



Maine Education Association

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Testimony
Neither for Nor Against
LD 1642: An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools
Before the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
January 09, 2024

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and other esteemed members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Mallory Cook (pronouns she/her/hers), and I am the Director of Training and Early Educator Engagement at the Maine Education Association and a certified English teacher and Building Administrator. On behalf of MEA, I am writing to provide testimony neither for nor against LD 1642: An Act to Strengthen the Teaching of Wabanaki Studies in Maine Schools.

While the teaching of Wabanaki studies is required pursuant to MRSA §4706, MEA recognizes that not all schools are adequately prepared to accomplish this. Even if a school has a curriculum that embeds Wabanaki studies, they may hire educators who do not have the background to adequately implement the lessons. Section 2 of LD 1642 seeks to create a commission of multiple stakeholders who will engage in work that will better inform districts, the department, and educator preparatory programs around ways in which they can meet the requirements around Wabanaki education in §4706. This is a step in the right direction to ensure our educators are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to teach Wabanaki studies.

Section 5 of the bill aims to create a new section in 4706, which separates Wabanaki Studies from Maine studies. Within that change, language has been added that states “Wabanaki Studies may include English, language arts, mathematics, and science in accordance with this subsection.” The current language in Section 4 of 4706 states that, like African American and Genocide studies, “Wabanaki studies must be included in the review of content standards and performance indicators of the learning results”. We believe the content areas added under section 5 to already be a part of the review; therefore, we do not believe they need to be made explicit.

Section 5 also requires the department to study implementation of Wabanaki curricula in a representative sample and report its findings every five years. While this would be valuable, the MEA would like to propose an alternative strategy that would empower districts to complete their own curricular audits, leading to meaningful, local strategic planning. This would also widen the scope of the audit, ensuring that our curriculum is representative of all people within our state. We propose that the department, along with other education organizations, work to create or adopt a curriculum audit process or structure, create a plan for implementation, which would include training district leaders, educators, and other stakeholders, and aiding districts as they engage in this work. A meaningful audit takes time and planning; therefore, adopting a cycle that mimics an accreditation process (10 years) would give districts the time they need to complete an audit and subsequent planning with fidelity.

35 Community Drive, Augusta, ME 04330 | 1349 Broadway, Bangor, ME 04401
7 Hatch Drive, Suite 220, Caribou, ME 04736 | 29 Christopher Toppi Drive, South Portland ME 04106

207-622-5866 | 207-888-2070 fax | www.maineea.org

It is likely Wabanaki studies will emerge as a gap for many schools in the state. The teacher institute proposed in this bill, along with the work of higher education institutions, like UMaine's Dawnland Micro-Credential, will aid our educators in developing their knowledge and skills. Along with recommendations from the commission, districts will be equipped to fill the gaps that exist and have a better awareness of the resources that are available to them.

Following the 131st regular session, MEPRI's 2024 workplan identifies preparing a summary of state policies related to school schedules and report on best practices and successful strategies. Many bills were funneled into this study, including those focused on start time, lunch time, and recess, but there were other bills around specific content and course mandates like hunter and bicycle safety. In addition to this bill, LD 2001: *An Act to Establish the African American Studies Advisory Council and Require Funding for African American Studies* will have implications on the school day and instruction. We are hopeful that from this summary, we might be able to glean best practices for meeting what is required in §4706, while also meeting all other curricular requirements.

Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.