GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION ON SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION

Report to

The Honorable Janet T. Mills, Governor of Maine

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

February 10, 2026

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Governor Mills, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, and Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs,

On behalf of the Governor's Commission on School Construction, I am pleased to deliver this report, which reflects a comprehensive review of school infrastructure issues accompanied by a plan of action.

We thank the Governor for her leadership in calling for this much-needed initiative. We also appreciate the efforts of Commissioner Pender Makin, who was instrumental both in creating and supporting the commission, and Commissioner Elaine Clark, who devoted considerable time and expertise to the effort.

The commission's composition—state agency leaders, superintendents, school business and municipal officials, school board members, and experts in financing and construction—contributed a wide range of perspectives, expertise, and experience. Over the past year, we examined issues and potential solutions closely. This included listening to local, state, and national experts—policy, financial, and technical—and to local stakeholders. We also examined reports and data from Maine, national sources, and other states.

We learned that Maine, like many states, is grappling with deteriorating school infrastructure and limited resources. The financial causes and implications of the issue are multi-faceted involving the age of buildings, deferred maintenance, cost of construction, property tax burden, and funding limitations. Beyond financial concerns, the deterioration of school buildings negatively affects the health and safety of students, teachers, and staff.

We also learned of the outstanding work by many organizations and individuals, including the Maine Department of Education, the Maine Municipal Bond Bank, local school boards, superintendents, municipal officials, and many others. Their experience, capacity, and dedication are integral to solving this complex and costly problem.

Progress requires a comprehensive plan that is strategic, interconnected, data-informed, measurable, and sustained. It must engage the many involved entities in new ways—state, regional, local, private and public—in developing strategies and solutions. It must anticipate, plan for, and adapt to new challenges and opportunities. Importantly, sustained focus on this long-term infrastructure issue must transcend state administrations.

The commission is grateful for the opportunity to examine this issue and to formulate a plan of action. We appreciate the efforts of all who contributed to this initiative and to the final report.

Sincerely,

Valerie Landry
Commission Chair

MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION

Valerie Landry
Chair

Jenny Boyden
former Associate Commissioner, Department of Administrative and Financial Services

Elaine Clark
Commissioner, Department of Administrative and Financial Services, former Director, Bureau of General Services

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Rhonda Sperrey
Superintendent, RSU 64 (Bradford, Corinth, Hudson, Kenduskeag, and Stetson)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Governor's Commission on School Construction accomplished its work with the help of many individuals and organizations, both in Maine and nationally. We first acknowledge Governor Janet T. Mills for creating the commission and her Senior Policy Advisor, Joseph Marro, who provided expertise and support throughout.

The commission is grateful to Maine Department of Education Commissioner Pender Makin for her role in creating the commission, supporting the process, and making available members of her team. This includes Scott Brown, Director of School Construction Programs, who provided a wealth of information, along with Chelsey Fortin-Trimble, Associate Commissioner; Paula Gravelle, Director of School Finance; Glenn Cummings, Director of Green Schools; Ann Pinette, School Facilities Manager; Laura Cyr, Federal and State Legislative Specialist; Erin Frazier, State Director of Special Services; and Chloe Teboe, Director of Communications.

The commission's work was off to a strong start with presentations from national experts Chris Duncombe (Education Commission of the States) and Mary Filardo (21st Century School Fund), who provided state comparisons and analysis. Joel Moore, also from the Education Commission of the States, was quick to respond to requests for information.

The commission benefited greatly from the responsiveness of Maine officials, including Commissioner of the Department of Economic and Community Development, Michael Duguay; Associate Commissioner for Tax Policy, Dr. Michael Allen; State Economist, Amanda Rector; Maine Department of Labor Deputy Director and Chief Economist, Glenn Mills; and Chief Procurement Officer, David Morris. The commission appreciated receiving information from University of Maine at Farmington President, Joseph McDonnell and Associate Dean, Erin Connor.

Practitioners from other states were generous with their time and expertise. They included Jason Washington, Associate Superintendent of Supporting Services, Prince George's County, Maryland, and Eric Berman, national consultant and former Deputy Comptroller, Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Janet Fairman, Amy Johnson, and Patricia Lech from the Maine Education Policy Research Institute were exceedingly helpful both in their written reports and quick response to many questions.

Too numerous to mention by name, many others contributed to this work. This includes superintendents who offered comments, individuals who faithfully attended commission meetings, state legislators, members of the State Board of Education, and others.

No project such as this can be successful without the people who pull all the pieces together. This includes the above-mentioned Chloe Teboe, whose quick, positive responsiveness made the workflow and communication possible among so many people. Rose Keller, Constituent Services Representative, Office of the Governor, provided timely and valuable assistance in formatting the final report. And much appreciation goes to Abigail Cram, who wore many hats—project management, research, writing, reviewing, and analysis—and did it all with great expertise, enthusiasm, and commitment to the purpose of the work.

And finally, thanks to members of the commission, who, in addition to their careful attention throughout the process, devoted considerable time to researching, drafting concepts, and editing and proofing the final report.

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SECTION ONE – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"Keep the important thing the important thing."

Rhonda Sperrey, Superintendent, RSU 64

Every child in Maine should be able to attend a safe, modern, efficient, and accessible public school, regardless of where they live. That is the first sentence of the Executive Order by Governor Janet T. Mills establishing the Governor's Commission on School Construction. (Appendix G1)

The commission's charge was to conduct a comprehensive review, leading to a well-informed, feasible plan to address current and future needs, including whether to establish a school building finance authority. Consistent with the Executive Order, the intent of this report is to set in motion a long-range plan leading to the above goal.

The commission was comprised of members from state, local, public, and private sector organizations. This diversity of perspective helped greatly in developing recommendations that are both strategic and practical.

As a commission, we sought to understand the issues fully before exploring potential solutions. We met with state and national experts and stakeholders. We reviewed reports, information, and data from Maine, other states, and national sources. Midway through the process in April 2025, we issued an Interim Summary which shared the commission's findings to that point.

Like many states, Maine is grappling with deteriorating school buildings due to aging infrastructure, deferred maintenance, and limited resources. A Maine Department of Education (MDOE) Facility Needs Analysis based on age, square footage, and corresponding replacement or renovation, identified a potential $11 billion cost to rectify these needs if renovation and replacement occurred today. (Appendix B1) Despite the statewide implications of the issue, currently, no statewide plan exists to address it. The commission credits Governor Mills for her leadership in taking an objective look at the problem and calling for such a plan.

Simply put, the existing approach is not equipped to address the size, scope, and complexity of this statewide issue—one that involves almost 600 schools in 272 districts across hundreds of municipalities, state and local funding, and a wide-array of partners and stakeholders. The issue crosses many governmental, professional, and community boundaries, including state and federal agencies, regional and local units of government, school districts, teachers, parents, community and economic development, banks, architects, engineers, contractors, lawyers, and more.

The need for change in *how* the state goes about planning, funding, and working closely with these entities is in no way a criticism of the efficacy of those involved in school construction—current or prior—in conducting the work with which they are charged. The problem is not the execution of existing statutes and regulations; it is the overall framework in which these entities operate.

Much will change in the years ahead—demographically, technologically, culturally, and financially. Any successful approach must anticipate and adapt to these changes. This reality underscores the imperative for ongoing, concerted, and consistent attention to this issue.

To make progress towards the goal, the commission identified four interconnected objectives:

1. Reduce cost.
2. Maximize existing resources.
3. Develop and diversify the revenue base.
4. Utilize data to best advantage.

These objectives and related strategies are offered *not* as a wish list or theoretical ideal, but rather as *achievable* steps to make systematic, measurable progress toward the goal. If they are considered optional, stand-alone ideas rather than an interconnected framework, the likelihood of this proposed plan having a substantial impact diminishes sharply.

Although the objectives and strategies will evolve on further review and over time, a comprehensive approach is fundamental to making progress.

> "The approach cannot be piecemeal."
>
> Elaine Clark, Department of Administrative and Financial Services

The Executive Order required the commission to determine whether to establish a school building finance authority, its potential role and responsibilities, and whether such a financing authority would benefit the state, school administrative units, and municipalities.

The commission unanimously concluded that a school building finance authority is *not* needed in Maine, due to the presence of high-quality financing resources, principally, the Maine Municipal Bond Bank.

Intergovernmental Office of School Infrastructure (IOSI)

Although a school building finance authority is not recommended, eleven of the thirteen members identified the need for a small, quasi-independent entity for the following reasons:

- This statewide infrastructure issue involves all units of government and other entities—federal, state, regional, local, public, and private.
- It requires high-level leadership that transcends administrations to sustain measurable progress and to engage all partners in solving the problem.
- No existing entity is positioned to tackle the above objectives fully, even with additional resources.

Two members of the commission expressed opposition to a new entity, preferring that any funds be devoted to additional staff at the MDOE Office of School Facilities (such as for administrative and construction support) and to support continued updates as needed to structures and processes (e.g., Rule, Chapter 61).

The proposed entity would be governed by an intergovernmental board (state, county/regional, and local) in close partnership with existing entities such as MDOE, the Maine Municipal Bond Bank, State Board of Education, Bureau of General Services, and other partners.

This entity, herein tentatively proposed to be titled the Intergovernmental Office of School Infrastructure (IOSI) would provide statewide leadership to engage all partners towards achieving the goal of all students having access to safe, sound, and accessible schools. It would continuously seek ways to reduce cost, maximize resources, and make critical information accessible, while working to develop financial resources beyond the General Fund and property taxes.

The future is certain if comprehensive action is not taken. The problem will become worse. For districts unable to fund repairs or renovation, the health and safety of students, teachers, and staff may be compromised by poor air quality, mold, and extreme temperatures.

> "We need to focus on this issue with autonomy and consistency."
>
> Jane McCall, Superintendent, RSU 39

We can do better—but only if we approach this statewide issue differently.

In Maine, we can engage all partners in ways other states with higher populations, even larger geography, and more layers of governance, might have difficulty achieving. Our connectivity, size, and configuration can work to our advantage in implementing this new approach—if we capitalize on it.

Now is the time to begin to turn this tide and establish a more predictable and sustainable future for all Maine schools and the thousands of students, teachers, staff, families, and communities who rely on them now and in the future.

To maintain momentum, the commission recommends establishing a short-term Working Group to develop the steps needed to create the proposed quasi-independent Intergovernmental Office of School Infrastructure (IOSI), including statutory language, positions, and funding for consideration by decision makers. The IOSI, in collaboration with involved entities, would be responsible for developing an implementation plan for the recommendations described in this report.

SECTION TWO – COMMISSION METHODOLOGY

> "We want to bring in voices not always heard."
>
> Pender Makin, Commissioner Maine Department of Education

The Executive Order required the commission to identify school construction and renovation needs by collecting stakeholder input and reviewing reports, data, and materials, including how other states fund public school facilities. (Appendix G)

The commission held approximately 50 briefings, meetings, and discussions with state and national experts in school infrastructure and related fields, and stakeholders. Commission meetings were open to all. Time permitting, all attendees were offered the opportunity to comment and also invited to submit feedback outside the meetings.

Early in the process, subcommittees led by subject matter experts were established to provide technical, financial, and policy information. Small group meetings also were held with subject experts to gain a deeper understanding of issues and potential strategies. In many of these discussions, the commission benefited from information provided by MDOE and other key partners.

Regular commission meetings were posted on the MDOE website along with meeting summaries and materials. An Interim Summary was issued in April 2025.

Commission members visited schools in various parts of the state. Approximately 40 superintendents attended a special meeting by Zoom to share observations and suggestions.

Reports, data, and analysis were reviewed from both state and national sources. Of particular value to the commission were recent reports from the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI), which provided

comprehensive information on the issue of school infrastructure, including history, funding, and condition of schools. Noteworthy also is the report from the 1998 Governor's School Facilities Commission, established by Governor Angus S. King and chaired by James E. Rier. The many reports—both old and new—conveyed consistent themes.

An extensive list of sources and references, presentations, and reports can be found in the Appendix. This compilation, organized by subject, is intended as a resource for all who are interested in this topic.

Through the process, commission members were attentive, patient, and deliberate in identifying strategies—both strategic and practical—that addressed specific problems, and which form the basis of this report.

SECTION THREE – CURRENT STATE

> "The age and condition of the nation's public schools are an expanding crisis. Decades of neglect, unfunded maintenance programs, constrained state and municipal budgets, shifting populations, technology requirements, and programmatic changes have combined to weaken the infrastructure of public education . . . Regrettably, Maine fits the national mold."

These statements were written *27 years ago* by the 1998 Governor's Commission on School Construction. This earlier report describes many of the same issues, and indeed, some of the same proposed solutions, considered by today's commission. The fact that so many issues remain the same, underscores the need for a different approach and a long-term, sustained effort.

Deteriorating, underfunded school infrastructure is not unique to Maine. In state after state, headlines describe similar circumstances. It has been a crisis unfolding in steady, slow motion for decades. Aging buildings and deferred maintenance—whether in homes, commercial, or public buildings—have a predictable outcome.

Steps taken

The problem in Maine is not due to a lack of effort by any single governor, state agency, legislature, school district, or municipality. In fact, state and local governments have taken important steps and increased funding. As an example, over the last 7 years, Governor Mills and the Legislature have increased state funding for education as a whole from $1.1 billion in fiscal year 2019 to $1.5 billion in fiscal year 2026. This includes achieving the required 55% funding of essential programs and services mandated by voters in 2004 (PL 17, c.446, PL 25, c.2). Local contribution also has increased. (Appendix B10)

"What is the size of the problem?"

Justin Poirier,
Maine Municipal Association

As stated above, MDOE identified a potential $11 billion price tag in today's dollars to renovate or replace existing infrastructure based on age and square footage of all schools in Maine. In the absence of financial modeling based on the specific condition of each building and cost-reduction strategies, it is difficult to predict the exact cost of the problem. The above estimate, however, is consistent with national figures and those in neighboring states. With certainty, the cost is much higher than the existing revenue stream. (Appendix B1)

What we know

- Many school buildings in Maine—particularly those built in the 1950s and 1960s—do not meet **health and safety requirements,** nor student educational and support service needs.
- **Enrollment patterns** will change over time— increasing in some areas and decreasing in others, affected by such factors as birth rates, migration patterns, and homeschooling.
- The **needs of all students** are front and center, requiring accessible buildings and flexible spaces to accommodate a wide range of abilities.
- **Deferred maintenance** is a major cost driver as schools deteriorate to the point of needing the most expensive intervention—replacement or major renovation. This is not due to a lack of interest on the part of school districts or local administrators; it is due to an absence of resources.
- The **cost of new school construction** has risen sharply. (Appendix B8, Cost Per Square Foot)
- Funding capacity of school districts varies widely. Many municipalities struggle to reconcile the **property tax burden** with school budget requests. An increasing number are rejecting school budget proposals.
- New school construction is complex, imposing a **high time burden** on local officials and administrators.
- Given limitations on state funding for construction, generally, **fewer than 10% of districts that apply for state funding achieve it.** Some districts do not have the financial or staff resources to undertake the application process at all. (Appendix B8, Recent MCIP Cycles)

Recent reports from MEPRI provide detailed information regarding the history, policies, procedures, and condition of Maine public schools. Readers are encouraged to review the reports, which can be accessed in Appendix A or on the MEPRI website. https://mepri.maine.edu An excerpt from one report summarizes the problem:

> "Maine, like many other states in the US, has many aging school buildings for PK-12 education and insufficient fiscal resources to keep up with the need for renovations or replacements. With the growing number of school buildings needing attention, some school leaders and community members feel increased frustration over the long wait and uncertainty about whether their schools will ever make it to the top of the state's priority list for state-subsidized construction. Policymakers would also like to see students educated in up-to-date facilities with improved cost efficiency. Changing demographics in the state predict a continued decline in PK-12 enrollment, particularly in the northern and rural, remote areas of the state (State of Maine, Office of the State Economist, 2021). Fewer students mean a higher cost per pupil to keep a small school in operation. Some communities have consolidated schools or school districts with neighboring communities or are considering it currently. Other communities have resisted consolidation, even with the incentive of a new school building and reduced cost per student (e.g., Budion, 2022; Carter, 2024; Potila, 2021). Local taxpayers have shown a reluctance to approve increases in proposed school budgets, whether for facilities needs or other costs (Kobin, 2024; Walkup, 2024). The pressures to rethink how Maine funds school construction and renovation and allocates school space are coming from multiple factors: aging infrastructure, shrinking enrollment and limited fiscal resources" (MEPRI. *Report on Policy and Practices for Funding Maine Public School Construction and Renovation*. 2025. p. 1).

Assistance provided by MDOE

- Public School Standards & Guidelines for New School Construction and Major Renovation Projects
  School systems seeking state-subsidized construction projects periodically apply to MDOE. An MDOE team reviews the applications and conducts a site visit to each applicant's district. Following the site visit, the team rates each potential project. Ratings are done from a matrix developed by Rule and adopted by the State Board of Education. MDOE then creates a list of projects in decreasing order

from the project with the greatest need, followed by projects with lesser needs. The MDOE Commissioner presents the list to the State Board, which funds as many projects from the list as available debt limit funds allow. (MRS Title 20-A, Chapter 609, School Construction)

- Major Capital Improvement Program (MCIP)
  This program, which helps school districts improve the quality and condition of their learning environments, is governed by State Board of Education Chapter 61, Rules for Major Capital School Construction Projects. In approving school construction projects, the State Board of Education is required to ensure that school administrative units have made efficient use of existing school facilities and have explored and when feasible developed agreements for sharing facilities with neighboring school administrative units (Title 20-A, §15905).

  The MCIP includes a 21-step process intended to serve as a practical guide for school districts and may be adapted to meet the needs of individual projects. It encompasses phases from needs assessment and application through pre-design, concept development and approval, referendum, design and funding approval, bidding, construction, bonding, and compliance review. (See Appendix B7 for a chart outlining the steps in this process.) According to MDOE, school construction design, bidding, and construction for a new school facility typically spans approximately three years from referendum to school opening. Because the projects involve extensive local decision-making related to consolidation, governance, decision-making, new construction or renovation, site selection, and approval through local referendum, the length and complexity of the process can be significant.

  Once funding eligibility is established, local communities evaluate consolidation opportunities and can implement multi-building projects that originate from a single-building application. For example, over the past 16 years, MDOE has funded 25 comprehensive school construction projects. (Please refer to the chart in Appendix B8 for a comprehensive overview of the 2010-2011 and 2017-2018 school construction rating cycles.)

