



RAISE THE PAY FOR MAINE'S EDUCATORS:

A SOLUTION TO OUR STAFFING SHORTAGE

2024 REPORT

www.mainea.org

INTRODUCTION

Across Maine, students are attending schools facing significant staffing shortages. Teachers, Ed Techs, bus drivers and many other critical roles in our public schools are going unfilled in large part due to the insufficient salaries and wages offered to public school employees.

Maine is not unlike other states. Across the country, public schools are struggling to recruit and retain high-quality educators. The challenging working conditions and low pay have caused many teachers and others to exit the professions earlier than they anticipated for higher-paying jobs in other fields. And with hundreds of teachers in Maine approaching retirement ages of 60, 62 and 65, we can expect the number seeking retirement will increase in the coming years.

If Maine is going to buck this trend, we must raise salaries for teachers and other certified professionals in our public schools and we must raise the hourly rate for Ed Techs and other key school personnel. Numerous studies and anecdotal evidence from educators underscore the key role compensation plays in recruiting and retaining educators. Yet, despite our best efforts, collective bargaining has been insufficient to raise salaries and wages to meet the inflationary pressures in the Maine and US economy, evidenced by the increasing teacher pay gap in Maine and around the country.



This year the Legislature and the Governor will have the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to stemming the shortages in our public schools by passing measures to raise the minimum teacher salary and raise the minimum wage for all hourly school staff. By raising wages for hourly staff and lifting salaries for teachers, we have a better chance of filling the growing list of vacancies in our school with qualified and well-trained staff. Our students deserve nothing less.

The Problem: *Shortages of School Support Staff and the Impact*

When our schools struggle to hire staff, students and educators pay the price.

To the right are the permitted responsibilities of Ed Techs per The Maine Department of Education and state rule and statute. While there are few Ed Tech Is in Maine's schools, there are thousands of Ed Tech IIs and Ed Tech IIIs, and these roles provide critical functions for students. For example, while Ed Tech Is can "provide classroom management functions," Ed Techs IIs can do all of the functions of an Ed Tech I, but can also "introduce new learning" to students – a key function in student success and development. Ed Tech IIIs can do all the functions of Ed Tech Is and IIs, but can also "supervise small groups of students." Ed Techs are critical to the success of students and yet are too often undervalued and unappreciated in our public education system.



Permitted Responsibilities of Ed Techs in Maine:

Ed Tech 1:

- i. Review and reinforce learning previously introduced by the classroom teacher or appropriate content specialist, or assist in drill or practice activities;
- ii. Perform non-instructional, non-evaluative functions;
- iii. Assist in the preparation of instructional materials; and
- iv. Provide classroom management functions.

Ed Tech 2:

- i. Perform all of the duties of an Educational Technician I; and
- ii. Introduce new learning preplanned in collaboration with the classroom teacher or appropriate content specialist.

Ed Tech 3:

- i. Perform all of the duties of an Educational Technician I or II;
- ii. Introduce new learning preplanned in consultation with the classroom teacher or appropriate content specialist; and
- iii. Supervise small groups of students in community-based programs.

Last school year (2022/2023) , Portland’s public schools contemplated offering certain special education services four days per week due to the Ed Tech shortages in that district¹. In September of 2022, the Editorial Board of the Portland Press Herald called the Ed Tech shortage an “emergency,” claiming “Our public schools have already had to sound the alarm way too many times.”²

And the shortage of Ed Techs has only increased since the Press Herald’s emergency declaration. MSAD 52 (Turner) Superintendent Cari Medd told WMTW her district started the current school year with 17 open Ed Tech positions.³ RSU 13 in the Rockland area had to close their middle school for a day due to the lack of substitutes and Ed Techs. Ed Techs have been regularly covering classes when teachers are absent, but they were forced to close for a day because they did not have the staff they needed to operate the school.⁴

While there is no statewide tracking of open positions in schools, staff at the MEA (Maine Education Association) scoured the Serving Schools website (www.servingschools.com) in the lead up to the current school year to better understand the Ed Tech shortages. Serving Schools is a central resource for school districts to post positions and the key website for educators seeking employment in schools. The MEA was regularly monitoring openings and below is a snapshot of the open Ed Tech positions from August 29, 2023.

