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**Essential Programs and Services Component Review:
Multilingual Learner Student Component**

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Introduction

Maine’s public school funding formula, the Essential Programs and Services (EPS) model, allocates resources for districts to support students who need supplemental English language instruction. The additional funds are calculated using a weighting procedure that adjusts the student count upward by a certain amount for each student identified as a Multilingual Learner (ML), formerly referred to as English Learners (ELs). By counting each ML as more than one student the district’s total allocation is increased. The additional weight is an estimate of the added cost of educating ML students relative to their non-ML peers and varies based on the size of the district’s Multilingual program. By Maine statute, each component of the EPS funding model is scheduled to be reviewed on a three-year cycle; in this iterative review of the ML component, we used district-level enrollment and expenditure data from SY2021 to summarize and describe expenditures supporting ML students and analyze ML education expenditures by district type. We also compare enrollment and spending in SY2018 and SY2021 to see if there have been changes.

Multilingual Learning in Maine

Maine defines Multilingual Learners (MLs) are identified as students:¹

- who have a primary or home language other than English, as determined by a Language Use Survey; and

¹ <https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/multilinguallearner/identification>
<https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doe/files/inline-files/LUS%20Decision%20Tree%20revised%206-13-23.pdf>
<https://wida.wisc.edu/about/consortium/me>

- who score below the state’s benchmark for proficiency on an initial English language exam known as the WIDA Screener assessment; and
- who continue to test at a below-proficient level in an annual English language proficiency assessment known as the ACCESS exam.

Because a student has a civil right to be identified and provided English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services if eligible, it is a federal requirement that all students who are multilingual learners be identified within 30 days of enrollment. For students who enroll during the summer this is counted from the beginning of the school year. To be compliant with this requirement, Maine requires that each district administer the Language Use Survey to the parent/guardian of every student, pre-kindergarten through 12th grade, enrolling in the SAU for the first time. If the results of the language use survey indicates that English is not the primary language used at home, an English language proficiency screener must be administered to that student.

Subsequent identification is based on the ACCESS exam, a language proficiency test given annually to all ML students. ACCESS scores range from 1.0 to 6.0. All publicly funded students enrolled in Maine public schools, or in a private school approved to receive tuition and enrolls at least 60% publicly funded students, are required to participate in state academic assessment process annually. English language proficiency is assessed using ACCESS for MLs 2.0 or Alternate ACCESS, designed for MLs with disabilities.

Prior to the 2018-19 academic year, a student was considered proficient and exited from active ML status once they scored a 5.0 or higher on the ACCESS test. Based on growing concerns that students were being held in ML courses too long and therefore were not being given the opportunity to receive the same academic content and meet the same academic standards that other students are expected to meet, the exit criteria have been changed beginning in the fall of 2018. Students are now exited from active ML status with an ACCESS score of 4.5 or higher.

While Maine gives districts control over ML programming and they have the authority to design programs to suit the specific needs of their ML students, the Maine DOE does stipulate broad requirements and provides guidance to ensure compliance with

federal laws and civil rights guidelines.² The Maine DOE also provides resources for professional development to increase the supply of ESOL (endorsement 660) teachers³ and to help districts develop instructional and assessment practices and tools for engaging multilingual students and their families.⁴

About 3 percent of Maine students are multilingual learners. Based on SY2018 data, the majority (81%) of ML students are non-white, with the largest race/ethnic group African/Black (55%). ML students are almost twice as likely to be living in poor households (85%) compared to their non-ML peers (44%). While most ML students (82%) are attending school in an urban or suburban district a still substantial number of ML students are attending school in rural areas where they make up only a handful of ML students.⁵

Multilingual Learner Funding Component

As laid out in the Essential Programs and Services (EPS) Funding Act of 2004, Maine's Essential Programs and Services (EPS) school funding formula provides additional funds to districts based on the number of ML students, using weighted counts in Section 2C of the EPS formula. The additional weight is an estimate of the added cost of educating ML students relative to their non-ML peers and varies based on the size of the district's ML student enrollment. Note: the weights are currently the same for pre-school students, grades Kindergarten through 8 and grades 9 through 12 students.