- Education Specifications (2025 updated)
  These planning documents include the following components for new school design:

  - Purpose and Vision
  - Equity, Excellence, and Engagement
  - Program-Driven Design
  - Organizational Strategies for Success
  - Sustainable and Health-Promoting Design
  - Safety, Security, and Well-Being
  - Adaptability and Innovation Over Time
  - Community Integration and Partnerships

SECTION FOUR – RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing the issue of school infrastructure requires that we think differently about solutions. This includes commitment to a long-range plan with measurable outcomes.

It is evident that additional funding is needed—at least to address immediate health and safety concerns. Even with additional funding, the solution must involve strategies to reduce cost, maximize existing resources, and to stop deterioration due to deferred maintenance. The solution also must embody a fundamentally different approach to how state, regional, and local entities work together to plan, support, and fund school infrastructure. This requires having shared, easy access to relevant data analytics, such as on enrollment, demographic trends, long-term costs, and options.

The Executive Order states the need for a "well-informed feasible plan for addressing current and future needs of public school facilities." (Appendix G1) In keeping with that directive, the commission's recommendations are proposed as a comprehensive plan. The commission offers these recommendations not as a list of separate "good ideas," but as a framework to systematically and, over time, achieve the goal of all students being in safe, sound, and accessible schools.

The information below includes objectives, related strategies, and in some instances, action steps. It is expected that the strategies will evolve based on an assessment of progress and emerging opportunities and challenges. Also, below is a proposed organizational framework to support and advance the work. For the purposes of this report the following terms are used:

Goal	Why are we undertaking this plan?
Objective	What are the outcomes needed to reach the goal?
Strategy	How will we achieve the objectives?

Goal

All students in Maine have access to safe, sound, and accessible public schools.

Objectives

Reduce Cost.
Maximize Existing Resources.
Diversify and Increase Funding.
Utilize Data to Best Advantage.

OBJECTIVE 1. REDUCE COST

Reduce Burden of Time and Cost on Districts and Municipalities

Soft Costs, Maintenance, Procurement

Reducing cost without sacrificing quality must be part of the long-term solution. Where opportunities exist, this includes making it less costly and time consuming for municipalities and districts to undertake capital construction, renovation, and maintenance.

"What we pay attention to improves."

Christopher Howell,
Superintendent, RSU 14

Summary of Strategies and Actions to Lower Costs

1. Reduce soft costs in major capital construction and renovation.
   - Use **specialists or teams prequalified** at the state level.
   - Offer **prototype** design elements to districts to reduce up-front soft costs and time, while supporting best design practices.
   - Work closely with state **permitting** agencies to identify ways to reduce the cost and/or the time involved in permitting.
2. Reduce deferred maintenance and associated costs.
   - Identify ways to **increase financial support,** such as through the use of the School Revolving Renovation Fund (SRRF).
   - Increase availability of **qualified maintenance technicians.**
   - Monitor **construction quality.**
3. Reduce cost of equipment and supplies.
   - **Expand use of centralized procurement** including master agreement contracts through the Office of State Procurement Services.
4. Reduce time by **sharing project planning information** more effectively.
   - Identify ways to ensure that all districts receive needed project information early in the process.

Context for the Strategies

In a presentation to the commission, Mary Filardo, Executive Director, 21st Century School Fund, described four cost reduction scenarios based on analysis of public data on public school construction costs and trends, available fiscal data, and standard industry measures such as the Facility Condition Index (FCI). Filardo estimated the potential cost reduction of these scenarios in Maine could be substantial over time. A link to the full presentation can be found in the Appendices. Excerpts from the presentation include:

Maintenance and Operations (M&O) Efficiencies

"When operations and maintenance are planned and managed for routine and preventive maintenance, there will be M&O efficiencies, for energy and other utilities, for security, cleaning and groundskeeping, and far fewer expensive reactive and emergency repairs."

Comprehensive Modernizations

"Manage facilities from an educational facilities master and capital plan that address capacity issues, deferred maintenance, capital renewals, educational alterations, security, and sustainability at the same time, rather than with piecemeal capital projects."

Cost Controls and Innovation
"Contain costs and develop innovations in financing, design, and construction, through process efficiencies in financing, procurement, permitting, inspections, and project management practices. Ensure public sector owners have access to timely and independent information about the costs of their design and construction decisions early in the pre-construction process."

More Efficient Building Utilization
"Space efficiencies can be achieved through joint use, adaptive reuse, consolidation and closings, as well as with selective demolition to reduce the size of facility through a modernization."

Given the estimated cost of replacement and renovation of existing school infrastructure, all possible steps must be taken to reduce costs without negatively affecting the quality of construction or the learning environment. This requires ongoing examination of the areas mentioned above. What might not be possible to reduce today, could become easier in the future, given changes in the external environment and closer collaboration among all involved.

Seeking goal-directed efficiencies and process improvements is particularly challenging in the public sector due to variables and controls being spread among separate and independent entities. School construction projects include extensive local discussions and decision-making, school site selection, and securing approval through local referendum, state permitting, and many other factors.

Acknowledging the inherent challenge of achieving efficiencies in the public sector, it is not impossible to do. The likelihood of success increases if the changes are focused on specific objectives and strategies such as those described below.

Strategies

1. Reduce soft costs.

Soft costs are expenses beyond construction costs, such as architectural, engineering, design, permits, surveys, inspections, accounting, legal, loan commitment fees, equipment, security, and more. These costs are essential components of construction. Although reducing cost in any one of these areas might not be significant, in the aggregate, they add up. The "pre-construction" phase typically involves the most time and uncertainty. Therefore, this is a priority area in which to seek cost reductions. Comments from school administrators underscore the cost and complexity involved.

> "I think we have close to $30 million dollars in soft costs, engineering costs, and other things that are going into this project. . .. So for what I'm paying in costs that we actually won't realize in construction, I think we could have built a school" (MEPRI. *Report on Policy and Practices for Funding Maine Public School Construction and Renovation*. 2025. p. 15).

> "I think that there's a fundamental mismatch with that construction timeline and your average superintendent tenure, and your board, and you know. So for me, it's money and speed with which to get something done" (MEPRI. *Report on Policy and Practices for Funding Maine Public School Construction and Renovation*. 2025. p. 17).

> "Maine districts seeking state assistance can wait several years or even decades before their project comes up to the top of the state's priority list, and sometimes never make it to the top. For the projects that are successful in reaching the top of the priority list, district administrators described the frustration of having to wait several more years—roughly ten years—to actually

begin the project, because of all the required steps in the process. As administrators pointed out, the timeline for starting or completing a project is much longer than the terms of employment for superintendents or school board membership, creating a challenge for successive district leaders" (MEPRI. *Report on Policy and Practices for Funding Maine Public School Construction and Renovation*. p.16).

"District administrators spoke about the high cost of creating new architectural plans every time a school is built, and the higher cost for some design features that, while visually attractive, may not be necessary or affordable. They offered that one way to save both local taxpayers and the state as a whole on the cost of funding school construction would be to create a few school plans that districts might choose from that would meet their needs but also be more affordable overall and could be used across multiple projects" (MEPRI. *Report on Policy and Practices for Funding Maine Public School Construction and Renovation*. 2025. p. 28).

Actions to reduce soft costs

- **Use specialists or teams prequalified at the state level to reduce cost and time** through a Request for Proposals (RFP), Request for Qualifications (RFQ), and/or bidding process, resulting in earlier availability of qualified architects, engineers, and potentially other specialists in real estate, site selection, finance, and equipment. Make available to interested districts.

- **Offer prototype design elements to districts to reduce up-front soft costs and time, while supporting best design practices.** A look at schools utilizing prototype elements in other states and countries, reveal that this approach is neither unproven, nor "cookie-cutter." The prototype design process holds the potential to reduce cost during design and construction. This approach employs pre-designed components, program diagrams, and floor plans while incorporating customization in materials, finishes, and site-specific adaptations. Prototype design planning engages stakeholder input to ensure that the design meets the vision and needs of communities, school administrators, local boards, parents, teachers, students, and others. Other states have used prototypes to jump-start the concept/schematic design phase.

- **Work closely with state permitting agencies to identify ways to reduce the cost and/or the time involved in permitting**. The extent of state permitting in any one project can be extensive, involving approximately ten different state agencies ranging from Health and Human Services, to Transportation, to Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, and more.

2. Reduce deferred maintenance and associated costs.

Reducing deferred maintenance is essential to any realistic attempt to lower cost, both for individual districts and the state. It is an issue in many Maine schools as they attempt to balance financial challenges and needs. Deferred maintenance is a major driver of long-term cost as schools deteriorate to the point of needing the most expensive intervention—replacement or major renovation.

Recent research from the Pew Charitable Trust estimates the cumulative national backlog of deferred maintenance in public buildings to be $1 trillion and recommends that states measure the deferred maintenance gap, develop a plan for shrinking the gap, and report regularly on progress.

According to MDOE, the state should strive for buildings with a minimum 50-year life cycle to reduce the need for premature replacement. In the past, a 2% building reinvestment expectation had been discussed, but was not realized due to budget constraints.

Despite the obvious financial and operational benefits of strategic asset management, it is challenging to implement. As illustrated by the comment below, the commission concluded that deferred maintenance is not due to a lack of interest on the part of school districts or local administrators; it is due to an absence of resources.

> "School districts facing budget constraints may not be putting money toward updating and maintaining their buildings. Voters have rejected budgets that included funding for deferred maintenance (Cohen, 2024; Kobin, 2024)" (MEPRI. *Report on Policy and Practices for Funding Maine Public School Construction and Renovation*. 2025).

Safety and health concerns

Beyond reducing cost, addressing deferred maintenance is necessary to safeguard the health and safety of students, teachers, and staff. As described in the 2025 MEPRI *Summary of School Building Inventory*, the existing hazards in Maine public schools are not insubstantial.

> "With the exception of asbestos, which has been a topic of concerted effort for decades, it is noteworthy that most schools have not explicitly investigated the presence of these potential hazards. In particular, both mold and air quality were identified in nearly half of the buildings surveyed (102 of 218 or 47% found mold, and 120 of 251 or 48% found air quality concerns)" (MEPRI. *Report on Policy and Practices for Funding Maine Public School Construction and Renovation*. 2025. p. 14).

In her presentation to the commission, Mary Filardo, Executive Director, 21st Century School Fund, posed the right question: "What might the state do to support effective routine and preventative maintenance?"

Actions to reduce deferred maintenance

- **Identify ways to increase financial support such as through the use of the State Revolving Renovation Fund (SRRF).** One suggestion involves increasing the cap in the State Revolving Renovation Fund (SRRF). The maximum loan is capped at $2 million per priority, per school building within any five-year period. This $2 million cap does not accommodate larger projects, for example, in the range of $8-12 million, which could enable a substantial upgrade or addition. Of the five SRRF statutory funding priorities, only Priority 1 has been partially funded. The other four priorities have not been funded since the fund was created in 1998.

  Some commission members have suggested that the SRRF and any additional resources have the flexibility to address issues of health and safety along with cost-drivers such as maintenance. At least some commission members would like all schools to be considered in the awarding of funds, not only those with the capacity to apply. This would require rethinking the SRRF statute, especially if the cap is raised.

- **Increase availability of qualified maintenance technicians.** Experienced technicians in sufficient supply are essential to maintain increasingly complex mechanical systems. The lack of qualified technicians in some districts places additional

State Revolving Renovation Fund Existing Statutory Priorities

1. Health, safety and compliance issues including roof structural upgrades; improvements to indoor air quality; compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act; hazardous material abatement or removal; and other health, safety and compliance issues.
2. Repairs and improvements not related to health, safety and compliance limited to repairs and improvements to school building structures, windows, doors and water supply or waste disposal systems.
3. Repairs and improvements related to energy and water conservation.
4. Upgrades of learning spaces
5. Other projects as approved by the MDOE Commissioner.

burden on school administrators as they respond to malfunctions. To build the supply of qualified technicians, a state-level initiative is needed to cultivate training with Career and Technical Education (CTE), adult education, community colleges, and groups such as the Maine Real Estate Managers Association (MREMA), along with continuing support from MDOE for the state maintenance association's annual summer conference.

- **Monitor construction quality.** The commission recognizes both MDOE and Maine contractors in supporting high-quality construction. Standard practice should include systematically evaluating post-construction quality (major systems, equipment, etc.) at the one-year and two-year marks and capturing this data such that any deficiencies can be analyzed and aggregated to inform future projects.

3. Reduce cost of equipment and supplies.

Districts undertake research and contract independently with vendors for major mechanical systems, technology hardware and software, and supplies and services. Some engagements—for example, a local snow plowing service—might not benefit from any adjustment. On the other hand, large HVAC systems could be an area where a centralized procurement option could reduce both time and cost. Such an option exists already—the State Office of Procurement Services. This resource is used by some municipalities and districts on purchases ranging from supplies to equipment to furniture. Assuming timely and responsive service, extending this centralized support and bulk purchasing to all interested districts would result in lower cost and time burden. It also could improve inter-district technology interoperability, capitalize on pricing, and support vendors who demonstrate excellent quality and maintenance records.

Action to reduce cost of equipment and supplies

- **Expand use of centralized procurement,** including master agreement contracts, through the Office of State Procurement Services.

4. Reduce time via sharing capital construction project information.

MDOE staff diligently shares construction project guidelines and information. Despite this effort, not all superintendents have a full understanding of the many project components and considerations. This is an important issue to address to reduce the time involved in project planning.

Action to reduce time in capital construction planning

- Identify ways to ensure that all districts receive **project information early in the process.**

OBJECTIVE 2. MAXIMIZE EXISTING RESOURCES

Financing, Consolidation, Integrated Consolidated, Energy Efficiency, Repurposing, Alignment

With substantial infrastructure needs, rising costs, and limited funding, state and local resources must be maximized to the greatest extent possible. Many of the cost-reduction strategies described above contribute to that objective. The following additional steps can be taken.

"We need to figure out how to do more with less."

Anthony Jaccarino,
Maine Bond Bank

Summary of Strategies and Actions to Maximize Existing Resources

1. Adopt a **sliding scale** (rather than an automatic 100% state financing) for the purpose of extending funds to more schools.
2. Incorporate **consolidation** as part of the long-term strategy with greater attention to understanding the economic and qualitative cost-benefits.
   - Develop **data analytics,** which over time, will be helpful to both state and local decision makers as they consider the financial and qualitative cost-benefits to consolidation.
   - Continue existing actions that **encourage and incentivize consolidation** in state-funded projects.
3. Increase **flexibility** in the Integrated Consolidated Educational Facility (ICEF) model to encourage adoption.
   - Review existing ICEF statute with involved entities and stakeholders and adjust as needed.
4. Continue to strengthen **energy efficiency** standards and equipment with emphasis on proven technologies.
   - **Incentivize third party certification** to gain a broad-based understanding of cost-benefits related to energy efficiency through the use and collection of similar measures statewide.
   - Support a state-level **energy efficiency point of contact** to provide up to date, in-depth information for districts regarding systems and strategies related to school infrastructure.
5. Seek **repurposing** opportunities for both facilities and grounds.
   - Establish **capacity for sourcing and sharing information** regarding potential repurposing opportunities, either short or long-term.
6. Align **roles** to maximize impact.
   - Consider opportunities to **better align and leverage the roles** of involved entities.

Context for the Strategies

1. Adopt a sliding scale approach for the purpose of extending funds to more schools.

A sliding scale approach would provide up to, but not automatic, 100% state financing depending on factors such as state-level priorities—for example, health and safety or consolidation, local economics, and demographics. This approach would serve to make existing resources available to more schools.

> "Only a small number of schools qualify for 100% state-funded new construction if their school facilities needs are ranked at the top of the state's priority list, and if there are sufficient funds available (MEPRI. *Report on Policy and Practices for Funding Maine Public School Construction and Renovation*, 2025, page 22).

2. Incorporate consolidation as part of the long-term strategy with attention to capturing the economic and qualitative cost-benefits.

Maine has almost 600 schools and 272 districts. The commission does not take a blanket approach to the merits of bigger or smaller schools. It will, however become increasingly difficult to maintain the number of existing schools in sound condition from both a cost and funding perspective. As a result, more schools will experience deteriorating health and safety conditions. In some instances, operability will be threatened. Also, the shortage of specialized teachers, support services, and flexible learning spaces will reduce equal access to resources.

The commission makes these assumptions with certainty because these conditions exist today.

> *Health and safety.* MEPRI compiled information from MDOE site visits to 594 public school buildings and reported, ". . . both mold and air quality were identified in nearly half of the buildings surveyed (102 of 218 or 47% found mold, and 120 of 251 or 48% found air quality concerns). This suggests that there

are likely schools with hidden issues among the many schools that have not been surveyed" (MEPRI. 2025. p. 14).

Student experience. Teacher shortages exist today and are likely to worsen in certain parts of the state. For the years 2025-2026, the U.S. Department of Education identified preK-12 teacher shortages in Maine in a number of subjects, ranging from general elementary to computer technology to mathematics to languages to special education. The impact could be worse in more rural, sparsely populated areas of the state. Educate Maine reported in its Maine's Educator Workforce 2024 Report that the teacher workforce is Maine is older than the nation's, with rural counties tending to have the oldest teachers, with not enough new entrants to grow the ranks sufficiently. As described by national researchers, rural areas experience particular challenges in this regard, including for reasons associated with unsafe and inadequate facilities.

Cost. Materials, labor, mechanical systems, furnishings, technology—virtually all aspects of school construction costs are increasing. Regardless of project size, design and construction of a new school building imposes substantial soft costs associated with architectural, engineering, site inspection, permitting, legal, and a myriad of other expenses.

Remaining abreast of both lagging and leading indicators is necessary in considering where and how many schools are needed. Over time, population trends will change—up and down—due to migration patterns affected by climate change, remote work, and other factors. For example, in the past few years in Maine, the number of homeschooled students has increased, and birth rates have declined.

> "School enrollment in Maine also tends to be lower on average than for other US states— even rural states with a low population density. The average number of students per Maine school hovered around 300 students from 1976 to 2020 (MDOE, 2021). In 2022-23, the national average number of students per school was 498, while Maine had an average of 298 students per school, ranking eighth among the states with the least students per school." (NCESa, 2024). [MEPRI. *Report on Policy and Practices for Funding Maine Public School Construction and Renovation*. 2025]

The state has the authority to incentivize consolidation in state-funded projects and indeed does so now. Each potential consolidation is context specific, involving unique financial, geographic, demographic, and operational factors. MDOE provides support through its 9-16 application, office hours, and technical assistance with schools approved for major capital construction, and assistance with transportation mapping.

Local districts and governments have the authority to raise local funds to renovate or replace schools as they determine. In fact, over the past 16-years, in 21 school districts, 55 schools were closed and consolidated. Consolidation requires extensive local effort and support. One such consolidation occurred in RSU 64, which serves Bradford, Corinth, Hudson, Kenduskeag, and Stetson. As described by Superintendent Rhonda Sperrey:

> "The new school didn't just consolidate five buildings; it created a new identity and a stronger sense of unity across the five towns. For students, it meant equitable access to the kinds of programs every child deserves. For teachers, it meant space to collaborate and innovate. For families, it meant reassurance that their children were learning in a facility designed for the future." (See Appendix E1 for description of this consolidation.)