OPEN POSITIONS 8/29/2023 - * STARTING WAGE FOR ED TECH'S 2022-23 CONTRACT YEAR				
DISTRICT	NUMBER OF OPEN ED TECH POSITIONS ON SERVINGSCHOOLS.COM	STARTING WAGE ED TECH I	STARTING WAGE ED TECH II	STARTING WAGE ED TECH III
Lewiston	63	\$16.40	\$17.57	\$18.11
Bangor	19	\$18.73	\$18.73	\$19.56
Portland	21	\$16.20	\$17.27	\$18.94
RSU 17 - Oxford Hills	16	N/A	\$16.64	\$17.25
SAD 75 - Topsham area	17	\$19.16	\$20.93	\$21.34
RSU 9 - Farmington	12	\$14.92	\$15.89	\$19.99

Ed Techs are widely employed in our public schools. In fact, according to the Maine Department of Education’s NEO Data Warehouse, over 8,000 Ed Techs are working in our public schools.

Ed Tech Breakdown Statewide

Ed. Tech I/ Ed Tech I Library/Media

1,595

Ed. Tech II/ Ed Tech II Library/Media

1,394

Ed. Tech III/ Ed Tech III Library/Media

1,595

Source: Ed Techs in Maine's Public Schools According to Maine Dept. of Education, NEO Data Warehouse

While Ed Tech IIs and IIIs are in the Maine Public Employees Retirement System (MainePERS), Ed Tech Is are not in MainePERS but are in the Social Security System.

Data provided by MainePERS illustrates one issue contributing to the shortages of Ed Techs. We have seen a dramatic uptick in the number of Ed Techs quitting over the past few years. For example, in the 2015-2016 school year, 237 Ed Tech IIs and IIIs quit their jobs – not retired, but quit. In the 2016-2017 school year, 274 Ed Techs left the profession. But since the COVID pandemic, the number of Ed Techs quitting has skyrocketed. In the 2020-2021 school year, 436 Ed Techs quit. In the 2021-2022 school year, 505 Ed Techs quit. And in the most recent school year, 2022-2023, 474 Ed Techs quit and left their jobs. The dramatic uptick in the number of Ed Techs quitting and leaving work in public schools highlights the challenges districts have in finding suitable, qualified candidates for these roles.

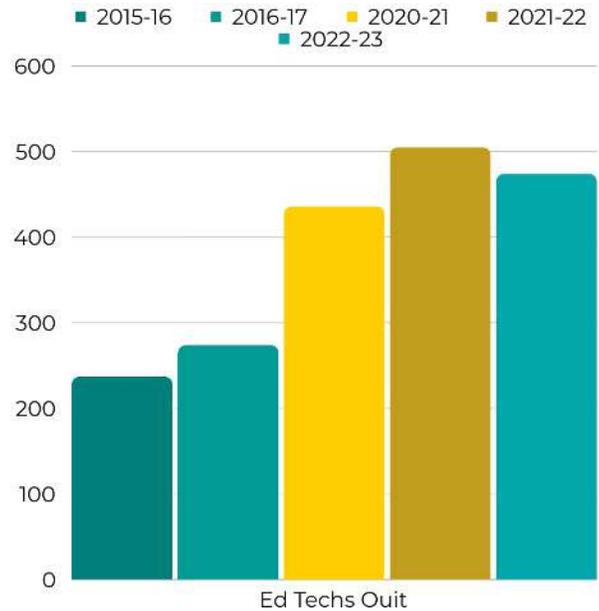
But it is not just Ed Tech shortages impacting schools.

Bus drivers are also in short supply and high demand. In October of 2023, the Portland Press Herald wrote about the bus driver shortages plaguing the Westbrook schools. The district is down 1/3 from full staffing and some bus drivers are concerned the situation is dangerous and unsafe:

"Like school districts across Maine and the nation, Westbrook has been short bus drivers for years. Recruiting and retaining school bus drivers has long been challenging due to low pay, irregular hours and licensing requirements. The pandemic intensified the issue.

