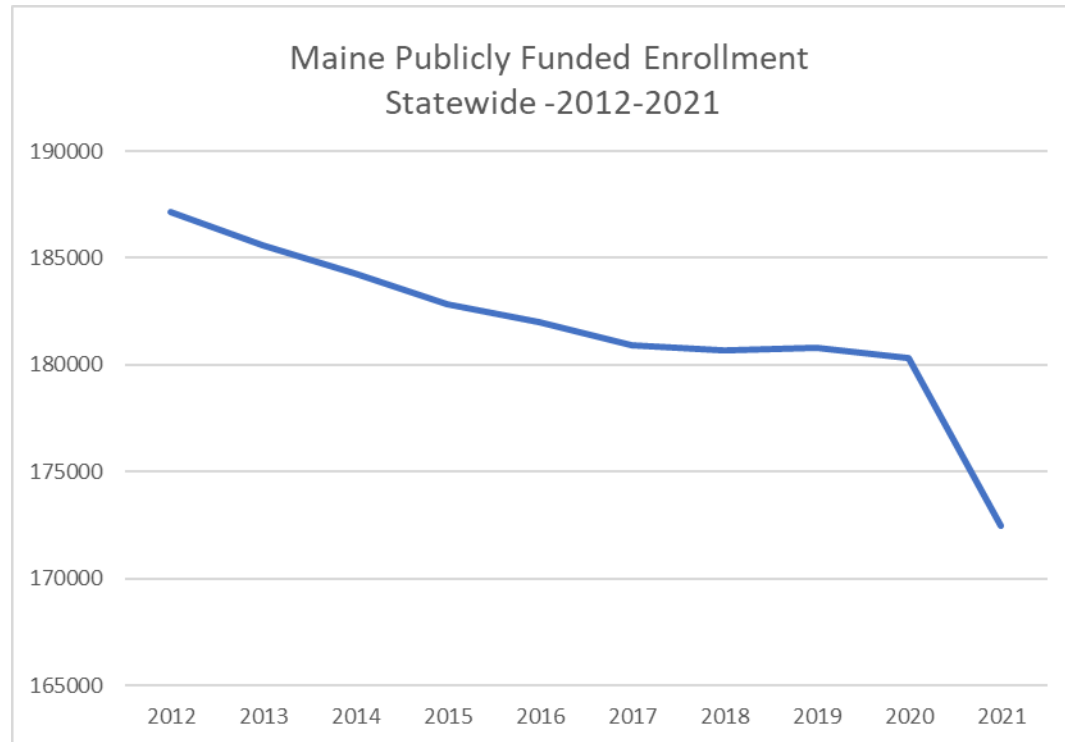
TESTIMONY

Proponents: Representative Millet (sponsor); Stephen Bailey, MSBA, MSSA; Dr. Holly Couturier, MPA; John Kosinski, MPA <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The administration has just recently instituted a one-year change for the 21/22 school year in the pupil to teacher ratio from 17:1 to 16:1 for elementary schools as the way to mitigate the negative impact on schools’ cost of education calculations and funding levels.• Bill protects school districts and taxpayers from a decrease in state aid due to a drop in enrollment counts.• Drop in enrollment does not correspond with fewer staff needs or fewer course offerings.• Even pre COVID, there were student enrollment decreases throughout the state. Can dramatically impact funding.• Schools are concerned about impact that further decreased enrollment due to COVIDI could have on future school funding.• We can expect volatility in student counts for the foreseeable future. A consistent approach is needed.• The current “sudden and severe” language addresses dramatic property tax increases or decreases.
Opponents: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• none
Neither For Nor Against <ul style="list-style-type: none">• none
Information Only: Joanna Allen, DOE <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Department supports amendment to bill that would require the Department of Education to use a 3-year average for attending pupil counts, if that average is greater than the current 2-year average, when a school administrative unit experiences a decrease of 10% or more of total school administrative unit attending student enrollment in the most recent year.