At the moment, little research exists nationally or in Maine regarding whether, and by how much, consolidation lowers overall cost. Intuitively, one school building rather than multiples in close proximity would appear to reduce construction and operating costs. This is supported by research in other states when small schools in close proximity to one another merge. A 2020 Boston Federal Reserve piece describes the complexity in analyzing the cost-benefit of consolidation.

> "The rationale behind consolidation of small schools and districts is that it can produce greater efficiency through fewer administrative positions and fewer properties to maintain while enhancing opportunities for students through larger peer groups and expanded curricula. Available research on consolidation tends to focus on the narrower question of whether it is effective at decreasing costs. Some studies confirm that consolidation decreases the per-pupil costs of local schools, but they also identify a number of offsetting factors—such as increased transportation needs and increased capital spending—that make cost savings easier to achieve in principle than in practice" (Sullivan, 2020).

As suggested by the following comments to the commission, Maine school administrators appear to support continued focus on consolidation in concept.

> "Consolidation is never easy no matter what grade level. Many times elementary schools are more difficult as emotions and travel distances required for younger students can make it difficult. The Sinclair Act of 1956 changed the landscape here in Maine as many regional high schools were constructed (through 60s & 70s) and the useable abandon schools were backfilled with middle and elementary school students. I think this approach is viable and should be considered moving forward with the policy revisions to the Integrated, Consolidated 9-16 Educational Facilities program. We are also closing elementary buildings in districts right now by building small additions to other district elementary schools and may be able to do more of that with policy changes in the Schol Revolving Renovation Fund. There is building capacity out there that, in many cases, can be renovated and close other buildings cheaper than new construction. It's really a combination of many factors that determines the solution and those factors vary district to district."

> "The teacher shortage in Maine is critical, with positions often difficult to fill due to non-competitive compensation and challenging working conditions. Building large, new schools does not solve the problem of staffing them. We must integrate construction planning with workforce strategy, ensuring that facility size and design support a limited, aging, and thinly spread educator workforce, potentially through regional centers or multi-district collaborations that pool resources and specialized staff. I would start with multi-district regional high schools that are modeled after the Massachusetts Technology High Schools."

> "From my perspective as a Maine educational leader, I fully support the Commission's position on consolidation as outlined in the *Consolidation Concept Paper Summary*. The evidence is overwhelmingly clear: Maine cannot maintain nearly 600 schools and over 270 districts at current staffing, facility, and fiscal levels. Many buildings are aging beyond viability, enrollment continues to decline in large portions of the state, and the cost of providing equitable programming across so many small units is becoming unsustainable. Consolidation, when driven by data, community engagement, and strong state support, offers a real pathway to healthier facilities, richer educational opportunities, and more efficient use of public dollars." . . . "Therefore, any consolidation strategy in our state must:
> - Use strong statewide data systems to demonstrate clear educational and fiscal benefits;
> - Provide significant state incentives—construction reimbursement, transitional operating support, and transportation assistance;
> - Offer early, sustained, and meaningful community engagement; and
> - Ensure that consolidation is never framed as a loss of identity, but rather as an investment in the future of students."
>
> "In short, I support the commission's consolidation recommendations because Maine cannot afford to maintain the status quo. But I also recognize that consolidation in Maine will succeed only when the state builds a process that respects local autonomy while making the case,

clearly, consistently, and transparently, that regional solutions can deliver better outcomes for students than any single small community can achieve alone."

Gaining a better understanding of the impact of consolidation will become easier with improved data analytics. This will make it possible for decision makers to analyze the cost-benefits and other options, factoring in the future costs of construction, equipment, maintenance, transportation, and availability of teachers and services. It is also important to understand the effect of school closures on the economic health of communities. Local, regional, and state economic development entities could play an important role in these discussions.

Actions related to consolidation

- Develop **data analytics capacity** to assist state and local decision makers in considering the financial and qualitative cost-benefits to consolidation.

- **Continue existing actions** that encourage and incentivize consolidation as part of state funded projects.

3. Increase flexibility in Integrated Consolidated Educational Facility (ICEF) model to encourage adoption.

A related model to consolidation is the Integrated Consolidated 9-16 Educational Facility. This is a regional high school integrated with a career and technical school, the University of Maine System, the Maine Community College System, and that supports industry training programs. Although the beneficial objectives of this model would seem evident, it has not yet been implemented. Recently, however, new proposed projects have surfaced. The case has been made by stakeholders that a more flexible approach is needed to encourage proposals adaptable to local and regional circumstances.

Action related to ICEF

- **Review existing ICEF statute** with involved entities and stakeholders and adjust as needed.

4. Continue to strengthen energy efficiency standards and equipment with emphasis on proven technologies.

Energy efficient systems reduce long-term cost and improve learning and working conditions by supporting temperature control and improved indoor air quality. Air quality, noise, and temperature matter because the well-being of students, teachers, and staff matter. Energy efficient standards hold the potential to reduce costs and improve student and teacher health and well-being. Maine has embraced this potential in its MDOE Standards and Guidelines, including providing technical assistance for state and local entities.

One challenge with this strategy is the tension between short-term expense and long-term gain. The financial unsustainability of existing school infrastructure, however, requires taking every opportunity to reduce cost over the long-term. Energy efficiency is one such strategy.

As compared to other sectors, school buildings are relatively high energy users. Given the statewide footprint of school buildings, steps taken to reduce carbon emissions benefit all who reside in Maine.

Other states have also adopted this approach. In New England, both Massachusetts and Rhode Island require LEED certification as their standards for state building construction.

Information provided to the commission by the MDOE Green Schools Initiative includes:

- Studies show that improved ventilation and reduced CO_2 increase student cognitive performance.

- Ventilation is essential to reduce the incidence of air borne illness.
- Electrified, renewable systems yield 30-year savings of $2–3 million per school and eliminate roughly 15,000 tons of CO_2 compared to oil heat, while stabilizing budgets against volatile fuel markets.
- Water efficiency reduces utility costs while modeling responsible resource use.
- Durable, low-carbon materials extend building life cycles.
- Sustainable building sites reduce maintenance and heat island effects while maximizing the use of outdoor areas for teaching, education, and other purposes.
- Federal tax credits for geothermal heat pumps (30–35% through 2035) reduce upfront costs, while long-term savings can be reinvested in instructional priorities.

Not surprisingly, the conditions in which one works or learns affect well-being and performance. Beyond cost, energy efficient strategies protect the well-being of students, teachers, and staff, as pointed out in this finding from the T.H. Chan School of Public Health:

> "These findings provide robust public health evidence that environmental exposures in school buildings can impact student health, student thinking and student performance. Studies show that environmental factors within and around school buildings can interact with each other in complex ways. Thus, the school building itself, where students spend a significant portion of their childhood, represents a prime opportunity to intervene and protect the health of children, our most vulnerable citizens" (*Foundations For Student Success; How School Buildings Influence Student Health, Thinking, and Performance*, Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health, 2014, p. 5).

Comments from Maine school administrators underscore the urgency to strengthen action in this area:

> "These old-school buildings have very poor air circulation systems, as most were built under climate conditions very different from today's. This is the future approach to education and learning in a post-COVID world. If possible, emission-free structures. Significant change but future focused" (comment to the commission).
>
> "I hope there will be coordinated efforts statewide to ease installation of heat pump technologies and hybrid technologies, which are more efficient for heating and also provide a cooling and dehumidification option" (comment to the commission).
>
> "I like the idea of green schools, but I am concerned about cost. I know the analysis talks about savings on fuel costs, but in my 15 or so years of doing sustainable economy work, I have found the claims rarely live up to real life application" (comment to the commission).

Actions related to energy efficiency

- **Incentivize third-party certification** to gain a broad-based understanding of cost-benefits related to energy efficiency through the use and collection of similar measures statewide.
- **Support a state-level energy efficiency point of contact** to provide up-to-date, in-depth information for districts regarding systems and strategies related to school infrastructure.

5. Seek repurposing opportunities for both facilities and grounds.

Repurposed properties offer opportunities to capitalize on existing public and private infrastructure. This approach benefits publicly funded entities in considering new ways to use existing resources. It contributes to long-term planning activities by widening the scope of options to be considered. It also could prompt new models, such as a public school located on or near a university campus. For example, if a building or grounds

associated with a university is no longer needed, it could be evaluated for a new public school, either short or long-term. Similarly, school buildings or grounds no longer needed could be repurposed for other community purposes. Although this sounds like a relatively simple prospect, no systematic or visible outreach exists even among entities in close proximity to one another. This outreach should include state, regional, and local community and economic development activities. In addition to surfacing repurposing options, this strategy would raise awareness of needs in specific areas of the state, which could prompt the development of additional resources or concepts.

Action related to repurposing

- **Establish capacity for sourcing and sharing information** regarding potential repurposing opportunities, either short or long-term.

6. Align roles.

As stated above, existing entities involved in school construction, such as MDOE do excellent work. Going forward, to maximize existing resources directed at this complex, statewide problem, resources must be aligned for the best advantage. The 1998 Governor's Commission report recommended, "Clearly define the roles of the Department of Education and the Bureau of General Services in the application and construction process. Education policy remains the province of the Department of Education. The Bureau of General Services is responsible for the technical and practical aspects of a project."

Action related to align roles

- As part of implementing a longer-term plan, **consider opportunities to better align and leverage the roles of involved entities.**

OBJECTIVE 3. DIVERSIFY AND INCREASE FUNDING

Dedicated and Local Option Taxes, Debt Ceiling, Public-Private Partnerships (P3), Philanthropy, Grants

Without question, additional funds are needed, now and in the future, for school infrastructure. The commission is not in a position to recommend one specific funding approach over another, given the many considerations, including those related to tax policy and General Fund budget constraints. At the same time, the approaches listed below are being used in other states and all deserve consideration as policy makers chart the financial path forward. A combination of one or more of these strategies, or others not yet surfaced, must be considered and implemented over time to avert an even larger, predictable financial crisis in the years ahead.

To address limitations on state and local funding, states are adopting alternative strategies such as dedicated taxes, local option taxes, and proceeds. Several employ the use of statewide bonds. Suggestions to the commission included using a portion of the Maine state budget lapsed balances or the Budget Stabilization Fund (Rainy Day Fund) for a one-time infusion of funds, which would then earn interest over time.

Although no single strategy would be sufficient to close the financial gap, every bit of resource development helps to move the state closer to its goal of all students having access to safe, sound, and accessible schools.

Summary of Strategies and Actions to Diversify and Increase Funding

1. Consider funding through **bonding, dedicated taxes, proceeds, and/or local option sales taxes**.
2. Consider options related to **debt service**.
   - Increase the debt service ceiling.
   - Capture difference between statutory debt service ceiling and actual debt payments.
   - Separate debt service into its own budget program.
   - Examine issues related to debt service inclusion in Essential Programs and Services.
3. Establish a **high-level philanthropic resource** for public schools and **strengthen grant-seeking.**
   - Incorporate philanthropy as part of the initial implementation planning.
   - Assess grant-seeking potential.
4. Explore **public-private partnership** opportunities.

1. Consider funding through bonding, dedicated taxes, proceeds, and/or local option sales taxes.

Options and considerations

Bonding. Numerous funding mechanisms for the backlog of school construction projects have been proposed by commission members, legislators, and executive branch staff. The most cost-efficient source of funds would be bonding, funded through debt service appropriations. State examples:

California places statewide school construction bonds on the ballot for voter approval (e.g., Proposition 2 in November 2024 authorized $10 billion). These funds provide matching grants to local school districts, which are expected to raise local funds through their own bonds.

Rhode Island has a statewide school construction bond program approved by voters in 2018, which provides state-level funding to support local school facility improvement.

Idaho has a mechanism where the Idaho State Building Authority issues bonds to fund public school capital projects across the state, with the proceeds distributed to districts.

Hawaii operates as a single statewide district with school construction funding managed at the state level.

Dedicated Taxes and Proceeds, and Local Option Sales Taxes. At least 19 other states use funding strategies beyond general fund and property taxes, such as sales and use taxes, excise taxes, lottery revenue, proceeds from the sale and use of state lands, and local option sales taxes. The information below is drawn from a variety of sources, including the ECS *50-State Comparison: K-12 School Construction Funding.* Because circumstances are changing continually, the information below might be incomplete. Nevertheless, it offers a view into how other states approach school infrastructure funding.

- Lottery proceeds or taxes on casino gaming (CO, FL, MO, NC, OH, VA, WV)
- Sales and use tax (AL, ID, MA, NC, WV)
- Severance taxes on natural resources (MT, NM, ND, WY)
- Sale or lease of state land (AZ, CO, WA, WY)
- Taxes on marijuana (CO, OK)
- Vehicle licensing fees (FL)
- Criminal fines, fees, and forfeitures (VA)

Other examples include, but are not necessarily limited to:

Iowa dedicates a one cent state sales tax to school infrastructure needs or school district property tax relief. In 2019, this resulted in $498 million distributed in sales tax revenues, with the majority going for school construction. The legislature and governor recently extended the tax's sunset date to 2051.

North Carolina Education Lottery Fund was created in 2005 with a portion dedicated to school construction; $240 million was awarded in 2018-19.

Massachusetts has a dedicated revenue stream of one penny of the state's 6.25-percent sales tax contributing more than $18.3 billion in reimbursements to cities, towns, and regional school districts for school construction projects.

Montana, Rhode Island, California, and Massachusetts (pending) use surcharge tax on second homes. Rhode Island applies this surcharge tax to properties not occupied for at least 183 days per year that are valued at over $1 million. The state charges $2.50 for every $500 of assessed value above $1 million, in addition to existing property taxes. Maine has the highest percentage of second home ownership in the nation with 15.3% of homes classified as seasonal, followed by Vermont (13.2%) and Alaska (9.1%).

Local Option Sales Taxes. States with Local Option Sales Taxes include Georgia, Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Local Option Sales Taxes are taxes that local governments, e.g., counties, cities, or municipalities, can impose in addition to the state sales tax. Typically, voters in the jurisdiction must approve it through a referendum or ballot measure or via local governance vote. Garnered revenue stays within the jurisdiction, allowing for additional local control. As an example, recently, voters in Bibb County, Georgia approved the 2025 Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax, funding $250 million worth of renovations and technological upgrades for the Bibb County School District (Casey Choung, Bibb County voters pass $250 million education sales tax, *The Macon Melody*, November 4, 2025).

2. Consider Options Related to Debt Service.

Debt service background

Debt service refers to principal and interest costs for approved major capital projects in the allocation year as defined by Maine Revised Statutes 20-A, Chapter 606-B. Principal and interest costs for approved state funded major capital projects appear as "debt service allocation" in each year's Part C budget, which establishes the Total Cost of Education from Kindergarten to Grade 12, the state contribution, the annual target state share, and the mill expectation for the local contribution. The MDOE budget in the General Purpose Aid for Local Schools program (Program 0308, pages 212-214) represents the state's required share of the Total Cost of Education as defined by statute.

The State Board of Education has the authority to approve state funded capital construction projects as long as no project approval will cause debt service costs to exceed the maximum limit now authorized in statute at $150 million. MDOE is responsible for requesting General Fund appropriations to support the cost of debt service on approved projects as part of the Total Cost of Education outlined in Essential Programs and Services.

In FY 26, the total Debt Service Allocation is $114,070,355. Existing authorized projects will reach the $150 million debt service limit in the year 2028-2029. If all other education costs remained flat, MDOE would need to request an additional $36 million to fund debt service for projects already authorized.

As part of the Total Cost of Education and the 55% calculation, debt service is a component of the department's request each year. It is not identified anywhere other than in Part C of each year's budget.

Potential actions related to debt service for consideration

- Increase **Debt Service Ceiling.**

An increase in the debt service ceiling requires an increase in funding from the General Fund. The commission understands the challenge of many priorities competing in need of state resources. At the same time, given the sharp escalation in the cost of construction, the debt ceiling will have to be increased in the future. Each passing year means that construction costs will be higher and, therefore, available funds will have less cumulative impact. The debt service limit should be examined to better ensure future capacity to meet predictable needs.

The commission heard numerous comments and suggestions regarding the debt service ceiling, such as these from the MEPRI *Report on Policy and Practices for Funding Maine Public School Construction and Renovation*, 2025:

> "The debt service ceiling has been increased over time, but is still a constraint on moving state-subsidized projects forward each year. With the current annual cap on debt service set at $150 million and the cost of a new school in the region of $100 million or substantially more, it is clear why few projects on the priority list can move forward each year." (p. 16)
>
> "The debt ceiling is haunting, given the increases of the cost of construction. So that's been static for about a decade, and I think that is extremely prohibitive in terms of working through the volume that we're seeing in terms of the number of schools going through that rating cycle or application process" (p. 16).

- **Capture Difference** between Statutory Debt Service Ceiling and Actual Debt Payments.

This approach captures the difference between the statutory debt service ceiling of $150 million, current limit, and the *actual* debt payments for both existing bonded construction projects and future approved school projects. It allocates a percentage of the difference between the annual debt service ceiling and the actual principal and interest payments due each year toward a dedicated purpose related to school facilities. For example, in FY 25-26, the total difference is $35 million. Three percent of this amount would yield $1,054,808. Ten percent would yield $3,516,020. The table in Appendix B9 illustrates the funding, which could be generated annually by allocating 3%, 5%, 8%, or 10% of the difference.

These funds could be used for a variety of purposes. Suggestions range from adding to the State Revolving Renovation Fund (SRRF), to modifying the fund to enable greater flexibility for strategic targeting of deferred maintenance and health and safety issues.

In keeping with the commission's emphasis on reducing deferred maintenance, one suggestion involves placing the difference between the annual debt service ceiling and the actual principal and interest payments due each year into a dedicated **School Maintenance Enhancement Fund.** The purpose would be to address building maintenance and renovation needs that fall outside the scope of the existing School Revolving Renovation Fund (SRRF). By supporting mid-level repair and improvement projects, this initiative would help extend the useful life of existing school facilities and reduce the long-term need for full school replacements through the Major Capital School Construction Program. These funds would:

- Help schools address deferred maintenance more proactively.
- Reduce the backlog of facility deficiencies.
- Contribute to cost savings by extending building lifespans and minimizing the number of schools requiring full replacement.

- **Separate debt service** into its own budget program.

Although this recommendation does not diversify or increase funding, it enables policy makers and the general public to more easily ascertain the amount of funding being devoted to construction versus education. Separating debt service into its own budget program would have the effect of reducing the appropriation in the General Purpose Aid for Local Schools program and increasing the appropriation in a new program.