School districts around the state are struggling to hire drivers and experiencing some of the same issues as Westbrook. The situation is severe enough that some districts have been unable to transport athletes to away games, or canceled bus routes to and from school and left students and their families to figure out transportation."⁵

Number of Ed Techs Quit



In January of 2019, Nickerson Elementary school was forced to cancel classes due to a severe shortage of drivers.⁶ In March of 2023, parents in Washington County reported that the bus routes for their children were cancelled for nearly a month, leaving them to drive the students themselves, and creating concerns about equity of opportunity for students.⁷ But it is not just rural Maine struggling to find drivers for school buses. In April of 2023, RSU 21 in Kennebunk was forced to collapse routes and cancel bus runs due to the severe shortages. In fact, on one Friday, the district was unable to drive students to their career and technical education school in Sanford – only 7 of the 25 students from RSU 21 were able to make it to their classes on that day.⁸ The problem is widespread and statewide.



It is important to remember that many hourly workers are only paid for 175 days per year, and nearly all hourly school employees must seek second jobs during the summer to earn money when they are not working in schools. Some Ed Techs report competing with their own students for summer work at restaurants or in retail jobs. This annual job search complicates the ability for hourly school employees to meet their basic needs.

And the low wages offered to school employees continue to complicate the ability for schools to entice individuals to consider working in these critical roles. For example, according to the Target website, a fulfillment operator at Target in Topsham can expect a starting wage of \$21.50-\$36.55 per hour-- far more than the starting pay for Ed Techs in most school districts. Local fast-food restaurants in the area are looking for staff and are offering hourly wages of \$18 or \$20 to start, depending on shifts and roles, and some are even offering sign-on bonuses to get employees in the door. The stability of these roles and the promise of yearlong employment with potentially higher pay is a contributor to the shortages we are seeing among hourly school support staff.

Hourly Pay Scale

\$21.50-\$36.55

Fulfillment operator at Target in Topsham, ME

Starting Pay Scale

\$18-\$20

Local fast-food restaurants in Topsham area

An analysis of wages among support staff shows the need for immediate action. As of September 2023, 26 school districts have a beginning wage scale for school support staff less than \$14.15 per hour – the new state minimum wage beginning January 1, 2024. In fact, 22 districts in the state have a starting Ed Tech wage of less than \$14.15 per hour. Districts in Dexter and Newport both have starting wages for Ed Tech IIs less than the state-required \$14.15 per hour. Custodians also play a key role in schools by keeping them clean, tidy, and safe, yet several districts have a starting wage of less than \$14.15 per hour, including districts in Milford, Windsor, Newport and Orono.

Put simply, if we are serious about attracting and retaining high-quality staff in all the critical jobs in our schools, we must raise wages for hourly school support staff.

The Problem: *Shortages of Teachers and the Impact*

While schools struggle to find hourly workers for critical roles in our schools, many districts are also struggling to find certified teachers to work in our public schools.

According to data from the Maine Department of Education from September of 2023, there are 25,657 professionally certified teachers in Maine. However, only 18,744 are currently working in our schools.⁹ This means nearly 7,000 individuals are currently certified to teach in Maine but are choosing to work in other settings, other professions, or teach in other states, rather than working in our schools helping students learn, grow, and thrive.

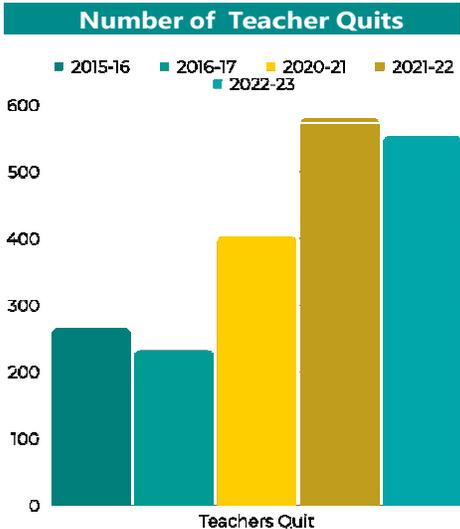
The shortage of teachers is at least partially due to the high turnover of teaching staff that we have seen since the COVID pandemic. Again, data from MainePERS shows that teachers are leaving and quitting their jobs for work outside of schools. For example, in the 2015-2016 school year, 265 teachers quit their jobs and left teaching. In 2016-2017, 232 teachers quit their jobs. But in the 2020-2021 the number of teachers quitting nearly doubled to 403. A whopping 580 teachers quit in the 2021-2022 school year, and 533 left the profession in the most recent 2022-2023 school year. The MEA has consistently heard from teachers that the low pay, stress of the job and challenging working conditions have led some to find other work.