INFORMATION REQUESTS:

- 1) It was asked how many fewer students are enrolled in Maine public schools than were enrolled prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic

Enrollment statewide has decreased from 187,145 students in 2012 to 172,474 in 2021.



SOURCE:¹ (Data derived from DOE website; chart created by analyst)

Publicly Funded Enrollment By County – Percent Change

County	2012 - 2020	2020-2021
Androscoggin	.14%	-5.33%
Aroostook	-11.03%	-3.43%
Cumberland	.58%	-2.96%
Franklin	2.40%	-6.45%
Hancock	-.38%	-5.81%
Kennebec	-3.03%	-4.84%
Knox	-2.33%	-4.36%
Lincoln	-3.83%	-3.31%
Oxford	-3.69%	-4.73%
Penobscot	-5.39%	-4.80%
Piscataquis	-9.34%	-5.43%
Sagadahoc	-8.74%	-2.96%
Somerset	-11.43%	-5.87%
Waldo	-9.95%	-7.05%
Washington	-1.91%	-5.92%
York	-4.98%	-3.92%

SOURCE:² (Data derived from DOE website; calculations are by the analyst)

¹ State of Maine. Student Enrollment Data. Available online at <https://www.maine.gov/doe/data-reporting/reporting/warehouse/enrollment>.

² State of Maine. Student Enrollment Data. Available online at <https://www.maine.gov/doe/data-reporting/reporting/warehouse/enrollment>.

Detailed school enrollment data can be found [here](#).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- The bill can be found [here](#).
- The current [Section 15674](#) is below:

§15674. Pupil counts

1. Pupil counts used for determination of operating costs. In addition to the additional weighted counts authorized under section 15675 and except as provided in subsection 2, the pupil count used for operating costs in this Act is the sum of:

- A. The average number of secondary school-age persons enrolled in an adult education course counted during the most recent calendar year counted pursuant to section 8605, subsection 2;
- B. The average number of students in equivalent instruction programs during the most recent calendar year, as reported pursuant to section 5021, subsection 8; and
- C. Beginning in fiscal year 2018-19:
 - (1) The average of the pupil counts for October 1st of the 2 most recent calendar years prior to the year of funding, reported in accordance with section 6004, including the counts of students enrolled in an alternative education program made in accordance with section 5104-A.

2. Exception. Notwithstanding subsection 1, paragraph C, the pupil count identified in subsection 1, paragraph C, subparagraph (1) must be used for:

- A. Elementary school level and middle school level students for school administrative units that send all their elementary school level and middle school level students as tuition students to schools elsewhere in the State;
- B. High school level students for school administrative units that send all their high school level students as tuition students to schools elsewhere in the State; and
- C. School level students for school administrative units that send all their school level students to schools elsewhere in the State.

3. Pupil count for public preschool programs. Beginning with funding for the 2015-2016 school year, the pupil count for students 4 years of age and students 5 years of age attending public preschool programs must be based on the most recent October 1st count prior to the year of funding.

- Representative Millet proposed the following amendment, which is supported by the Department:

An Act To Stabilize Attending Student Count in Maine's School Funding Formula

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. 20-A MRSA §15674, sub-§1, as amended by PL 2017, c. 284, Pt. C, §29, is further amended to read:

D. Beginning in fiscal year 2022-23:

(1) The average of the attending pupil counts for October 1st of the 2 most recent calendar years prior to the year of funding, reported in accordance with section 6004, including the counts of students enrolled in an alternative education program made in accordance with 5104-A, except that if a school administrative unit experiences a decline in total attending school administrative unit student enrollment of 10% or more in the most recent year, the pupil counts for October 1st of the 3 most recent calendar years prior to the year of funding will be used unless that count is less than the average of the 2 most recent calendar years.

SUMMARY

This bill requires the Department of Education to use a 3-year average for attending pupil counts, if that average is greater than the current 2-year average, when a school administrative unit experiences a decrease of 10% or more of total school administrative unit attending student enrollment in the most recent year.

- See also the bill analysis for LD 1207.

FISCAL IMPACT: Not yet determined.