- Examine issues related to **debt service inclusion in Essential Programs and Services.**

The issue of state school construction funds being embedded in General Purpose Aid for Schools (GPA) and flowing through the EPS funding model surfaced numerous times during the commission's work. The commission was not in a position to fully analyze this multifaceted issue surrounding the funding formula and recommends it be examined by involved entities with recommendations to follow.

3. Establish a high-level philanthropic resource for public schools and strengthen grant-seeking.

A high-level, ongoing advancement program would support and enhance existing fundraising at the local level while developing resources for statewide purposes. Private schools vastly outpace public schools in fundraising. According to a 2024 report from the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, the 1,447 independent schools participating in their data collection received $5.42 billion in 2024.

> "As compared to fundraising for private schools, we are dead in the water."
>
> Christopher Howell, Superintendent, RSU 14

As an example of unrestricted donor funds, in 2022, philanthropist MacKenzie Scott contributed more than $150 million to public school districts across the country. Another example is the Rhode Island Foundation, which donated $86 million to 2,500 nonprofits in 2024, 26% of which was devoted to education and student success (*Rhode Island Foundation Annual Report*, 2024). In Maine, although local fundraising efforts for public schools have been underway for many years, no high-level, coordinated effort exists to develop philanthropic support for public schools.

The need and opportunity exist to facilitate philanthropy targeted at school construction, maintenance, and operations in the form of major gifts, pledges, grassroots funding (e.g., payroll contributions), along with targeted gifts and pledges, for specific projects or regional profiles. This could occur via an independent foundation—Foundation for Sustainable Schools—the creation of which assumes a fully operational quasi-governmental entity with the creation of the foundation 2-3 years later. Seed work for the foundation can begin with the new entity's Executive Director, with the expectation of hiring a Development Director for the new foundation. Other similar entities, such as LifeFlight of Maine, may offer useful models. See Appendix F for the proposed Foundation for Sustainable Schools structure and additional details.

Implementation of this initiative would require consistency, relationships with donors developed over time, and adherence to state principles, guidelines, and standards. Finances would be under the control of an independent board of trustees in close coordination with statewide partners.

Could this type of effort be successful in Maine? We won't know until we try.

Grant funding also represents an important resource for infrastructure, particularly in areas such as energy efficiency, technology, or other needs. MDOE is the primary entity involved in successful grant funding. Attention should be given to the extent of existing grant funding capacity and how it can be strengthened.

Actions to support philanthropy and grant seeking

- Incorporate philanthropy capacity as part of the initial implementation planning.
- Assess grant-seeking potential.

4. Explore public-private opportunities.

Opportunities exist today, and others will emerge in the future, that involve collaboration between public and private sector entities to finance, build, and/or operate public sector infrastructure. In researching and sharing the options below, the commission is not promoting one or another as *the* solution for school building infrastructure progress. They are, however, examples of existing strategies being used in other states. Although these programs might be feasible for only a few districts in Maine, all districts should be aware of them and supported to explore, if interested. To dismiss these, or future opportunities, without examining if or how they could be adapted for use in Maine would be self-limiting.

Importantly, the programs below are what is available *today.* Others will emerge in the future. It is essential for Maine to remain abreast—and ahead of—these opportunities, advocate for elements that contribute to school infrastructure, share the information broadly, and work closely with the involved entities to explore potential partnerships and joint initiatives. Staying out in front of opportunities to cultivate new types of resources is essential to diversifying and developing resources.

Public-Private Partnerships (P3)
P3 is a contractual arrangement between public and private sector partners, typically involving a government agency contracting with a private partner to renovate, construct, operate, maintain, and/or manage a facility or system, in whole or in part, that provides a public service. Under these arrangements, the agency may retain ownership of the public facility or system; however, the private party generally invests its own capital in designing and developing the properties. Maryland is one state that is exploring and implementing the use of P3s. In a recent report, the Maryland State Comptroller described the initiative:

> "Prince George's County offers another example of the options afforded by counties with more revenue and resources for school construction. In 2014, the County conducted an asset study that identified $8.5 billion worth of deferred school maintenance, followed by a value for money analysis that suggested a public-private partnership (P3) would be the most cost-effective way to address these deficiencies quickly. The county was able to attract a private partner by demonstrating its robust bonding capacity, strong revenue forecasts, and (historically) diverse and substantial funding streams dedicated to capital improvement projects. The private partner provided up-front financing, and the County and LEA will each pay about $15 million annually for 30 years. Phase one of the project is complete: six schools were built in two-and-a-half years. Prince George's County Public Schools estimates that building these six schools would have taken 15 years through the traditional process: securing CIP [Capital Improvement Plan] approval for state funding, raising the local share (millions incrementally through bonding), completing design work, and obtaining permits before building. The accelerated timeline and bundled procurement have yielded significant savings, estimated at $230 million for the six schools. Phase two involves another 30-year (design, build, finance, maintain) P3 for eight more schools, this time supported by state funding ($27 million annually) in addition to local funding" (Maryland Comptroller, State Spending Series, School Construction, September 2025).

P3 is a complex model requiring a high degree of expertise, including assessing the short and long-term costs and benefits of involved variables. For example, while upfront costs could be higher, the timeframe to construct multiple schools could be shorter, potentially reducing the escalator effect of rising construction costs for

multiple schools over time. In Prince George's County, schools will be returned to public ownership with updated or new major systems in place, thereby extending the lifespan of the facilities.

Opportunity Zones and other Tax Credit Programs

Opportunity Zones were created by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 to support business growth and real estate development in low-income and undercapitalized communities. Governors nominated eligible census tracts and proposed their designations to the U.S. Department of the Treasury, which approved the final designations. In Maine, 32 Opportunity Zones have been designated ranging from Aroostook to York Counties. New designations are now under review.

According to the 21st Century School Fund, school districts in these zones could tap into Qualified Opportunity Funds to improve their buildings. Developers and a school district could form a P3 using ground leases to transfer building ownership to private investors, while leaving the local school district in control of ongoing operations. The investment from a Qualified Opportunity Fund could then finance the renovations, with ownership returning to the district at the end of the term. The 21st Century School Fund also suggests that school districts and developers could partner to modernize underutilized school facilities, such as mixed-use community centers, involving groups such as health facilities, childcare centers, libraries, and elder-care centers. This approach is aligned with the community school concept, such as the Margaret Chase Smith Community School in Skowhegan, which works with families, students, and community organizations to identify and address unmet needs. Because Opportunity Zones can be located near higher education institutions, opportunities exist for partnerships between Maine colleges and universities and school districts, including but not limited to Integrated Consolidated Schools.

Other programs:

New Markets Tax Credits (NMTC)

Established in 2000, NMTC is allocated by the Department of the Treasury to qualified applicants in low-income communities. In 2024, 24 NMTC projects included components that supported vocational training, early childhood education, K-12, community college, and university equipment and facilities.

Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI)

Although CDFI K-12 related initiatives appear largely to involve charter schools and early learning facilities, it is a resource that should be explored to assess its utility in assisting public schools to access other necessary services, if not direct financing for facilities.

Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Clean Energy Tax Credits

Provides opportunity for K-12 school districts to leverage federal tax credits to help to fund investments in clean energy infrastructure and reduce cost. Through this program, school districts can claim certain clean energy tax credits and receive funds directly from the IRS for their qualifying projects or investments. After a school district places eligible property in service, the district can register its intent to claim a tax credit with the IRS and file a tax return. The IRS would then make a payment in the amount of the credit.

State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit

Although targeted at commercial development, this tax credit is an example of a state-level program that, with some modification, could be applicable to a Maine school building via a public-private partnership.

Actions to support strategies for diversifying and increasing funding

- As part of implementing a long-term plan, **consider and examine the above strategies** as potential elements in the overall funding framework.
- Going forward**, advocate for and remain abreast of new programs** that could hold potential for new sources of revenue for school infrastructure.

OBJECTIVE 4. UTILIZE DATA TO BEST ADVANTAGE

Multi-year planning, financial modeling, eligibility/selection

"We need to keep an eye on the waves that are crashing on shore while also watching the 5th wave out to sea."

Hollis Cobb
Maine Association of School Business Officials

Multi-year planning for major infrastructure investment would enable state and local entities to prioritize and predict expenditures over a longer period of time. Doing so requires accessible data analytics and financial modeling. The temptation might exist to push the data issue to the side for a variety of reasons—not necessary, too costly, or too burdensome. The commission would counter that data analytics are *essential* for the strategic targeting of resources to lower cost and maximize existing resources.

In an environment as costly and complex as school infrastructure, data analytics play an important role in helping state government and local decision makers determine the best options based on a number of variables. This approach also helps to inform choices around the most and least important data to collect.

Fortunately, Maine has an abundance of data from MDOE, the State Economist's Office, Maine Department of Labor (MDOL), MEPRI, Bureau of Taxation, and others. By synthesizing specific data related to school infrastructure investment and making it accessible via a data visualization platform, state and local decision makers could derive greater benefit from it. This strategy cannot be achieved quickly, but with a clear plan and persistence, it can be done over time. (See Appendix D1 for an example of a Data Analytics Dashboard)

Summary of Strategies and Actions to Utilize Data to Best Advantage

1. **Source and synthesize data** to improve data analytics and to support **financial modeling.**
   - Initiate **collaboration** with involved entities such as MDOE, State Economist, MDOL, MEPRI and others to prioritize the data needed, identify data collection needs and associated resources, and develop a plan-of-action with defined outcomes.
   - Prioritize and support **data security** measures at both the state and district levels.
   - Strengthen capacity for **multi-year financial modeling.**
2. Develop a **centralized database** dashboard and data visualization tools.
3. Work closely with municipalities and districts to develop a **user-friendly digital template** for data collection and provide resources to implement.
   - Conduct **enrollment studies** at the state level, relieving districts of this responsibility to support consistency and be a more efficient way to collect and synthesize the various data inputs.
   - Conduct **enrollment studies** statewide, relieving districts of this responsibility.
   - Initiate discussions with district representatives to develop a feasible plan for data collection.
4. Develop Statewide School Facilities **Master Plan.**
   - Identify and prioritize **elements needed** for Master Plan and determine methodology.
   - Conduct rolling **in-person assessments** of school conditions.
5. Support development of district **Capital Improvement Plans** (CIP).
   - With districts, identify **technical assistance and resources** needed for developing CIPs.
6. Develop an **Eligibility/Selection** model versus the existing application model.

Strategies

1. Source and synthesize data to improve data analytics and to support financial modeling.

Data analytics will enable decision makers to determine with increasing precision the intervention (e.g., replacement, renovation, maintenance, and/or consolidation) that would best accomplish the desired goal. Examples of data points include age, condition, location, and enrollment trends. If organized in a manner that is accessible to users, the data can become more valuable in planning, financial modeling, and decision making.

Although data related to school infrastructure is generated now, it typically exists in silos, in stand-alone form, or available upon request. Data analytic models are needed to enable state and local decision makers to answer questions, diagnose and predict issues, identify trends, and independently and quickly manipulate variables and possibilities to assess or predict possible outcomes based on one decision or hypothesis versus another.

Maine has excellent data on which to build these analytics. For example, the MDOE Data Warehouse provides information such as number of schools, their locations and ages, and number of students by grades. The Maine Education Data Management System (MEDMS) assists districts with reporting on a range of student and staff indicators. MDOE provides raw data on school appropriations and many other topics through its website. The Maine State Economist's Office and MDOL provide high-quality information on demographics and demographic projections, socio-economic data, population estimates, occupations, wages, and more. In addition, groups such as MEPRI provide additional data and analytic capacity, and should be engaged in assisting to strengthen data collection and analytics.

Multi-year financial modeling analysis capacity is needed, including factors such as cost, age, and condition of schools, both for decision making and to determine total cost of ownership. This element goes hand-in-hand with data analytics. Greater capacity for financial modeling at the state and district levels will enable decision makers to better understand fiscal impact of various options. Financial modeling is also an essential component of planning. Similar to the current state of data, pockets of excellent financial management exist, including modeling. This capacity must be strengthened to provide maximum benefit to decision makers.

Actions to support data sourcing and synthesizing for financial modeling

- Initiate **collaboration** with involved entities such as MDOE, State Economist, MDOL, MEPRI and others to prioritize the data needed, identify data collection needs and associated resources, and develop a plan-of-action with defined outcomes.
- Prioritize and support **data security measures** at both the state and district levels.
- Strengthen capacity for **multi-year financial modeling.**

2. Develop a centralized database dashboard and data visualization tools.

User-friendly, accessible data visualization tools will aid decision makers in weighing variables and options. For example, in considering consolidation, local decision makers need easy access to data analytics to inform them of the long-range implications of one choice versus another. This data should include factors such as total cost of ownership, enrollment, demographics, transportation, teacher availability, effect on local economy, etc.

Given advances in technology, building these types of tools is increasingly feasible. For example, a Roux Institute graduate student recently constructed a data visualization tool pertaining to school infrastructure in Maine. This illustrates the increasing availability of expertise and options in this area. It also highlights the importance of partnerships to develop data analytics capacity in the public sector. The Roux Institute in

Portland offers a graduate degree in data analytics; degrees and certificates are also offered at various University of Maine system campuses. (See Appendix D1 for an example of Data Analytics Dashboard)

3. Work closely with municipalities and districts to develop a user-friendly digital template for data collection and provide resources to implement.

Data analytics are only as useful as the accuracy, timeliness, and importance of the data itself. Implementation of this essential function requires collaboration with superintendents on a user-friendly model to upload information, along with resources to support their efforts.

Actions to support data strategies

- Conduct **enrollment studies** at the state level, relieving districts of this responsibility to support consistency and be a more efficient way to collect and synthesize the various data inputs.
- Initiate discussions with district representatives to **develop a feasible plan for data collection.**

4. Develop Statewide School Facilities Master Plan.

The School Facilities Master Plan would be the statewide, comprehensive, long-range strategy to achieve the goal of all schools being in safe, sound, and accessible condition. It would set priorities, desired outcomes, and measurable benchmarks over at least a five-year period. The concept of master planning is a well-established concept in public sector infrastructure projects, as illustrated by the following comments:

> "Master Plans provide a vision for the government that should be supported by realistic planning documents, solid financial policies targeted for the implementation of stated goals, and trends on the government's accomplishments and progress toward these goals. Such plans forecast the outlook for the government, illustrating the alignment between demand generators, capital improvement programs, and funding policies. In doing so, Master Plans help address the management factors that are critical in rating analysis and investor communication." (Government Finance Officers Association)
> "Comprehensive facilities master planning at the state level can promote equity, efficiency, and transparency" (21st Century School Fund/ECS, 10/14/25 memo).

Many states provide guidelines and/or requirements for *districts* to develop their own master plans. In Maine, moving away from a piecemeal to proactive approach requires master planning at the *statewide* level. Such a plan is not created in a vacuum, but rather in collaboration with state, regional, and local entities and stakeholders. Statewide Master Plan priorities would provide guidance for municipalities and districts to develop local Capital Improvement Plans with greater certainty.

The MEPRI 2025 *Report on Policy and Practices for Funding Maine Public School Construction* includes observations from 45 district administrators regarding the need for improved planning, excerpts below:

> "In the focus group, district administrators shared the view that the challenge for Maine to fund school facilities improvements are now so extensive and pressing that a more holistic approach through a comprehensive statewide plan is now needed to address the facilities challenges across the state in an equitable and timely manner. The piecemeal approach of selecting and funding projects as they are proposed by individual districts and only funding a few projects at a time is not working" (Fairman & Lech, MEPRI, p. 27).

> "District leaders indicated Maine needs a new, holistic approach to tackling the school facilities challenges by looking at the collective needs statewide, considering demographic changes and students' needs, rather than continuing with a piecemeal approach based on

> individual project applications submitted by some districts. Districts also called for more flexibility in policies around school facilities to help districts find the most cost-effective solution to meet their needs" (p. 26).
>
> "We really need to look at the entire system of what does community support look like? What does state support look like? What is the financing structure of that? And then what are some community choices that need to be made?" (p. 27).
>
> "Some sort of a holistic look, each and every time. Really, the state of the needs within the state. I just think it's weird that we leave it up to the choice of an application process when something so significant is now like bubbling around the state" (p. 28).
>
> "State planning needs to move from a piecemeal or project by project approach to a more holistic, statewide approach to assess facilities needs across the whole state" (p. 36).
>
> "A new plan needs to prioritize improving equity and shortening the timeline to complete projects to address serious facilities needs in a timely way" (p. 36).

Action related to state level master plan

- Identify and prioritize **elements needed** for Master Plan and determine methodology

5. Support development of district Capital Improvement Plans (CIP*).*

Capital Improvement Plans include planned projects with corresponding revenues and financing sources. District-level CIPs would both inform the statewide Master Plan and be informed by the Master Plan. They would recognize the complete lifecycle costs of school buildings, allocating resources for both capital construction and ongoing Maintenance & Operations (M&O). Funding new construction without revenue sources or planning for M&O serves to continue the cycle of deterioration, increasing the Current Replacement Value over time.

Action related to district capital improvement plans

- With districts, identify technical assistance and resources needed for CIPs.

6. Develop an Eligibility/Selection model versus the existing application model.

Moving from the existing application process for capital construction to a multi-year eligibility/selection process is intended to lower cost and burden on districts, achieve more strategic targeting of resources, and improve predictability for planning purposes.

Despite the careful development and management of the state funding application process, due to the time and cost involved in developing an application, some schools do not apply at all. This creates an inequitable environment in which districts and municipalities with resources have an advantage over districts that do not. The following comments from superintendents were shared in the 2025 MEPRI *Report on Policy and Practices for Funding Maine Public School Construction and Renovation.*

> "Beyond the additional financial costs that local districts have shouldered to fund all aspects of the required planning process for capital improvement projects, there is also a cost to the district in terms of time demanded to work on planning and managing these projects. Superintendents agreed in the focus group that there is a significant impact on their own professional time and workload over several years, making a tough job even more demanding.

> One superintendent observed, 'that might be part of the reason that we get so many delays and things, because we're also trying to do our other jobs at the same time'" (p. 15).
>
> "Maine districts seeking state assistance can wait several years or even decades before their project comes up to the top of the state's priority list, and sometimes never make it to the top. For the projects that are successful in reaching the top of the priority list, district administrators described the frustration of having to wait several more years—roughly ten years—to actually begin the project, because of all the required steps in the process. As administrators pointed out, the timeline for starting or completing a project is much longer than the terms of employment for superintendents or school board membership, creating a challenge for successive district leaders" (p. 16).
>
> "Having gone through the process now, we're seven years in, and we physically haven't started construction. We've broken ground on site, but we haven't put a single piece of concrete in the ground and haven't built anything. And so, from submitting the application to actually opening a building is going to be 11 years from even being approved on the list" (p. 16).