It is important to note that the state is not seeing a sudden uptick in retirements from teachers. In reviewing the past 8 years of retirement data of teachers in MainePERS, we see a low of 821 teachers retiring in 2021 to a high of 927 teachers retiring in 2022. While this represents a modest increase in retirements, there is no apparent trend of teacher retirements since the COVID pandemic.

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Annual Classroom Teacher Retirements

The number of teachers leaving their jobs and retiring has left districts with major gaps to fill.

Yet, at the same time this is occurring we are seeing a dramatic decline in the number of students enrolling in teacher prep programs at our universities. Typically, new teachers complete a 4-year degree program to prepare them for the classroom. Universities such as the University of Maine-Farmington have a long legacy of training new teachers in pedagogy, classroom management, content knowledge, and the tools they will need to be successful in a classroom. According to Ed Week, the number of undergraduate students enrolling in a teacher prep program in Maine has declined by 32.4% between 2008-2009 and 2020-2021.¹⁰

According to the Maine Department of Education, the decline in completion in teacher preparation programs is even more severe. The Maine Department of Education contends, "since 2010, the number of teachers completing Educator Preparation programs in Maine has dropped by 53%--this is the third largest decline in the nation with Oklahoma and Michigan experiencing a 54% decline."¹¹

A recent study from the Maine Education Policy Research Institute connects the low pay for teachers to the dearth of students entering our teacher prep programs. In "Factors Driving Undergraduate Students' Choice of a College Major and Perceptions about Teaching as a Career Choice" written by Janet Fairman and Patricia Leach and released in April of 2023, the authors surveyed undergraduate students and here are some of the key findings:

"On one survey item, respondents were asked to choose up to three perceived drawbacks to teaching as a career from a list of different factors. Pay was overwhelming chosen by most respondents (81%, n=444). No other drawback was selected by more than 40% of the respondents."

Year	Annual Classroom Teacher Retirements
2015	880
2016	844
2017	842
2018	880
2019	916
2020	843
2021	821
2022	927

Since 2010

Decline 53%

Number of teachers completing Educator Preparation programs in Maine

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“There was agreement among respondents (88%, n=491) that a starting salary for teachers of \$40,000 was too low. Over half of the respondents (54%, n=299) felt \$40,000 was “far too little” for a first year teacher’s salary in Maine.”¹²

Teaching is competing with other professions, and according to the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), the teacher pay gap has only increased in recent years.¹³ In September of 2023, EPI wrote, “Teacher pay has suffered a sharp decline compared with the pay of other college-educated workers. On average, teachers made 26.4% less than other similarly educated professionals in 2022—the lowest level since 1960.” EPI went on to state, “recent high inflation has significantly reduced the average weekly wages of teachers but has had less of an effect on other college graduates” and “the benefits advantage for teachers has not been enough to offset the growing wage penalty.”¹⁴ In Maine, EPI calculated the teacher pay gap to be 23% -- meaning teachers can expect other college graduates to make almost a quarter more than they do. Is it any wonder why we are struggling to compete for students in our teacher preparation programs?

In the wake of these challenges, the state has responded in several ways.

First, the state has improved forgivable loans for undergraduates pursuing a degree in teaching. The Educators for Maine program provides \$5,000 per year for eligible students, although funding may be reduced if state appropriations for the program are not sufficient to address the need. Students must be pursuing teaching as a career and two years of loans are forgiven for each year the individual spends teaching in underserved schools or in underserved subjects.¹⁵ Despite these efforts, we have seen no discernible increase in enrollment in teacher prep programs in the state.

