MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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132nd MAINE LEGISLATURE

FIRST REGULAR SESSION-2025

Legislative Document

No. 437

H.P. 291

House of Representatives, February 4, 2025

An Act Directing the Department of Education to Develop Pilot Programs to Place Child Care Facilities in Selected School Administrative Units

Reference to the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs suggested and ordered printed.

ROBERT B. HUNT
Clerk

Presented by Representative GOLEK of Harpswell.

Cosponsored by Representatives: CLOUTIER of Lewiston, DHALAC of South Portland,

GATTINE of Westbrook, Senator: RENY of Lincoln.

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

Sec. 1. 20-A MRSA §4017 is enacted to read:

§4017. Pilot programs to establish child care facilities in public schools

The department shall conduct a study to place child care facilities in public schools for infants, toddlers and preschool-aged children. Based on the study, the department shall develop and implement pilot programs in at least 8 school administrative units. Pilot programs developed pursuant to this section must be operational no later than the first day of the 2026-2027 school year.

- 1. **Duration.** Pilot programs established pursuant to this section must be designed to last 6 years.
- **2. Reports.** The department shall submit to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education matters the following reports.
 - A. No later than November 4, 2026, the department shall submit a report detailing the findings of the study, including any recommendations for legislation and information about the pilot programs established, including the initial progress of those programs. The committee may report out legislation based on the report to the 133rd Legislature in 2027.
 - B. No later than December 5, 2029, the department shall submit an interim report detailing the progress of the program and any findings related to the program, including any recommendations for legislation. The committee may report out legislation based on the report to the Second Regular Session of the 134th Legislature.
 - C. No later than November 3, 2032, the department shall submit a final report detailing the progress of the program and any findings related to the program, including any recommendations for legislation. The committee may report out legislation based on the report to the 136th Legislature in 2033.
- Sec. 2. Pilot programs placing child care facilities in public schools; purposes. The Department of Education shall develop pilot programs to place child care facilities in public schools pursuant to the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 20-A, section 4017 to serve the following purposes:
- 1. Providing an early childhood education course in child development combined with hands-on training for 11th and 12th grade public school students and child care courses involving the developmental stages of infants, toddlers and preschool-aged children;
- 2. Providing nurturing quality child care and age-appropriate learning experiences in a safe and secure environment for infants, toddlers and preschool-aged children;
- 3. Providing quality child care for children of all public school staff and employees during employment hours;
- 4. Creating a source of early childhood educators and caregivers to help reduce the shortage of child care workers in the State; and
- 5. Being organized for and focusing on the needs of the children and parents receiving the services and the students, staff and employees of the public school.

- Sec. 3. Pilot programs placing child care facilities in public schools; program characteristics to consider in developing programs. In developing pilot programs to place child care facilities in public schools pursuant to the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 20-A, section 4017, the Department of Education shall study potential characteristics for child care facilities in public schools, including:
- 1. Serving infants, toddlers and preschool-aged children of public school staff and employees;
- 2. Being staffed by a qualified child care educator who is hired by the school administrative unit of the public school and receives full state benefits as an employee of the school;
- 3. Serving as a classroom to provide hands-on experience as part of an early childhood education and development course or curriculum for students in grades 11 and 12 and adult education students, with a certificate awarded at graduation to a student who has completed 2 years of study in the course or curriculum;
- 4. Providing child care to children of students and others in the community if space is available once all children under subsection 1 have been served;
- 5. Providing child care to children in the community whose family's household income is at or below the federal poverty level;
- 6. Charging a fee for child care, which may be adjusted based upon the income of the parent or guardian of the child, based upon recommendations of the Department of Education and other child care service providers, and accepting a child care voucher or other child care assistance:
- 7. Providing child care for free or at a discount to a public school staff member or employee as an employment incentive or benefit;
- 8. Operating from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. on school days, coordinated with the school year, or year-round and on holidays or weekend days or operating in conjunction with the course schedules of adult education students who are enrolled in a course or curriculum to receive a certificate under subsection 3; and
- 9. Determining adequate space, staffing and resources to provide a quality child care service.

31 SUMMARY

This bill directs the Department of Education to study placing child care facilities in public schools and to develop and establish pilot programs based on the study in 8 school administrative units no later than the first day of the 2026-2027 school year. The pilot programs must be designed to continue for 6 years.

The pilot programs will be designed to serve infants, toddlers and preschool-aged children of public school staff and employees. The department must develop the pilot programs to serve several purposes, including, but not limited to, the following: providing safe child care for staff and the community, providing child care and child development courses to students and reducing the shortage of early childhood educators and caregivers. Through the study, the department must also evaluate several potential characteristics of a program developed under this provision, including, but not limited to: providing child care

services to the children of students and community members as space allows after the children of school staff members have been served; child care facility staffing; hours of operation; fees for participation; potential discounts and acceptance of vouchers; and the development of an early childhood education and child development curriculum for 11th and 12th grade students, including a certificate awarded at graduation after 2 years of study.

Beginning in 2026, the department is required over the 6-year duration of the pilot programs to make 3 reports to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education matters. The reports must be submitted by the dates specified in the bill and must include the findings of the initial study and the progress of the pilot programs, including any recommendations for legislation. The joint standing committee is authorized to report out legislation with respect to each of these reports.