Despite the many excellent aspects of the existing process, challenges include:

- The process focuses only on schools that apply, potentially missing critical needs in districts that lack capacity to resource the application process.
- Upfront costs disproportionately affect smaller and/or financially constrained districts.
- To apply for funding, districts expend resources on design fees, feasibility studies, and site analysis.
- Applications are submitted building-by-building rather than holistically by district, potentially missing opportunities for economies of scale and/or consolidation opportunities (with the exception of the Integrated Consolidated model).

Although the number varies over the years, *generally*, ten percent of funding applicants achieve funding in any given rating cycle. For example, if 100 applications are received, ten or fewer would be funded. This means that 90 others would have expended time and financial resources to no avail during the rating cycle. They can reapply in the next cycle, but that also involves time, money, and uncertainty.

The fundamental distinction between an eligibility/selection process and the existing application process lies in how projects are identified, evaluated, and prioritized for state funding. This approach takes a more comprehensive, holistic approach where facilities in all districts are systematically evaluated using standardized criteria before funding decisions are made. This model can be implemented with the same level of carefulness, due diligence, and fairness inherent in the existing process. Transition to such an approach first would require a statewide assessment of building conditions and priorities via a statewide Master Plan. The proposed selection/eligibility approach would be intended to:

- Enable multi-year planning by districts and the state.
- Reduce the time and cost of preparing applications at the district level.
- Ensure greater equity in making it more likely that under-resourced districts without the capacity to submit applications will receive the same consideration as those that do.
- State resources are prioritized to address the greatest needs, such as health and safety.
- Identify opportunities for collaboration and coordination of regional improvements.
- Align with long-term demographic and educational needs.
- Create predictable funding expectations that enable districts and the state to plan effectively.
- Establish contingency capacity to address catastrophic or unusual situations.
- Expand opportunity for district-wide multiple school proposals.

ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK

"We are in this together."

Roy Gott,
Maine School Boards Association

The Executive Order requires the commission to "examine whether to establish a school building finance authority, its potential role and responsibilities, and whether such a financing authority would benefit the State, school administrative units, and municipalities."

States organize their school building activities in different ways, such as quasi-independent financing authorities, within departments of education, or, in at least one instance, within a state construction department. The entities vary greatly in size—from more than 100 employees to little more than governing boards responsible for approving capital projects.

The commission unanimously concluded that a full-fledged school building authority with bonding capacity is *not* needed in Maine. Given, however, the scope, cost, and complexity of the problem, the majority of the commission supports the creation of a streamlined quasi-independent entity that draws on the capacity of other partners, while implementing essential elements linked to the above objectives and strategies.

Two members of the commission expressed opposition to a new entity, preferring that any funds be devoted to additional staff at the MDOE Office of School Facilities (such as for administrative and construction support) and to support continued updates as needed to structures and processes (e.g., Rule, Chapter 61).

Respecting the objections of two members noted above, the commission recommends the creation of an Intergovernmental Office of School Infrastructure (IOSI), a quasi-independent entity with staff support of approximately six people for the following reasons:

- This statewide infrastructure issue involves all units of government and other entities—federal, state, regional, local, public, and private.
- It requires high-level leadership that transcends administrations to drive and sustain measurable progress and to engage all partners in solving the problem.
- No existing entity is positioned to tackle the above objectives fully, even with additional resources.

A preliminary description of the IOSI is included below. A short-term Working Group should be formed to develop the specific language, positions, and funding needed to establish this new entity for consideration by policy makers. Once established, the IOSI, in collaboration with involved entities, would be responsible for developing an implementation plan for the recommendations described in this report.

General Description

The Intergovernmental Office of School Infrastructure (IOSI) would be established by the Legislature as a quasi-independent state entity to fulfill governmental purposes and that receives revenues derived, in whole or part, from federal or state taxes or fees. General responsibilities would include:

- Be a visible, accessible statewide leader and convenor on all issues related to school infrastructure.
- Lead, coordinate, develop, and/or implement policy and processes to support objectives.
- Lead and support resource development, including philanthropy.
- Synthesize existing data sets to establish accessible data analytics.
- Monitor, analyze, and propose changes in priorities, policies, procedures, funding, financing, and/or approach based on established measurable benchmarks.

- Proactively work with existing entities in education policy, financing, design, construction management, technical assistance, and procurement to continuously improve strategies and processes leading to the overarching goal.
- Report to the Governor, State Legislature, other units of government, and the general public on the condition of school infrastructure, and the extent of progress to reach the goal.

Governance (preliminary)
The IOSI would be overseen by a governing board appointed by the Governor with staggered terms unless role-dependent vacancies occur. The Chair may be appointed by the Governor. In the absence of that appointment, the Chair may be elected by members. Members would include:

At-large member representing statewide interests who serves as Chair
Executive Director of IOSI, non-voting board member
Commissioner, Department of Education
Additional appointee from state government leadership
Director, Bureau of General Services
Representative of the Maine State Legislature
Representative of Maine Municipal Association
Representative of State Board of Education
Representative of Maine School Boards Association
Representative of Maine School Superintendents Association
Representative of a Regional Council or Maine County Commissioners Association
Two additional at-large members

General Responsibilities of the Board (preliminary)
- Consider and approve the state-level master plan with input from all key partners.
- Adopt and monitor key priorities and benchmarks.
- Review, approve, and recommend policy changes in collaboration with key partners.
- Report to the Governor, State Legislature, County and Municipal Governments, School Boards, Districts, and the general public the state of school facility infrastructure and measurable progress associated with key priorities and objectives.
- Approve priorities related to eligibility/selection for state funding.

Technical Advisory Team (preliminary)
The technical advisory team would advise the IOSI on major building components, including design (architectural and engineering), maintenance, vendor contracts, prototype development and updating, design specifications, energy efficiency systems, third-party energy inspection, technology systems, and other technical areas. Members include but are not limited to:

Chair:	IOSI Planning Director
Finance:	MDOE, DAFS, MMBB/Maine Health and Higher Educational Facilities Authority Design and technical assistance: MDOE, BGS, and other external specialists in design, architecture, engineering, and project management
Policy:	MDOE and the State Board of Education
Purchasing:	Chief State Procurement Officer
Energy:	MDOE/Director, Green Schools Initiative, DAFS, and external specialists
Data:	MDOE, DAFS, MEPRI, and other external specialists

Principal Partners (preliminary)

The IOSI would have ongoing, seamless communication, and shared planning and initiatives with the following entities.

- Maine Department of Education
- Maine State Board of Education
- Maine Municipal Bond Bank and Maine Health & Higher Educational Facilities Authority
- Department of Administration and Finance and Bureau of General Services
- Maine Education Policy Research Institute
- Department of Economic and Community Development
- Department of Health and Human Services

Associate Partners (preliminary)

The following entities would have regular contact and information sharing with the IOSI, and/or provide technical support and guidance.

Governmental

- Maine Municipal Association
- Municipalities and Districts
- Maine Council of Governments and Regional Planning Commissions
- Maine State Legislature
- Federal delegation

Education

- Maine School Boards Association & School Boards
- Maine School Superintendents Association & Superintendents
- Maine Education Association & teachers
- Maine Principals' Association Interscholastic Association
- Maine PTA
- Maine Adult Education Association
- University of Maine System
- Maine Community College System
- Maine Parent Federation and Special Education Associations
- Maine School Library Network

Data and Research

- Maine State Economist's Office
- Maine Department of Labor
- Maine Office of Community Affairs
- Educate Maine

Community

- Maine State Chamber of Commerce & business groups
- Regional Workforce Boards
- Private Colleges and Universities

Maine Permitting Agencies

- Department of Environmental Protection
- Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
- Department of Marine Resources
- Department of Labor
- Department of Transportation
- Department of Public Safety & Office of State Fire Marshal
- Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, Bureau of Parks and Land
- Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Disease Control, Public Drinking Water
- Maine Historic Federation
- Army Corps of Engineers

Educational, Technical, and Associations, including but not limited to:

Associated General Contractors of Maine
AIA Maine (State component of American Institute of Architects)
Maine Real Estate Management Association (MREMA)
Structural Engineers Association
Maine Connectivity Authority
University of Maine, College of Engineering and Computing
University of Maine-Augusta, Bachelor of Architecture program

IOSI Staffing (preliminary)

The following roles and responsibilities are preliminary examples, pending implementation analysis.

- Executive Director (Responsibilities include oversight of the IOSI, including leadership, management, proactive outreach and community engagement, implementation plan development and implementation, resource development, and reporting.)
- Finance Director (Responsibilities include financial modeling and analytics.)
- Chief Data and Technology Officer (Responsibilities include data analytics, data visualization, user-friendly template for data upload, and risk management for security issues.)
- Planning and Policy Director (Responsibilities include dashboard, master planning, CIP, communication with partners on progress, surveys and information gathering.)
- Technical Assistance Manager (Responsibilities include collaboration with state and local entities to continuously seek ways to lower costs through strategies such as centralized purchasing, e.g., major mechanicals, technology, etc., prototype design, and prequalification of specialized services.)
- Administrative Support (Responsibilities include supporting all aspects of the IOSI including internal and external communications.)

SECTION FIVE – TABLE OF OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES, & ACTIONS

OBJECTIVE 1 – REDUCE COST **Strategies & Actions**
1. Reduce soft costs in major capital construction and renovation. - Use specialists or teams prequalified at the state level to reduce cost and time via a more streamlined Request for Proposals (RFP) and/or bidding process. - Offer prototype design elements to districts to reduce up-front soft costs and time. - Identify ways reduce the cost and/or the time involved in permitting.
2. Reduce deferred maintenance and associated costs. - Identify ways to increase financial support, including increasing the cap and reconsidering use of the State Revolving Renovation Fund (SRRF). - Increase supply of qualified maintenance technicians. - Monitor construction quality.
3. Reduce cost of equipment and supplies. - Expand centralized procurement use of including master agreement contracts, through the Office of State Procurement Services.
4. To reduce time involved, strengthen distribution of information in capital projects. - Identify ways to better ensure that early in the process, all districts receive project information.

OBJECTIVE 2 – MAXIMIZE EXISTING RESOURCES **Strategies & Actions**
1. Adopt a sliding scale rather than automatic 100% financing to be able to extend funds to more schools.
2. Incorporate consolidation as part of the long-term strategy with attention to capturing the economic and qualitative cost-benefits. - Develop data analytics capacity to assist state and local decision makers in considering the financial and qualitative cost-benefits of consolidation. - Continue to encourage and incentivize consolidation as part of state-funded projects.
3. Increase flexibility in the Integrated Consolidated Educational Facility model to encourage adoption. - Review existing ICEF statute with involved entities and stakeholders and adjust as needed.
4. Continue to strengthen energy efficiency standards and equipment with emphasis on proven technologies. - Incentivize third party certification to gain a broad-based understanding of cost-benefits related to energy efficiency through the use and collection of similar measures statewide. - Support a state-level energy efficiency point of contact to provide up to date, in-depth information for districts regarding systems and strategies related to school infrastructure.
5. Seek repurposing opportunities for facilities and grounds. - Establish capacity for sourcing and sharing information regarding potential repurposing opportunities, either short or long-term.
6. Align roles to maximize impact. - Consider opportunities to better align and leverage the roles of involved entities.
OBJECTIVE 3 – DIVERSIFY and INCREASE FUNDING **Strategies & Actions**
1. Consider funding through bonding, dedicated taxes, and proceeds, and/or local option sales taxes.
2. Consider options related to Debt Service. - Increase Debt Service ceiling - Capture difference between statutory debt service ceiling and actual debt payments. - Separate debt service into its own budget program. - Examine issues related to debt service inclusion in Essential Programs and Services.
3. Establish a high-level philanthropic resource for public schools and strengthen grant-seeking capacity. - Incorporate philanthropy as part of the initial implementation planning. - Assess grant-seeking potential.
4. Explore public-private partnership opportunities.
OBJECTIVE 4 – UTILIZE DATA TO BEST ADVANTAGE **Strategies & Actions**
1. Source and synthesize data to improve data analytics and to support financial modeling. - Initiate a collaborative effort with involved entities such as MDOE, State Economist, MDOL, MEPRI, and others, to prioritize the data needed, identify data collection needs and associated resources, and develop a plan-of-action with defined outcomes. - Prioritize and support data security measures at both the state and district levels. - Strengthen capacity for multi-year financial modeling.
2. Develop a centralized database dashboard and data visualization tools.

3. Work closely with municipalities and districts to develop a user-friendly digital template for data collection and provide resources to implement. - Conduct enrollment studies at the state level, relieving districts of this responsibility to support consistency and be a more efficient way to collect and synthesize the various data inputs. - Initiate discussions with district representatives to develop a feasible plan for data collection.
4. Develop a Statewide Master Plan for school building infrastructure. - Identify and prioritize **elements needed** for Master Plan and determine methodology.
5. Support districts in developing capital improvement plans. - With districts, identify technical assistance and resources needed for developing CIPs.
6. Develop an Eligibility/Selection model versus the existing application model.
ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK
Establish the Intergovernmental Office of School Infrastructure (IOSI), a quasi-independent entity to lead, coordinate, and advance this statewide initiative with engagement of key partners to ensure that all students have access to public schools that are safe, sound, and accessible. - Form a short-term Working Group to develop the steps needed to create the proposed quasi-independent Intergovernmental Office of School Infrastructure (IOSI), including statutory language, positions, and funding for consideration by decision makers. The IOSI, in collaboration with involved entities, would be responsible for developing an implementation plan for the recommendations described in this report.

APPENDICES

Appendix A
Sources & References

Appendix A - Index:

1. Presentations
2. Maine Statutes, Regulations, Standards, and Guidelines
3. Maine Reports
4. Maine News
5. National Reports
6. Consolidation
7. Data
8. Energy Efficiency
9. Maintenance
10. Master Planning
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Prince Edward Island: Prince Edward Island Provincial Authority Over School Change. In P.E.I., the Public Schools Branch (a provincial entity) manages school closure processes under a "School Change" policy. The province, not municipal governments, has final authority to close or consolidate small schools when enrollment falls too low to support programming.

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Saskatchewan reduced the number of school divisions from 71 to 14 through a provincially driven amalgamation process. Local boards and municipalities expressed concern, but the province moved forward based on equity, staffing, and operational capacity. As with other examples, governance consolidation eventually led to program and facility rationalization, including the closure of very small schools.

Vermont: Act 46
Vermont encouraged voluntary mergers but Act 46 ultimately empowered the State Board of Education to mandate mergers when districts did not voluntarily consolidate into the state's preferred governance structures. The Vermont Supreme Court upheld the State's authority to do so. Even so, the process was contentious, with strong community resistance, lawsuits, and long-term political divisions.

West Virginia: West Virginia has one of the most centralized systems in the U.S. When the state takes over a county system due to fiscal or administrative concerns, it can make consolidation or closure decisions, even when local communities object, because final approval authority rests at the state level.

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Georgia: (Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. § 160-5-4-.01) requires each local school board to develop and submit a five-year Educational Facilities Construction Plan to the State Board of Education every five years, including inventory of all existing and currently funded school facilities, and historical and projected student enrollment data for the upcoming five years.

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Definition: Congress. Gov., Indefinite Delivery, Indefinite Quantity Contracts (IDIQ), https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF12558

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- Maryland Interagency Commission on School Construction, https://iac.mdschoolconstruction.org/?page_id=127
- Program Description, D25E03. https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/pubs/budgetfiscal/2026fy-budget-docs-operating-D25-Interagency-Commission-on-School-Construction.pdf
    - "Previously under the authority of the Board of Public Works (BPW) and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), IAC is an independent commission created by the 21st Century School Facilities Act (Chapter 14 of 2018). Members of the commission include the State Superintendent of Schools, the Secretary of Planning, the Secretary of General Services, two members of the public appointed by the Governor, two members of the public appointed by the President of the Senate, and two members of the public appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates. IAC staff assist the commission to administer school construction funding under the Built to Learn Act (Chapter 20 of 2020, as amended); the Public School Construction Program; and State supplemental grants, including the Aging Schools Program for public and nonpublic schools. IAC's budget includes funding for public school safety programs, although that program is administrated by the Maryland Center for School Safety – budget code R00A06.

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    - " . . . It is in the best interests of the commonwealth and its citizens to create an authority to achieve the objectives of effective management and planning of the commonwealth's investments in school building assets, promoting positive educational outcomes, ensuring the health, safety, security and well-being of students, easing and preventing overcrowding, maintaining good repair, efficient and economical construction and maintenance, financial sustainability of the school building assistance program, thoughtful community development, smart growth and accessibility."
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New Hampshire:

- School building Authority legislation, School Building Authority – State Guarantee, Chapter 195-C Section 195-C. https://www.gc.nh.gov/rsa/html/XV/195-C/195-C-1.htm
    - "There shall be a school building authority, referred to in this chapter as the authority, consisting of the state treasurer, the commissioner of education, the state fire marshal or designee, and 3 other members appointed by the governor, one of whom shall have expertise in education, one of whom shall have expertise in finance, and one of whom shall have expertise in building construction or engineering, with the advice and consent of the council, for terms of 3 years and until their successors are appointed and qualify."
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Rhode Island:

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    - Located within the RI Department of Education, the Authority's financial and program staff support development of projects. An advisory board (The Rhode Island School Building Authority Advisory Board) advises the Authority on the best use of the school building authority capital fund, including setting statewide priorities, criteria for project approval, and recommendations for project approval and prioritization.
    - Rhode Islan Department of Education: ((RIDE) School Building Authority) rules mandates five-year school facility master planning, overseen by the RIDE school Building Authority. Districts complete condition assessments, space/utilization analysis, lifecycle forecasting, and enrollment projections to inform a statewide Recommended Action Plan guiding funding priorities and investments.
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- Vermont Education Financing Report. https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-school-construction-aid-tf-draft-report-ri-school-buildings-tf-9-27-23.pdf

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    - "Among other responsibilities, the Wyoming School Facilities Commission sets standards and requirements, periodically evaluates facility adequacy, review district long-range plans, and prioritizes needs."
- Wyoming School Facilities Commission. *Wyoming School Facilities Commission The AiM of Government Transparency.* AiM by AssetWorks. https://www.goassetworks.com/hubfs/Blog/AssetWorks%20-%20Wyoming%20School%20Facilities%20Commission%20Case%20Study.pdf
    - Excerpts: "Prior to implementing a web-based Integrated Workplace Management System (IWMS), the SFC managed their facilities management and capital project funds in a variety of spreadsheets and nonintegrated databases. This system of accounting made reporting a difficult and time-consuming task. There was just no structure in place to manage funds effectively and, quite frankly, they did not even know how many projects were being funded. Controls over capital project monies did not exist and there was very little documentation on SFC business processes. After extensive analysis, the SFC concluded that out of 1,100 projects, 750 of those projects were overspent" "Anyone who now visits the Wyoming School Facilities Commission website can log into the AiM IWMS database and view financial reports."