Second, realizing the challenges presented by the shortages articulated above and the lack of an adequate pipeline to replace teachers leaving the classroom, the state also modified teacher certification requirements to address possible barriers that prevent more individuals from entering the profession. For example, in 2021 the Legislature passed, and the Governor signed into law, LD 1189, An Act to Amend the Teacher Certification Statutes. This bill made several changes to teacher certification laws and rules, including the adoption of an emergency teacher certificate that allows someone to receive emergency certification to work as a teacher in a Maine public school if they have met one of the following criteria:

1. Emergency teacher certificate. The commissioner may issue an emergency teacher certificate under this section to an applicant who has submitted to a criminal history background check and who:
 - A. Holds a 4-year postsecondary degree or the equivalent in work or academic experience;
 - B. Is enrolled in an approved educator preparation program; or
 - C. Holds a certification as an education technician III issued according to rules of the department pursuant to section 13019-H

These new emergency certificates are open to students who may have a 4-year degree but may not have experience in classroom management, basic pedagogy, among other skills and experiences that contribute to effective teaching. Furthermore, the emergency certificate is available to Ed Tech IIIs although Ed Tech IIIs are not required to have a bachelor's degree, only 90 credit hours of coursework. What is more, the new emergency certificate program allows individuals to substitute work experience instead of an undergraduate degree to qualify for certification.

A May 2023 study by the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI), "Maine Principals 'Views on Emergency-Certified Teachers'" contends that 43% of schools in Maine have hired at least one emergency certified teacher.¹⁶ As of February of 2023, the state had issued 404 emergency teacher certificates and 55% of those certificates were for special education teachers.¹⁷ In a survey of principals as part of the MEPRI study, "Half of the principals felt their emergency-certified teachers were performing lower than traditional



teachers (39% said somewhat lower, 11% said much lower) ..."¹⁸ In the survey, principals identify a list of weaknesses with many of the emergency certified teachers, including the following:

- **Classroom management**
- **Managing difficult student behavior**
- **Using appropriate instructional strategies**
- **Lesson planning**
- **Student assessment**
- **Communication with families**
- **Creating appropriate learning environment**
- **Engaging students in learning**
- **Managing the workload, pace and stress of the job**

Since February 2023

404

emergency teacher certificates had been issued by the state of Maine.

While more research may be needed, the data before us could not be clearer. Emergency certified teachers are struggling and need more help and support if they are going to become successful teachers. Prior to the changes in certification in 2021, many of these individuals would not have qualified for certification. It is not surprising to learn that many of these individuals are struggling with the subjects covered in undergraduate teacher preparation programs such as classroom management, managing difficult student behaviors, and appropriate instructional strategies.

While these changes have been impactful, they have been insufficient given the challenges we are seeing in recruiting and retaining high quality staff in public schools.

For example, if the \$30,000 minimum salary adopted in 2007 had been tied to inflation, the current minimum salary for a teacher in Maine today would be \$43,767 – instead of the current \$40,000.

Year	Annual CPI	\$30K Minimum Salary Adjusted for Inflation	Minimum Teacher Salary in Maine	Difference
2008	0.038	\$31,140	\$30,000	\$1,140
2009	-0.004	\$31,015.44	\$30,000	\$1,015
2010	0.016	\$31,511.69	\$30,000	\$1,512
2011	0.032	\$32,520.06	\$30,000	\$2,520
2012	0.021	\$33,202.98	\$30,000	\$3,203
2013	0.015	\$33,701.03	\$30,000	\$3,701
2014	0.016	\$34,240.24	\$30,000	\$4,240
2015	0.001	\$34,274.48	\$30,000	\$4,274
2016	0.013	\$34,720.05	\$30,000	\$4,720
2017	0.021	\$35,449.17	\$30,000	\$5,449
2018	0.024	\$36,229.95	\$30,000	\$6,300
2019	0.018	\$36,953.35	\$30,000	\$6,953
2020	0.012	\$37,396.79	\$35,000	\$2,397
2021	0.047	\$39,154.44	\$37,500	\$1,654
2022	0.08	\$42,286.80	\$40,000	\$2,287
2023*	0.035	\$43,766.84	\$40,000	\$3,767