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Appendix B
Charts and Graphs

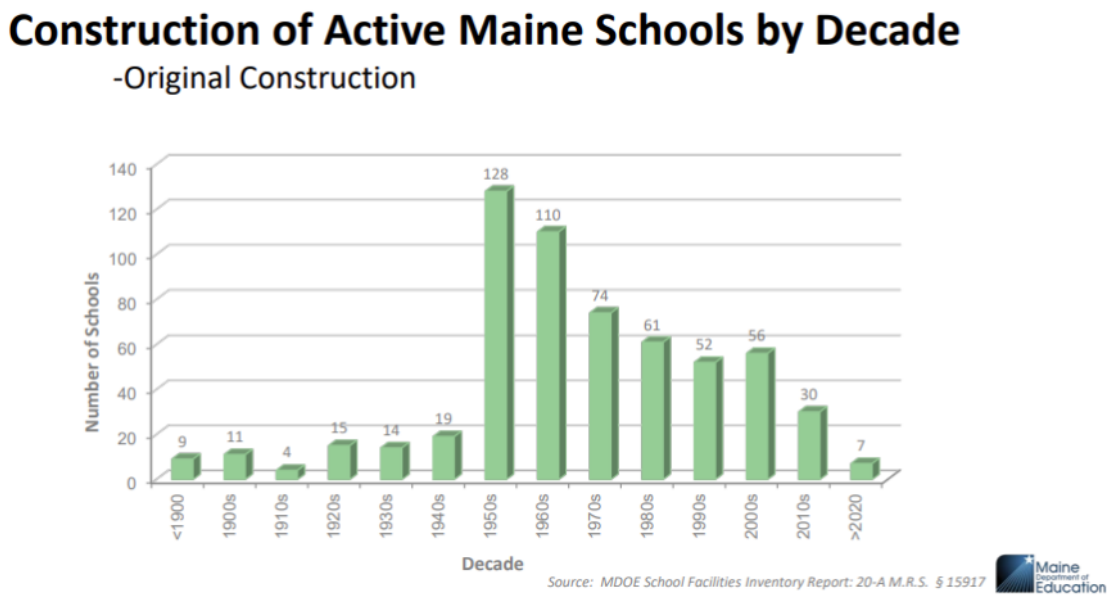
No.	Description
B1	Facilities Needs Analysis, Maine DOE

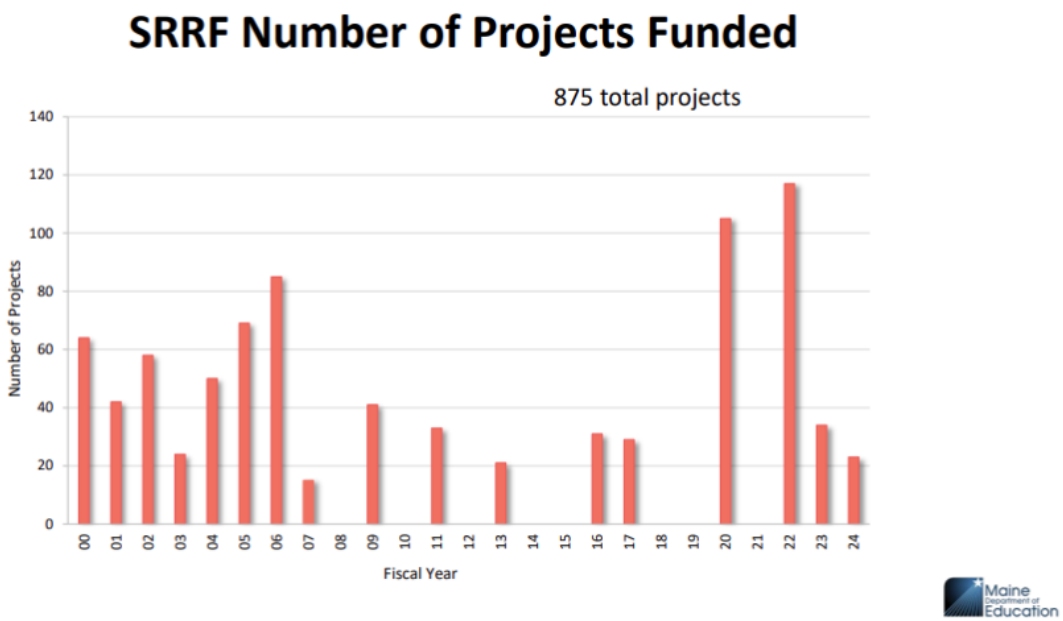
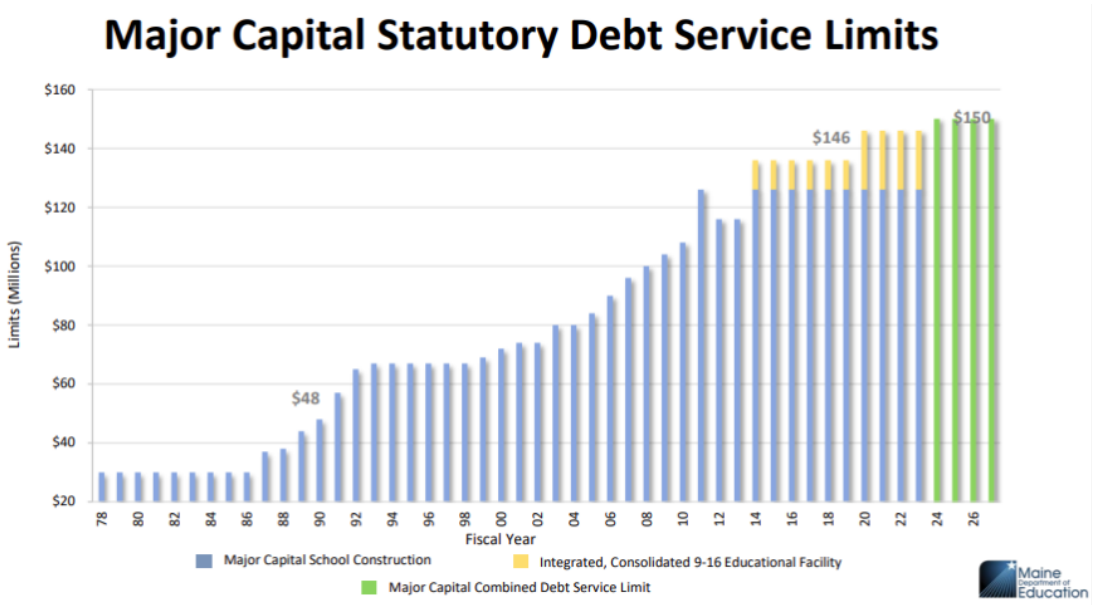
FACILITIES NEEDS ANALYSIS

Public School and CTE Needs Identified by the Maine School Building Inventory

	School Buildings	Square Footage	Estimated Cost	Estimated Total
New Construction and Significant Renovation Needs - *Schools constructed between 1804 and 1950 -*	83	4,190,617	$660/s.f.	2,765,807,220
Modernization thru Renovations and Updates of Codes, Energy Systems, Health & Safety, and Programming Improvements *Schoool constructed between 1951 and 1975 -*	273	15,771,906	$440/s.f.	$6,939,638,640
Modernization thru Light Renovations and Upgrades of Codes, Energy Sytems, Health & Safety, and Programming Improvements *School Constructed betweem 1976 and 2000 -*	141	7,128,744	$220/s.f.	$1,568,323,680
				$11,273,769,540

B2	Overview: Current State of School Construction and School Construction Funding *presentation*, Scott Brown, Director of School Facilities, Maine Department of Education and Paula Gravelle, Director of School Finance, Maine Department of Education. November 15, 2024. https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doe/files/inline-files/Governors%20Commission%20-%20November%2015%202024%20Meeting%20Presentation%20-%2011.19.2024.pdf



B3	Overview: Current State of School Construction and School Construction Funding *presentation*, Scott Brown, Director of School Facilities, Maine Department of Education and Paula Gravelle, Director of School Finance, Maine Department of Education. November 15, 2024. https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doe/files/inline-files/Governors%20Commission%20-%20November%2015%202024%20Meeting%20Presentation%20-%2011.19.2024.pdf 
B4	Overview: Current State of School Construction and School Construction Funding *presentation*, Scott Brown, Director of School Facilities, Maine Department of Education and Paula Gravelle, Director of School Finance, Maine Department of Education. November 15, 2024. https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doe/files/inline-files/Governors%20Commission%20-%20November%2015%202024%20Meeting%20Presentation%20-%2011.19.2024.pdf 

B5

Overview: Current State of School Construction and School Construction Funding *presentation*, Scott Brown, Director of School Facilities, Maine Department of Education and Paula Gravelle, Director of School Finance, Maine Department of Education. November 15, 2024. https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doe/files/inline-files/Governors%20Commission%20-%20November%2015%202024%20Meeting%20Presentation%20-%2011.19.2024.pdf

Major Capital Improvement – Current Bonded Debt

STATE OF MAINE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
DEBT SERVICE PAYMENTS BY FISCAL YEAR
BEGINNING WITH FY 2025

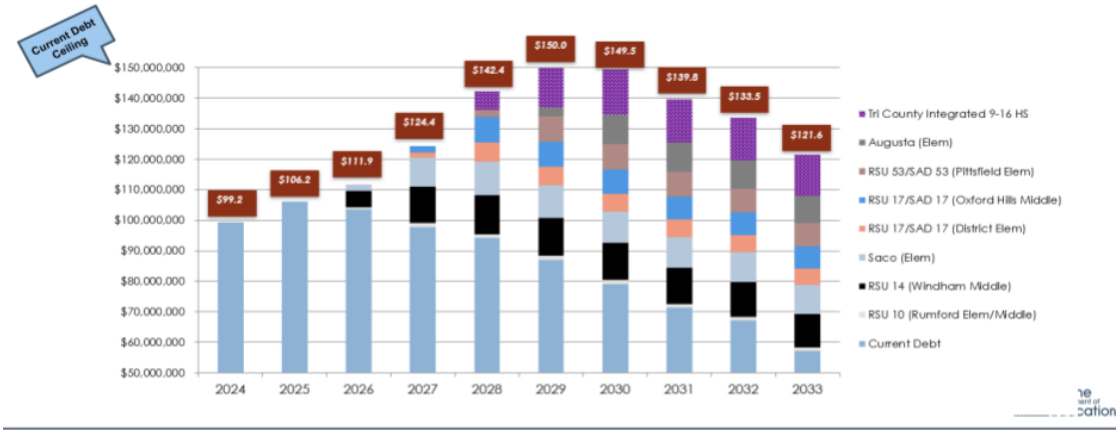
FISCAL YEAR		PRINCIPAL	INTEREST	TOTAL
2025	Grand Total	$76,449,669.34	$29,677,394.16	$106,127,063.50
2026	Grand Total	$75,950,557.29	$27,584,180.74	$103,534,738.03
2027	Grand Total	$72,650,854.26	$25,132,646.23	$97,783,500.49
2028	Grand Total	$71,533,352.22	$22,605,369.77	$94,138,721.99
2029	Grand Total	$66,550,555.33	$20,490,662.45	$87,041,217.78
2030	Grand Total	$60,464,436.33	$18,626,726.27	$79,091,162.60
2031	Grand Total	$54,472,520.39	$16,874,728.02	$71,347,248.41
2032	Grand Total	$51,939,322.58	$15,140,682.36	$67,080,004.94
2033	Grand Total	$43,595,786.09	$13,486,104.80	$57,081,890.89
2034	Grand Total	$43,595,786.09	$11,882,432.41	$55,478,218.50
2035	Grand Total	$43,595,557.09	$10,306,234.43	$53,901,791.52
2036	Grand Total	$43,595,557.09	$8,695,488.36	$52,291,045.45
2037	Grand Total	$42,095,173.70	$7,101,470.28	$49,196,643.98
2038	Grand Total	$41,128,085.75	$5,539,407.67	$46,667,493.42
2039	Grand Total	$30,724,683.34	$4,175,120.77	$34,899,804.11
2040	Grand Total	$25,413,213.04	$3,119,773.88	$28,532,986.92
2041	Grand Total	$18,725,800.15	$2,292,472.59	$21,018,272.74
2042	Grand Total	$18,725,800.15	$1,583,719.65	$20,309,519.80
2043	Grand Total	$11,877,899.73	$969,167.76	$12,847,067.49
2044	Grand Total	$9,096,344.35	$493,956.79	$9,590,301.14
2045	Grand Total	$5,876,344.35	$138,670.67	$6,015,015.02
	Total Currently Bonded Debt	$908,057,298.66	$245,916,410.06	$1,153,973,708.72

Maine Department of Education

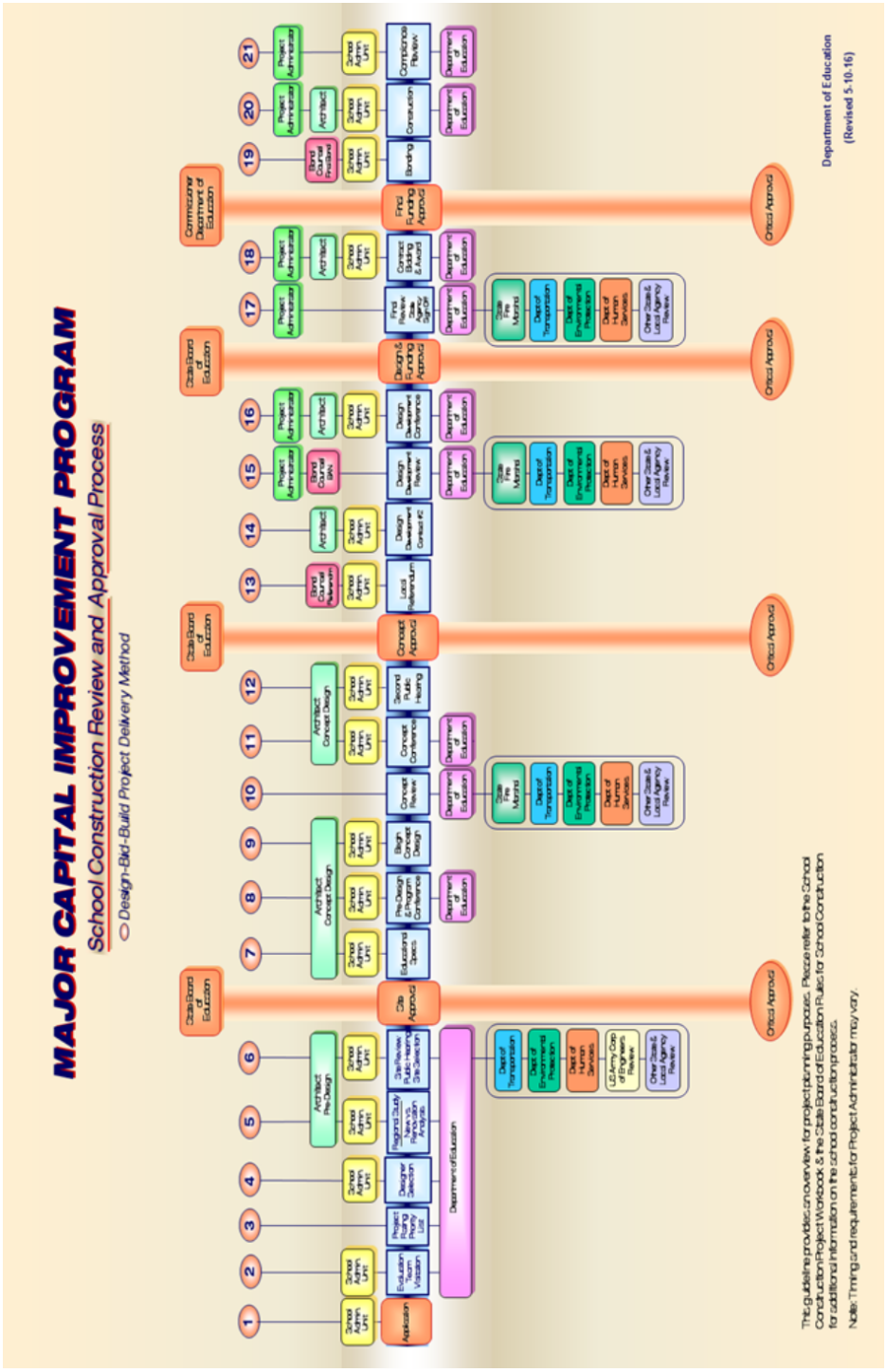
B6

Overview: Current State of School Construction and School Construction Funding *presentation*, Scott Brown, Director of School Facilities, Maine Department of Education and Paula Gravelle, Director of School Finance, Maine Department of Education. November 15, 2024. https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doe/files/inline-files/Governors%20Commission%20-%20November%2015%202024%20Meeting%20Presentation%20-%2011.19.2024.pdf

Major Capital Improvement – Debt Service Impact



B7	Major Capital Improvement Program, School Construction Review and Approval Process, Capital Projects, Maine Department of Education (21-Step Process)



B8 Review of Recent MCIP Cycles, Maine DOE

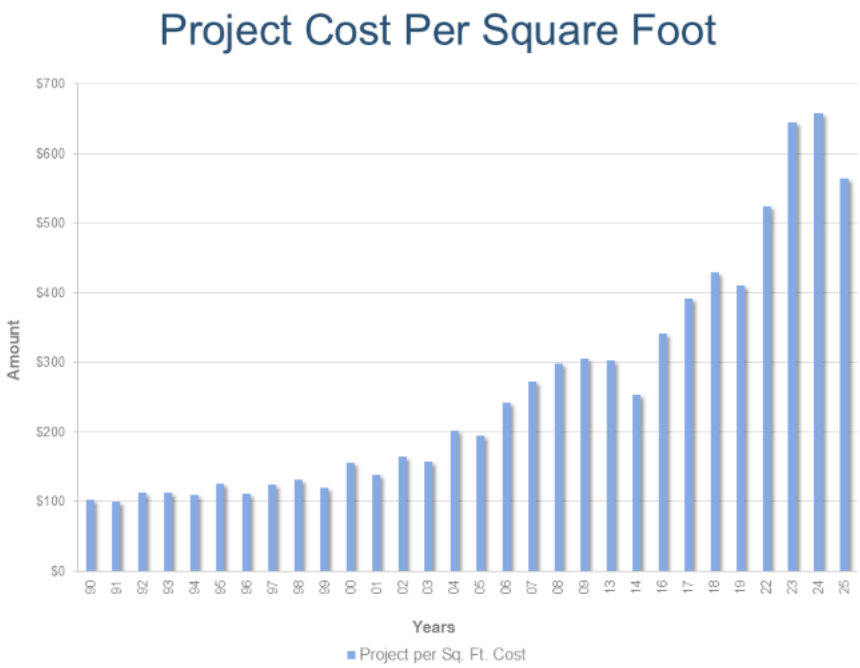
Recent MCIP Cycles

Cycle	# of Comprehensive School Construction Applications	# of Comprehensive School Construction Projects Funded	# of Maine Schools Closed (Consolidation)	# of Additional Schools Impacted	# of SAUs Impacted	# of Towns Impacted
2010-2011	71*	16	30	17	13	50
2017-2018	74**	9	22	18	8	32