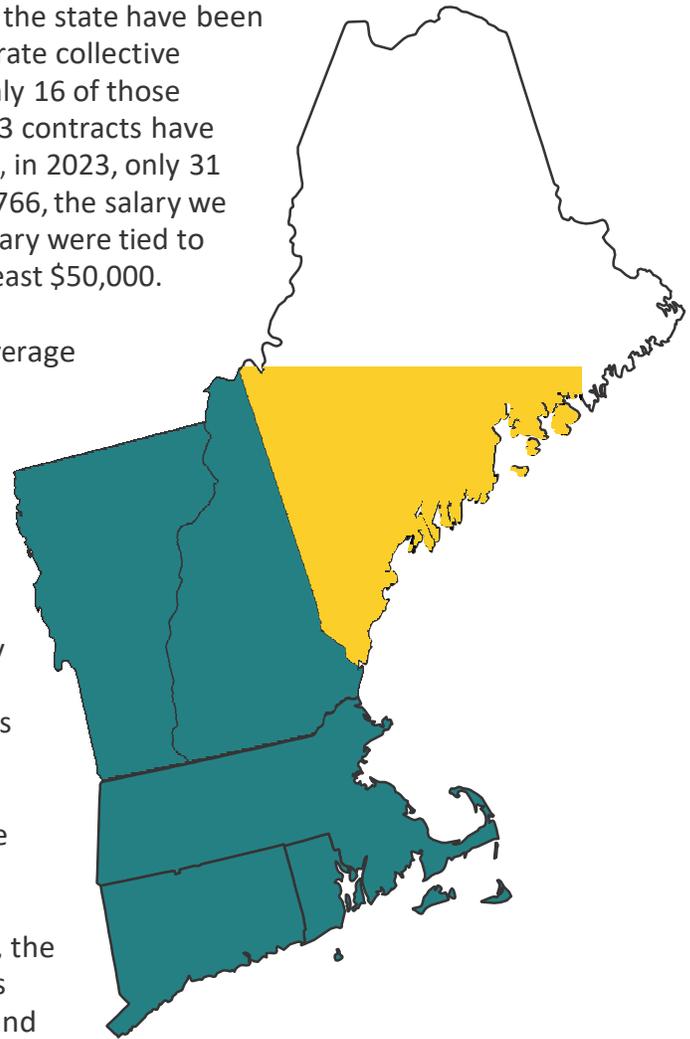
*Estimate based on 2023 data

The increases in the minimum teacher salary required by the state have been effective at lifting teacher salaries. The MEA has 183 separate collective bargaining agreements covering teachers and in 2019 only 16 of those contracts had a beginning salary of \$40,000. Today, all 183 contracts have a starting salary of at least \$40,000. While that is progress, in 2023, only 31 contracts currently have an entry-level salary above \$43,766, the salary we could have expected if the original \$30,000 minimum salary were tied to inflation. Only 3 contracts have a beginning salary of at least \$50,000.

Maine continues to lag behind other states in terms of average annual starting teacher salary. According to the National Education Association, the largest union of teachers in the country, the average starting teacher salary in the United States is \$42,844, according to data from 2021-2022, the last year data was available. However, the average starting salary in Maine is only \$39,101. Only thirteen states had a lower average starting salary than Maine. (It is important to note, that while Maine currently has a minimum teacher salary of \$40,000, for the 21-22 school year the minimum required salary for teachers was \$37,500.)

And Maine lags every other state in New England and the northeast in terms of average starting salary for teachers.

While Maine has made progress in lifting teacher salaries, the shortages we are seeing lead us to believe the progress is insufficient to meet the needs of Maine’s public schools and the students we serve.



State	Average Starting Teacher Salary 2021-2022
Maine	\$39,101
New Hampshire	\$40,272
Vermont	\$41,587
USA	\$42,845
Rhode Island	\$45,337
Pennsylvania	\$47,827
New York	\$47,981
Connecticut	\$48,007
Maryland	\$49,451
Massachusetts	\$49,451
New Jersey	\$55,143

Source, National Education Association Teacher Benchmark Reports



Maine Avg. Starting Salary

\$39,101

Only thirteen states had a lower average starting salary than Maine.