* Repeat applications from previous cycle – 14 of 71 = 20%

** Repeat applications from previous cycle – 15 of 76 = 20%

Cost Per Square Foot, Maine DOE



B9

Paula Gravelle, Director of Public School Finance, Maine Department of Education, Potential % Enhancement Fund potential from Debt Service Delta. 2025

Debt Service Funding Required Compared to Debt Ceiling per year:

Fiscal Year	Principal & Interest Payments Bonded	Principal & Interest Payments Expected Bonds	Total Construction Debt	Debt Ceiling	Difference	Efficiency Percentage Options: 3%	5%	8%	10%
2025-26	$ 108,318,331.58	$ 6,521,468.36	$ 114,839,799.94	$ 150,000,000.00	$ 35,160,200.06	$ 1,054,806.00	$ 1,758,010.00	$ 2,812,816.00	$ 3,516,020.01
2026-27	$ 109,352,150.95	$ 22,648,326.28	$ 132,000,477.23	$ 150,000,000.00	$ 17,999,522.77	$ 539,985.68	$ 899,976.14	$ 1,439,961.82	$ 1,799,952.28
2027-28	$ 105,585,189.39	$ 35,930,767.34	$ 141,515,956.73	$ 150,000,000.00	$ 8,484,043.27	$ 254,521.30	$ 424,202.16	$ 678,723.46	$ 848,404.33
2028-29	$ 98,230,242.16	$ 44,139,965.96	$ 142,370,208.12	$ 150,000,000.00	$ 7,629,791.88	$ 228,893.76	$ 381,489.59	$ 610,383.35	$ 762,979.19
2029-30	$ 90,006,465.26	$ 49,674,289.58	$ 139,680,754.84	$ 150,000,000.00	$ 10,319,245.16	$ 309,577.35	$ 515,962.26	$ 825,539.61	$ 1,031,924.52
2030-31	$ 81,972,746.52	$ 48,464,238.20	$ 130,436,984.72	$ 150,000,000.00	$ 19,563,015.28	$ 586,890.46	$ 978,150.76	$ 1,565,041.22	$ 1,956,301.53
2031-32	$ 77,415,256.01	$ 47,254,186.83	$ 124,669,442.84	$ 150,000,000.00	$ 25,330,557.16	$ 759,916.71	$ 1,266,527.86	$ 2,026,444.57	$ 2,533,055.72
2032-33	$ 67,126,157.42	$ 46,044,135.45	$ 113,170,292.87	$ 150,000,000.00	$ 36,829,707.13	$ 1,104,891.21	$ 1,841,485.36	$ 2,946,376.57	$ 3,682,970.71
2033-34	$ 65,230,812.17	$ 44,834,084.07	$ 110,064,896.24	$ 150,000,000.00	$ 39,935,103.76	$ 1,198,053.11	$ 1,996,755.19	$ 3,194,808.30	$ 3,993,510.38
2034-35	$ 63,362,024.01	$ 43,624,032.70	$ 106,986,056.71	$ 150,000,000.00	$ 43,013,943.29	$ 1,290,418.30	$ 2,150,697.16	$ 3,441,115.46	$ 4,301,394.33
2035-36	$ 61,458,031.76	$ 42,413,981.32	$ 103,872,013.08	$ 150,000,000.00	$ 46,127,986.92	$ 1,383,839.61	$ 2,306,399.35	$ 3,690,238.95	$ 4,612,798.69
2036-37	$ 58,068,889.47	$ 41,203,929.94	$ 99,272,819.41	$ 150,000,000.00	$ 50,727,180.59	$ 1,521,815.42	$ 2,536,359.03	$ 4,058,174.45	$ 5,072,718.06
2037-38	$ 55,243,351.03	$ 39,993,878.56	$ 95,237,229.59	$ 150,000,000.00	$ 54,762,770.41	$ 1,642,883.11	$ 2,738,138.52	$ 4,381,021.63	$ 5,476,277.04
2038-39	$ 43,178,143.01	$ 38,783,827.19	$ 81,961,970.20	$ 150,000,000.00	$ 68,038,029.80	$ 2,041,140.89	$ 3,401,901.49	$ 5,443,042.38	$ 6,803,802.98
2039-40	$ 36,512,858.21	$ 37,573,775.81	$ 74,086,634.02	$ 150,000,000.00	$ 75,913,365.98	$ 2,277,400.98	$ 3,795,668.30	$ 6,073,069.28	$ 7,591,336.60
2040-41	$ 28,698,727.51	$ 36,363,724.43	$ 65,062,451.94	$ 150,000,000.00	$ 84,937,548.06	$ 2,548,126.44	$ 4,246,877.40	$ 6,795,003.84	$ 8,493,754.81
2041-42	$ 27,689,525.56	$ 35,153,673.06	$ 62,843,198.62	$ 150,000,000.00	$ 87,156,801.38	$ 2,614,704.04	$ 4,357,840.07	$ 6,972,544.11	$ 8,715,680.14
2042-43	$ 19,925,611.43	$ 33,943,621.68	$ 53,869,233.11	$ 150,000,000.00	$ 96,130,766.89	$ 2,883,923.01	$ 4,806,538.34	$ 7,690,461.35	$ 9,613,076.69
2043-44	$ 16,366,586.76	$ 32,733,570.30	$ 49,100,157.06	$ 150,000,000.00	$ 100,899,842.94	$ 3,026,995.29	$ 5,044,992.15	$ 8,071,987.44	$ 10,089,984.29
2044-45	$ 12,488,437.58	$ 31,523,518.92	$ 44,011,956.50	$ 150,000,000.00	$ 105,988,043.50	$ 3,179,641.30	$ 5,299,402.17	$ 8,479,043.48	$ 10,598,804.35
2045-46	$ 6,170,087.51	$ 30,313,467.55	$ 36,483,555.06	$ 150,000,000.00	$ 113,516,444.94	$ 3,405,493.35	$ 5,675,822.25	$ 9,081,315.60	$ 11,351,644.49
2046-47	$ -	$ 18,958,617.43	$ 18,958,617.43	$ 150,000,001.00	$ 131,041,383.57	$ 3,931,241.51	$ 6,552,069.18	$ 10,483,310.69	$ 13,104,138.36
2047-48	$ -	$ 9,728,625.00	$ 9,728,625.00	$ 150,000,002.00	$ 140,271,377.00	$ 4,208,141.31	$ 7,013,568.85	$ 11,221,710.16	$ 14,027,137.70
2048-49	$ -	$ 4,606,875.00	$ 4,606,875.00	$ 150,000,003.00	$ 145,393,128.00	$ 4,361,793.84	$ 7,269,656.40	$ 11,631,450.24	$ 14,539,312.80
	$ 1,232,399,625.29	**$ 822,430,580.97**	**$ 2,054,830,206.26**	**$ 3,600,000,006.00**	**$ 1,545,169,799.74**	**$ 46,355,093.99**	**$ 77,258,489.99**	**$ 123,613,583.98**	**$ 154,516,979.97**

Note: Current Bonded are approved projects already funded; Expected bonds are estimated costs over 30 years for approved projects from the 2018 priority list not yet funded.

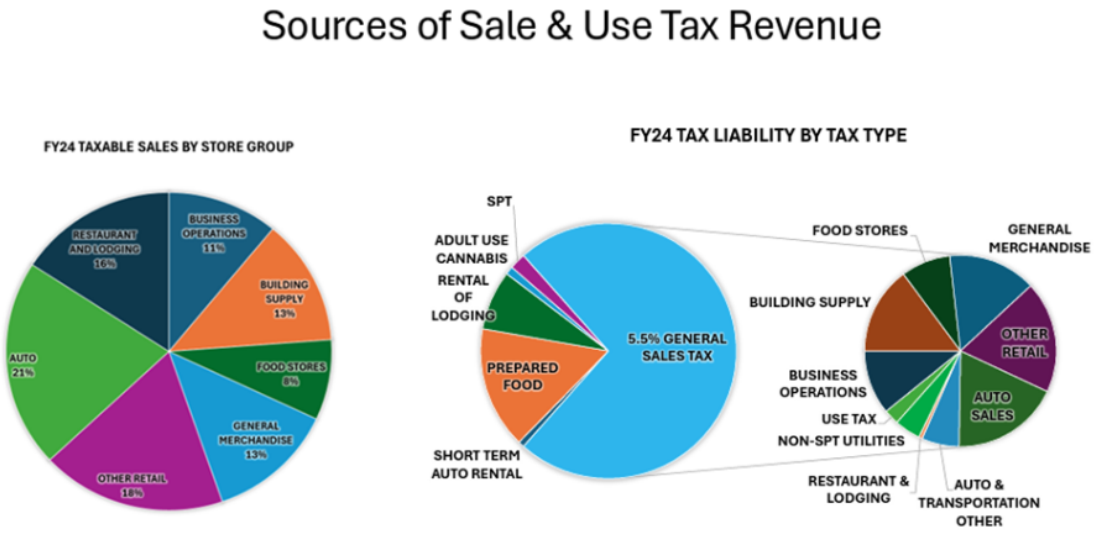
B10 Locally Raised Nonstate Debt 2021-2025, Maine DOE

Local Raised Nonstate Debt 2021-2025

Sum of Amount_Value	Column Labels					
Row Labels	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Grand Total
Appleton School Department	56,935.00		41,656.50		44,968.29	143,559.79
Athens Public Schools	2,750.00	2,750.00				5,500.00
Auburn School Department	102,473.04	311,789.04	894,187.08	1,187,586.00	1,155,648.96	3,651,684.12
Augusta Public Schools	212,275.00	205,675.00	194,150.00	187,750.00	139,075.00	938,925.00
Bangor School Department					2,180,000.00	2,180,000.00
Biddeford School Department	2,547,691.00	2,484,573.00	2,427,070.00	2,360,743.00	2,296,061.00	12,116,138.00
Brewer School Department	186,842.04	193,460.04	150,825.00	145,946.04	142,455.00	819,528.12
Brunswick School Department	1,613,221.00	1,643,720.00	1,639,866.00		1,636,124.69	6,532,931.69
Cape Elizabeth School Department	454,800.00	439,400.00	419,000.00	398,800.00	228,800.00	1,940,800.00
Cranberry Isles School Department	71,031.00	71,031.00	71,031.00	71,031.00		284,124.00
East Millinocket School Department	46,441.00					46,441.00
Easton School Department					257,000.00	257,000.00
Ellsworth School Department	82,510.11	83,059.34	88,100.50	85,784.74	82,345.63	421,800.32
Falmouth School Department	778,737.00	764,326.00	740,975.00	719,850.00	703,800.00	3,707,688.00
Five Town CSD	758,824.07	717,511.90	692,486.40	666,081.84	656,500.20	3,491,404.41
Gorham School Department	593,959.00	740,888.00	1,251,288.00	1,256,943.00	1,795,917.00	5,638,995.00
Great Salt Bay CSD					113,779.10	113,779.10
Hermon School Department	610,419.00	601,060.60	591,523.56	581,731.56	571,608.00	2,956,342.72
Islesboro School Department	171,910.00	175,020.00	176,481.00	196,965.00	189,438.00	909,814.00
Kittery School Department	769,972.00	720,997.00	697,793.00	469,938.00	459,075.00	3,117,775.00
Lake View Plt. School Department	40,634.27					40,634.27
Lewiston School Department	1,466,928.96	2,365,968.72	2,013,465.00	1,985,163.00	1,922,604.00	9,754,129.68
Lisbon School Department	454,034.00	446,833.00	438,820.00	430,229.00	421,264.00	2,191,180.00
Millinocket School Department	97,208.00	95,065.89			95,065.89	287,339.78
Mount Desert School Department	317,132.00	301,397.00	285,154.00			903,683.00
MSAD 46	40,226.76	38,663.89	37,078.42	36,716.17	36,354.92	189,040.16
Mt Desert CSD	519,849.00	136,922.00	109,819.00	107,657.00	105,459.00	979,706.00
Northport Public Schools	259,466.00	254,243.70	249,403.24	254,974.61	245,890.66	1,263,978.21
Portage Lake	28,855.00	30,478.00	33,743.00	34,283.00	33,562.00	160,921.00
Portland Public Schools	392,289.00	385,252.00	1,477,412.00	272,722.00	368,211.00	2,895,886.00
RSU 01	1,316,616.00		599,850.00		566,746.00	2,483,212.00

RSU 02		36,724.68			33,343.47	70,068.15
RSU 05			10,424.50	122,377.00	121,247.63	254,049.13
RSU 06/MSAD 06	186,327.95	172,627.97	98,907.93	624,793.35	90,408.99	1,173,066.19
RSU 07/MSAD 07	147,892.00	70,639.50	135,864.00	121,090.85	144,096.25	619,582.60
RSU 08/MSAD 08	82,859.35	79,587.26	47,866.09	41,377.81	35,963.43	287,653.94
RSU 09	577,497.16	534,783.86	186,813.43	201,235.40	198,825.85	1,699,155.70
RSU 12			7,889,904.86			7,889,904.86
RSU 13	2,517,000.12	2,465,565.00	2,284,398.96	2,175,495.84	2,400,601.09	11,843,061.01
RSU 14	436,374.95	419,500.00	397,750.00	379,250.00		1,632,874.95
RSU 15/MSAD 15	629,408.00	633,221.00	593,097.00	573,152.00	536,574.00	2,965,452.00
RSU 16	425,425.04	420,194.97	414,866.06	409,394.00	412,115.00	2,081,995.07
RSU 17/MSAD 17	34,858.00	32,368.95	32,253.79	32,369.00	310,105.58	441,955.32
RSU 18	52,925.00	49,250.10				102,175.10
RSU 19	123,650.04	125,000.04				248,650.08
RSU 21	4,909,732.00	4,682,998.00	4,384,203.00	4,246,325.92	4,009,184.11	22,232,443.03
RSU 22	570,297.12	493,888.02	493,888.02	435,159.21	277,435.43	2,270,667.80
RSU 24	181,584.48	133,255.35	164,595.06	165,603.23	162,879.52	807,917.64
RSU 25	215,337.84	210,985.56	229,034.40	384,565.32	371,657.30	1,411,580.42
RSU 28/MSAD 28	3,827,912.00	3,718,485.41	3,611,338.92	3,464,898.00	3,491,200.08	18,113,834.41
RSU 32/MSAD 32	66,805.65	74,800.11	74,595.49	70,333.06	65,500.72	352,035.03
RSU 33/MSAD 33		17,377.20				17,377.20
RSU 34	375,995.37	375,995.37	375,995.37	375,995.37	375,995.37	1,879,976.85
RSU 38	681,742.00	102,635.00	97,104.11			881,481.11
RSU 39	97,567.00	113,336.00	141,319.00	189,111.00	186,097.84	727,430.84
RSU 40/MSAD 40	760,899.64	98,224.12	94,207.78	90,580.98	83,902.92	1,127,815.44
RSU 51/MSAD 51	2,368,904.78	2,312,718.91	2,254,853.20	2,269,745.51	2,119,942.82	11,326,165.22
RSU 52/MSAD 52	317,809.00	306,579.00	290,509.00	285,033.00	273,243.00	1,473,173.00
RSU 54/MSAD 54	22,386.69	21,588.41	20,930.97	20,031.32	18,655.04	103,592.43
RSU 55/MSAD 55	125,159.52	121,297.91	117,331.44			363,788.87
RSU 56	9,308.88	9,556.32	9,166.08	8,812.32	8,163.36	45,006.96
RSU 57/MSAD 57	59,016.56	57,241.37	55,086.08	53,010.27	51,425.00	275,779.28
RSU 59/MSAD 59	20,349.38	20,402.50				40,751.88
RSU 61/MSAD 61	1,630,143.00	1,920,937.00	1,855,853.00	1,855,141.00	1,847,688.00	9,109,762.00
RSU 64/MSAD 64	21,536.70	21,577.92	20,709.02	20,893.04	20,163.34	104,880.02
RSU 71	1,270,167.97	1,308,693.17	1,286,846.79	905,672.33	881,291.56	5,652,671.82
RSU 75/MSAD 75	562,189.71	540,647.93	511,674.00	505,091.00	4,277,546.39	6,397,149.03
RSU 79/MSAD 01	256,303.00	247,393.00	238,323.00	215,438.09	215,000.04	1,172,457.13
Saint George Public Schools	133,743.60	134,127.92	99,283.80	107,487.60	92,850.89	567,493.81
Sanford School Department	975,293.00	543,452.41	623,439.64	692,487.41	692,486.84	3,527,159.30
Scarborough School Department	5,309,738.00	5,537,376.00	5,712,560.00	5,548,580.00	5,193,479.00	27,301,733.00
South Portland School Department	3,794,524.00	3,696,349.00	2,959,357.00	2,977,824.00	3,499,006.00	16,927,060.00
Southwest Harbor School Department	261,050.00					261,050.00
Wells-Ogunquit CSD					1,788,975.00	1,788,975.00
Westbrook School Department	2,854,266.27	2,620,278.00	2,535,752.94	2,492,593.00	2,446,986.12	12,949,876.33
Winterville Plt. Public Schools	4,056.00		3,971.00			8,027.00
Wiscasset School Department			2,543,770.00	2,972,151.00	3,294,456.00	8,810,377.00
Yarmouth Schools	2,379,625.00	2,523,454.00	2,572,862.00	2,540,999.00	2,503,255.00	12,520,195.00
York School Department	1,850,803.00	1,780,044.00	1,886,587.00	1,784,903.00	1,621,551.03	8,923,888.03
Grand Total	**55,122,494.02**	**51,995,243.36**	**62,678,471.43**	**50,809,895.19**	**60,601,052.35**	**281,207,156.35**

B11	Sale and Use Tax Revenue, Dr. Michael Allen, Associate Commissioner of Tax Policy, Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services, Maine DAFS Associate Commissioner for Tax Policy *presentation*, https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doe/files/inline-files/Governors%20Commission%20-%20Maine%20DAFS%20Associate%20Commissioner%20for%20Tax%20Policy%20Presentation%20-%201.25.2025.pdf