There is no central database tracking vacancies in our public schools but over the summer MEA staff scoured the servingschools.com job-posting website to understand the unfilled and open positions in our schools. We looked at a random sample of districts around the state and found some districts were struggling to find the staff they needed to operate. For example, according to servingschools.com, on September 11, 2023, Lewiston public schools had 84 teaching/professional positions posted on the site. Other smaller districts such as RSU 17 Oxford Hills had 36 postings on the site and RSU 49 in Fairfield had 7 open positions.

We are deeply concerned that when districts are unable to fill these positions schools are left with a multiple choice of bad options. They can increase class sizes, thus leaving students with less one-on-one time with teachers and leaving teachers less time to communicate with parents. They can hire emergency certified staff who may not have the background and experience to be prepared to succeed in the classroom. Or they can eliminate programs and offerings to students or revert to online courses, as some have chosen to do to provide foreign language courses to students.

The current situation also raises major concerns regarding equity for our state’s students. Dr. Flynn Ross of the University of Southern Maine highlights the use of emergency certified teachers specifically in schools with high concentrations of poverty in her study, “Assessing Teacher Turnover: Distribution of Inexperienced Teachers and Emergency-Certified Teachers in Maine Schools” published by the Maine Policy Review in 2023.¹⁹ Dr. Ross writes, “This study calls further attention to the need for policies and practices to help redress the inequities and encourage a more equitable distribution of experienced teachers across districts, rather than leaving it to market forces with higher pay in some districts that privilege more resourced communities.”²⁰ While the emergency certification process is new, the early analysis points to deep concerns about equity among students and access to high-quality teachers for all of our students.

District	Teaching Professional Positions	Starting Pay (Min \$40K)
Lewiston	84	\$40,000.00
Auburn	12	\$41,750.00
Bangor	9	\$42,765.00
Falmouth	0	\$45,433.00
Portland	10	\$43,617.00
SAD 6 - Bonny Eagle	4	\$41,130.00
RSU 17 - Oxford Hills	36	\$42,886.54
RSU 49	7	\$40,000.00
RSU 54	5	\$40,000.00
RSU 75	11	\$42,553.00
RSU 9	6	\$40,000.00
RSU 14	5	\$42,770.65
Biddeford	11	\$39,317.00
RSU 39	2	\$41,000.00

The Solution: *Raise Pay for Educators*

This year, the Legislature and the Governor will have the opportunity to address the shortages by lifting the minimum compensation for school support staff and teachers.

LD 974, An Act to Establish Minimum Pay for Educational Technicians and Other School Support Staff was carried over by the Legislature for consideration in 2024. The bill was originally passed unanimously by the Education Committee and proposed to lift the minimum wage to at least 150% of the state minimum wage for all school support staff and 200% for all Ed Techs. The bill was later amended due to concerns raised by some administrators and instead proposes to lift the minimum wage for all Ed Techs to 150% of the state's minimum wage and 125% of the state minimum wage for all other hourly school support staff. If this bill is enacted this year with immediate effect, the minimum wage for all school support staff would be \$17.81 and the minimum wage for Ed Techs would be \$21.23. We think this bill is critical to lift the wages for school support staff across the state and to better recruit and retain high-quality staff for these critical roles in our schools. The cost of this proposal according to the fiscal note is approximately \$7.75 million. The Legislature included in the supplemental budget \$80,000 to provide a better cost analysis of this proposal since we have no statewide database tracking the current wages of hourly support staff.

LD 1064, An Act to Increase the Minimum Teacher Salary was also carried over by the Legislature for consideration in 2024. The bill proposes to gradually lift the minimum teacher salary to \$50,000 over four years and is modeled off the approach used when the state lifted the minimum salary to \$40,000 in 2019. The bill proposes the state provide funding for districts to meet the new minimum salary. The fiscal note for the bill, as written, includes a cost of approximately \$3.5 million.

Both bills are necessary and critical to address the shortages we are seeing in public schools and to provide living wages for the people who work in our schools.

We look forward to working with legislators and the Governor in 2024 to pass both of these important bills that are critical to continuing to provide a strong system of public education in Maine for all students.

LD 1064

\$50,000

An Act to Increase the Minimum Teacher Salary gradually over four years.

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