Appendix C

Debt Service

C1

Debt Service History

A	B	C	D
Year	State Share of Education (SSE)	Statutory Debt Ceiling for School Construction 20A-15905	Annual Debt Ceiling Percentage of (SSE) C/B
1990	$476,923,038	$48,000,000	10.06%
1991	$523,535,768	$57,000,000	10.89%
1992	$512,925,568	$65,000,000	12.67%
1993	$516,204,022	$67,000,000	12.98%
1994	$519,931,666	$67,000,000	12.89%
1995	$521,910,192	$67,000,000	12.84%
1996	$534,148,396	$67,000,000	12.54%
1997	$544,460,070	$67,000,000	12.31%
1998	$556,290,235	$67,000,000	12.04%
1999	$593,048,207	$69,000,000	11.63%
2000	$626,580,384	$72,000,000	11.49%
2001	$664,131,846	$74,000,000	11.14%
2002	$708,663,172	$74,000,000	10.44%
2003	$713,499,588	$80,000,000	11.21%
2004	$727,087,545	$80,000,000	11.00%
2005	$737,013,147	$84,000,000	11.40%
2006	$836,115,966	$90,000,000	10.76%
2007	$914,098,222	$96,000,000	10.50%
2008	$977,958,385	$100,000,000	10.23%
2009	$956,481,491	$104,000,000	10.87%
2010	$909,273,269	$108,000,000	11.88%
2011	$872,625,022	$126,000,000	14.44%
2012	$888,752,379	$116,000,000	13.05%
2013	$895,071,007	$116,000,000	12.96%
2014	$942,295,406	$136,000,000	14.43%
2015	$943,846,108	$136,000,000	14.41%
2016	$983,622,789	$136,000,000	13.83%
2017	$1,002,461,515	$136,000,000	13.57%
2018	$1,039,558,537	$136,000,000	13.08%
2019	$1,115,886,866	$136,000,000	12.19%
2020	$1,163,757,928	$146,000,000	12.55%
2021	$1,226,852,247	$146,000,000	11.90%
2022	$1,313,076,036	$146,000,000	11.12%
2023	$1,356,132,167	$146,000,000	10.77%
2024	$1,400,174,513	$150,000,000	10.71%
2025	$1,442,068,445	$150,000,000	10.40%
2026		$150,000,000	
2027		$150,000,000	avg
			11.98%

Debt Service Analysis

A	B	C	D
Year	Debt Service Limit 20A - 15905	Actual Debt Service Payments	% of Debt Ceiling Used C/B
1990	$48,000,000	$44,573,231	93%
1991	$57,000,000	$52,782,337	93%
1992	$65,000,000	$59,326,452	91%
1993	$67,000,000	$60,833,622	91%
1994	$67,000,000	$62,467,865	93%
1995	$67,000,000	$64,484,527	96%
1996	$67,000,000	$62,833,501	94%
1997	$67,000,000	$62,631,452	93%
1998	$67,000,000	$64,412,173	96%
1999	$69,000,000	$66,145,753	96%
2000	$72,000,000	$66,591,958	92%
2001	$74,000,000	$67,168,857	91%
2002	$74,000,000	$70,413,162	95%
2003	$80,000,000	$73,868,233	92%
2004	$80,000,000	$70,181,099	88%
2005	$84,000,000	$72,855,065	87%
2006	$90,000,000	$78,818,081	88%
2007	$96,000,000	$78,543,811	82%
2008	$100,000,000	$80,130,698	80%
2009	$104,000,000	$86,436,309	83%
2010	$108,000,000	$92,713,353	86%
2011	$126,000,000	$92,498,091	73%
2012	$116,000,000	$96,950,570	84%
2013	$116,000,000	$98,355,077	85%
2014	$136,000,000	$93,230,876	69%
2015	$136,000,000	$88,662,891	65%
2016	$136,000,000	$83,299,039	61%
2017	$136,000,000	$82,114,468	60%
2018	$136,000,000	$83,910,732	62%
2019	$136,000,000	$91,107,748	67%
2020	$146,000,000	$98,919,697	68%
2021	$146,000,000	$97,220,930	67%
2022	$146,000,000	$97,391,920	67%
2023	$146,000,000	$97,018,180	66%
2024	$150,000,000	$99,223,673	66%
2025	$150,000,000	$106,127,064	71%
2026	$150,000,000	$110,056,206	73%
2027	$150,000,000	$120,431,827	80%
2028		$130,069,489	
2029		$131,181,184	
2030			

Actual Debt Service Payments % of State Share of Education

A	B	C	D
Year	State Share of Education (SSE)	Actual Debt Service Payments	Actual Debt Service Payment as % of State Share of Education (SSE) C/B
1990	$476,923,038	$44,573,231	9.35%
1991	$523,535,768	$52,782,337	10.08%
1992	$512,925,568	$59,326,452	11.57%
1993	$516,204,022	$60,833,622	11.78%
1994	$519,931,666	$62,467,865	12.01%
1995	$521,910,192	$64,484,527	12.36%
1996	$534,148,396	$62,833,501	11.76%
1997	$544,460,070	$62,631,452	11.50%
1998	$556,290,235	$64,412,173	11.58%
1999	$593,048,207	$66,145,753	11.15%
2000	$626,580,384	$66,591,958	10.63%
2001	$664,131,846	$67,168,857	10.11%
2002	$708,663,172	$70,413,162	9.94%
2003	$713,499,588	$73,868,233	10.35%
2004	$727,087,545	$70,181,099	9.65%
2005	$737,013,147	$72,855,065	9.89%
2006	$836,115,966	$78,818,081	9.43%
2007	$914,098,222	$78,543,811	8.59%
2008	$977,958,385	$80,130,698	8.19%
2009	$956,481,491	$86,436,309	9.04%
2010	$909,273,269	$92,713,353	10.20%
2011	$872,625,022	$92,498,091	10.60%
2012	$888,752,379	$96,950,570	10.91%
2013	$895,071,007	$98,355,077	10.99%
2014	$942,295,406	$93,230,876	9.89%
2015	$943,846,108	$88,662,891	9.39%
2016	$983,622,789	$83,299,039	8.47%
2017	$1,002,461,515	$82,114,468	8.19%
2018	$1,039,558,537	$83,910,732	8.07%
2019	$1,115,886,866	$91,107,748	8.16%
2020	$1,163,757,928	$98,919,697	8.50%
2021	$1,226,852,247	$97,220,930	7.92%
2022	$1,313,076,036	$97,391,920	7.42%
2023	$1,356,132,167	$97,018,180	7.15%
2024	$1,400,174,513	$99,223,673	7.09%
2025	$1,442,068,445	$106,127,064	7.36%
2026		$110,056,206	
2027		$120,431,827	avg
		$130,069,489	9.70%
		$131,181,184	

% Increase Comparison

Increases in State Share of Education		
1990		$476,923,038
2025		$1,442,068,445
	% increase	**202%**
Increases in Statutory Debt Ceiling		
1990		$48,000,000
2025		$150,000,000
	% increase	**213%**
Increases in Actual Debt Service Payments		
1990		$44,573,231
2025		$106,127,064
	% increase	**138%**
Increases in Project Costs of Approved Projects		
1990		$102 s.f.
2025		$661 s.f.
	% increase	**548%**

Appendix D

Interactive Infrastructure Data Dashboard - example	
D1	Rachel Schoenberg, Cody Snow, and Hardik Bisnoi. (2025). *Maine School Closures: A Predictable Crisis*. Data visualization project for Maine Redevelopment Land Bank Authority. https://nudataviz.github.io/project-fall25-mrlba/Methodology_Citations

Appendix E

Consolidation Narrative by Rhonda Sperrey, Superintendent, RSU 64	
E1	

Doing More Together: The Story of RSU 64's Central Community Elementary School

It is often said that we can do more together than any one of us can do alone. Nowhere is this more evident than in communities that choose collaboration over division, hope over fear, and vision over status quo. The success in doing more together is a sentiment that is often realized in communities where people come together to navigate complex issues, explore possible solutions to challenges, and commit to action steps necessary for continued follow through toward desired outcomes. Group processing like this requires individual members to engage in significant dialogue about the identified desired outcomes and the pathway forward that is necessary in order to meet them. This process requires that individuals remain committed to vision casting, fact finding, capacity building, and forward thinking. This is the story of how one small district - RSU 64 - did just that. This is a story of a district that came together to reimagine elementary education, resulting in the construction of a new school that changed the future for children and families across five towns.

RSU 64 serves the students of Bradford, Corinth, Hudson, Kenduskeag, and Stetson. In 2011, the district had 1,194 students and seven schools: five elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school.

At the elementary level, the situation was complicated:

- **Bradford Elementary School** – 77 students, Grades K–2
- **Kenduskeag Elementary School** – 169 students, Grades K–2
- **Stetson Elementary School** – 45 students, Grades K–2
- **Hudson Elementary School** – 46 students, Grades 3–4
- **Morison Memorial School (Corinth)** – 218 students, Grades 3–5

Enrollment numbers and staffing levels often dictated where children attended school, sometimes placing students outside of their own town. Each building faced unique challenges: overcrowding in some, under-enrollment in others, and limited space for programs such as special education, art, music, or physical education. Only one school had a gymnasium, and only one had a production kitchen. Meals were prepared at the middle school and driven daily to the elementary schools, where students ate in their classrooms, with their teachers.

Several of the district's elementary buildings were aging and inadequate, and leaders knew change was necessary.

In 2010, RSU 64 applied to the Maine Department of Education's Major Capital Improvement Program, which evaluates school facilities across the state. Enrollment projections were completed and site visits were had. Applications were scored on three categories: Buildings and Grounds, School Population, and Program and Planning.

When the evaluation results were released on March 9, 2011, Morison Memorial School ranked as the **number one proposed priority in Maine** for a major capital construction project. The district's other four elementary schools fell further down the list, including one ranked dead last.

The news spread quickly. Excitement rippled through the community, sparking conversations about the possibilities. At first, many imagined simply replacing Morison Memorial with a new school for grades 3–5. But soon, a bigger vision began to take shape: what if RSU 64 consolidated all five elementary schools into one?

As word of a potential consolidation grew, so did debate. Initially several parents expressed worry about losing the small school in their town.

Parents expressed concerns about longer bus rides, larger class sizes, and the fear that their children would be "lost" in a bigger building. Many valued the intimacy and community of their town's small school, and they resisted the thought of letting that go.

What is extraordinary about this process was how the community engaged with one another. Concerns weren't dismissed; they were heard—repeatedly, respectfully, and with patience. And slowly, through listening and dialogue, something remarkable began to happen: fears started to transform into vision.

Community members began to ask bold questions:

- **Programs & Learning:** What if every child had access to PreK, art, music, physical education, and a real library?
- **Facilities:** What if students had a gymnasium for PE, assemblies, and community events? What if every child could eat in a cafeteria with meals prepared onsite instead of eating in a classroom, meals that had been brought in daily from another facility?
- **Student Services:** What if therapies, counseling, and health services were delivered in dedicated spaces instead of closets or hallways, or not at all?
- **Equity & Efficiency:** What if transportation was streamlined, maintenance costs reduced, and staff were able to collaborate more effectively?

These "what ifs" shifted the conversation. Parents who had once opposed consolidation began to see what could be gained—not just for their own children, but for every child in the district. Parents began to realize that if they wanted to make education better for their child, they needed to focus on making education better for all of the children, regardless of which town they lived in. Several of these parents joined the Building Design Committee, and their voices proved essential in shaping the vision for what would become **Central Community Elementary School**.

The dream became reality: a single elementary school that brought all of RSU 64's youngest learners together in one learning community.

With the opening of **Central Community Elementary School**, the district gained:

- A PreK program, available for the first time.
- Robust art, music, library, guidance, physical education, and health services.
- Expanded special education programming and appropriate spaces for therapies.
- A gymnasium, cafeteria, and playgrounds designed for students' needs.
- Warm, safe, well-lit classrooms where every child could thrive.

The new school didn't just consolidate five buildings; it created a new identity and a stronger sense of unity across the five towns. For students, it meant equitable access to the kinds of programs every child deserves. For teachers, it meant space to collaborate and innovate. For families, it meant reassurance that their children were learning in a facility designed for the future.

Today, when students walk through the doors of Central Community Elementary School, they enter more than a building. They step into a vision brought to life by a community that believed in doing more together.

The success of the project wasn't just in the physical building itself, but in the culture that was created: a culture of respect, listening, and collective action. Parents and educators showed children what it means to dream, to compromise, and to work toward a shared future.

This is more than the story of a construction project. It is the story of a community that modeled for its children the very lesson it hoped to teach them: that together, we can achieve far more than any one of us can do alone.

Appendix F

Foundation for Sustainable Schools: Details

F1

Anthony Jaccarino, Senior Program Officer, Maine Health and Higher Educational Facilities Authority, Maine Municipal Bond Bank, Topic: Foundation for Sustainable Schools (provided to the commission.)

Foundation for Sustainable Schools – for discussion

Recommendation to create an independent foundation to support the mission of having clean, safe, schools for all Maine students. The primary function of the foundation is philanthropy targeted at any and all aspects of school construction and maintenance in the form of major gifts, pledges, grassroots funding (i.e. payroll contributions) along with targeted gifts and pledges for specific project or regional profiles.

A secondary function of the foundation is the messaging and branding of the work as a natural byproduct of the development work. Foundation leadership is the most likely first point of contact for potential P3 opportunities and other non-traditional approaches to creating learning spaces for K-12 students.

Key Benefit: A private corporation has greater flexibility to enter into partnerships and agreements than a state quasi organization. Finances would be under the control of an independent board of trustees free of any political pressures and state budget fluctuations.

Structure:
The creation of an independent foundation assumes a fully operational *Office of School Construction* with the creation of the foundation 2-3 years later. Seed work for the foundation can begin with a Development Director in the OSC who can later transition to the foundation.

	Office of School Construction	Foundation
Form	Quasi State/Instrumentality	Independent 501c3 Public Benefit Corp.
Funding	State	Self
Primary Focus	• Analytics • Master Planning • Implementation • Technical Support • Design • Procurement • Efficiencies/Scale	• Fund Development • Vision, messaging and advocacy • Partner Development
Governance	Board of Governors	Board of Trustees
Alignment	Bylaws Board Selection Memorandum of Understanding	

Appendix G

Executive Order	
G1	Executive Order 1: An Order Establishing The Governor's Commission on School Construction, Office of the Governor (Janet T. Mills), FY24/25.

FY 24/25

WHEREAS, every child in Maine should be able to attend a safe, modern, efficient, and accessible public school, regardless of where they live;

WHEREAS, the Mills Administration, in partnership with the Legislature, has made record investments in the construction and renovation of Maine schools, providing $580 million since 2019 to finance the renovation or construction of new schools and to provide debt service for school construction loans;

WHEREAS, even with these investments, the need for construction and renovation of public school facilities across the State far outpaces available funding;

WHEREAS, the current funding model for school construction is inequitable and often disadvantages communities based on local taxpayers' ability to finance projects;

WHEREAS, many of Maine's public school facilities require improvements to enhance safety and community access while reducing energy costs through investments in energy efficiency, clean energy, and modern technologies;

WHEREAS, these problems require a well-informed, feasible plan for addressing the current and future needs of public school facilities;

WHEREAS, Maine's approach to school construction financing, including all laws and regulations, deserves a comprehensive review;

WHEREAS, the Maine Department of Education identified the need for an analysis identifying the most fiscally responsible and equitable method of funding public school construction;

WHEREAS, State officials and legislators would benefit from policy recommendations to support the current and future needs of Maine students, school staff, and communities more effectively and equitably;

WHEREAS, a comprehensive evaluation of school construction financing has not occurred since 1997:

NOW THEREFORE, I, Janet T. Mills, Governor of the State of Maine, pursuant to authority conferred by Me. Const. Art. V, Pt. 1, §§ 1 & 12, do hereby Order the following:

1. **Commission Established; Purpose**
    1. The Governor's Commission on School Construction ("Commission") is hereby established.
    2. The purpose of the Commission is to conduct a comprehensive review of school construction needs throughout the State and provide a report with recommendations that:
        1. Identify school construction and renovation needs by collecting stakeholder input and reviewing any available reports, data and other relevant materials;
        2. Provide analysis summarizing how other states fund public school facilities, including but not limited to other state funding mechanisms, revenue sources and other financing mechanisms;
        3. Outline necessary changes in current state law, rules and policies controlling school construction including, but not limited to, new construction, renovations, leased space, maintenance and capital improvement plans and financing options in order to determine where changes are needed and provide any recommended revisions in current state law, rules and policy in order to implement the recommended revisions. In conducting the review and analysis, the commission shall examine whether to establish a school building finance authority, its potential role and responsibilities, and whether such a financing authority would benefit the State, school administrative units and municipalities.
    3. In conducting its duties, the Commission shall solicit broad input representing local school construction needs and financing abilities, and invite comment from school administrative units, municipal leaders, state legislators, experts in school construction, including architects, engineers, energy and building decarbonization professionals and building contractors, particularly those with experience supporting clean energy projects in schools; as well as the general public.
2. **Membership and Chairs**
    1. The Commission shall consist of the following members:
        1. The Commissioner of Education or the Commissioner's designee;
        2. The Commissioner of Administrative and Financial Services or the Commissioner's designee;
        3. The Chair of the State Board of Education or the Chair's designee;

4. The Director of the State Bureau of General Services or the Director's designee;
5. Three members who are current or former school superintendents, selected by the Commissioner of Education;
6. A representative of the Maine School Boards Association;
7. A representative of the Maine Association of School Business Officials;
8. A representative from the construction industry in Maine;
9. A representative from the Maine Municipal Bond Bank; and
10. A representative of the Maine Municipal Association.

2. The Governor shall designate one additional member with relevant expertise to serve as Chair of the Commission.

3. **Funding and Staffing**

1. The Department of Education shall provide necessary staffing services to the Commission and may seek staffing and financial support from other state agencies and private entities to accomplish the goals and work of the commission;
2. The Chair and members of the Commission shall serve without compensation.

4. **Proceedings and Records**

1. The Chair will preside at, set the agenda for, and schedule Commission meetings. The Commission shall meet as often as it deems necessary to complete its work. To the extent practical the Commission should conduct its work in a manner that is open and accessible to the public. Records, proceedings and deliberations of the Commission are not subject to the requirements of 1 M.R.S. c. 13, in accordance with sections 402(2)(F), (3)(J) and § 403(6) of that Chapter. The Commission may conduct its work through subcommittees.
2. The Commission shall issue a report of its findings to the Governor and the Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs and the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs no later than April 15, 2025.

Janet T. Mills
Governor