In the absence of solid empirical evidence as to how much it costs in additional resources to provide ML students with adequate services and support, Maine calculates the ML weights used in the EPS formula by comparing districts' actual reported ML expenditures to the cost of regular education. The resulting ratio – per-ML-pupil expenses divided by the state's average overall per-pupil spending - forms the basis for the EPS

² See *Lau Plan Template and Guidance* available here: <https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/multilinguallearner/services> and <https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/multilinguallearner/policy>

³ See <https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/multilinguallearner/pl>

⁴ See <https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/multilinguallearner/resources>

⁵ See *Analysis of Essential Programs and Services Components: English Language Learners Report of Findings*. A report of the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI). Morris and Johnson, 2019. Available here: <https://www.maine.gov/doe/funding/gpa/eps/reports>

funding formula weights. The weight varies based on the total number of students identified as multilingual. Specifically, the ML weights are calculated by dividing school administrative units into three groups based on the number of ML students served (1-15, 16-250, 251+) and comparing the group two-year average ML per pupil costs to state two-year average per pupil operating costs, excluding transportation and debt services. To be included in the cost analysis, SAUs must have two consecutive years of valid ML enrollment and ML expenditure data. This is done to exclude SAUs that have newly established ML programs with potentially higher start-up costs.

The weighted adjustments initially incorporated into the Maine funding formula in 2005-06 were 0.50, 0.30 and 0.60 based on analysis that showed SAUs with 1 - 15 ML students spent approximately 50% more than the state average per pupil expenditure for their ML students, that those with 16 - 249 ML students spent 30% more than the state per pupil average and those with 250 or more ML students spent 60% more than the state average. Subsequent recalculations conducted as part of the 3-year cycle of reviews indicate that the ratio of ML to regular expenditures had declined, particularly for larger multilingual programs, and eventually stabilized at about 0.50, 0.30 and 0.30 for the three ML enrollment size groups, respectively. Districts with large ML programs argue that any economies of scale effect is offset by the higher costs of running large programs and the increased diversity of their ML students.⁶ Currently, the weights used in the EPS formula are 0.70, 0.50 and 0.525.

⁶ See [Analysis of the Essential Programs and Services Limited English Proficiency \(LEP\) Cost Component](#). A report of the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI). Silvernail and Batista, 2011; and [Analysis of Essential Programs and Services Components: English Language Learners Report of Findings](#). A report of the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI). Morris and Johnson, 2019.

Methodology

In this iterative review of the ML component, we used district-level enrollment and expenditure data from SY2021 to summarize and describe expenditures supporting ML students and analyze ML education expenditures by district type. Bivariate and multivariate techniques were used to provide additional confidence that the observed differences are not being driven solely by outliers and variable distributions within sub-groups. We also compare enrollment and spending in SY2018 and SY2021 using the same sample of districts to see if there have been changes. We focus all analysis on regular public school districts. Specifically, we address the following questions:

1. How much is spent on ML education and services, and how are funds being spent?
2. How do ML per-pupil expenditure profiles vary by ML program (enrollment) size? Is there evidence of economies of scale?
3. Do districts reporting low ML student enrollment spend their EL funds differently from districts with higher reported ML enrollment?
4. How have ML expenditures changed since the last review (SY2018)?

Findings

During the 2020-2021 school year there were 5,339 ML students counted in the enrollment records obtained from the Maine DOE, making up 3.1% of all Maine students. Of the 191 regular public school districts reporting data, 60% (n=114) had at least one ML attending student. The following analysis focuses on regular public school districts and their 5,141 ML students.

Expenditures Analysis

Of the 191 regular public districts, 114 (60%) reported at least one ML student and 90 reported ML expenditures. Statewide, \$20,786,017 was spent on ML education in SY2021, most from General funds (\$19,540,644) and some from Special Revenue sources (\$1,245,372).

Of the 114 SAUs with at least one ML student, 71% (n=81) reported General fund expenditures related to ML programs (program code 4100). Of these, 8 districts also

reported federal grant expenditures (Special Revenue funds) ranging from \$2,143 to \$976,403, for Portland, the district with the largest number of ML students.

There were SAUs that reported ML students attending school in their district without also reporting any General Fund ML expenditures. Of the 114 SAUs with more than one ML student, 33 districts (29%) reported no General Fund expenditures and only one of the 33 reported expenditures from the Special Revenues fund. These districts tended to have low ML enrollments: 88% (29) have 7 or fewer ML students. In fact, 14 have only a single ML student and 15 have between 2 and 7. The remaining 3 districts still have relatively low ML student enrollment: 11 (Eastport), 17 (Madawaska), and 39 (RSU88/MSAD24 Hamlin, Van Buren, Cyr Plantation).

There were also SAUs reporting ML expenditures despite not reporting any ML students attending school in their district. Of the 77 districts with no reported ML students attending, 7 reported EL expenditures from the General Fund, ranging from \$150 spent by one district on contracted services to \$40,546 spent for a teacher salary and benefits (Millinocket Public Schools). Expenditures in the absence of students probably reflects recent graduation of ML students or their advance into English proficiency. For example, in SY2018 Millinocket reported two high school ML students.

Per Pupil Spending

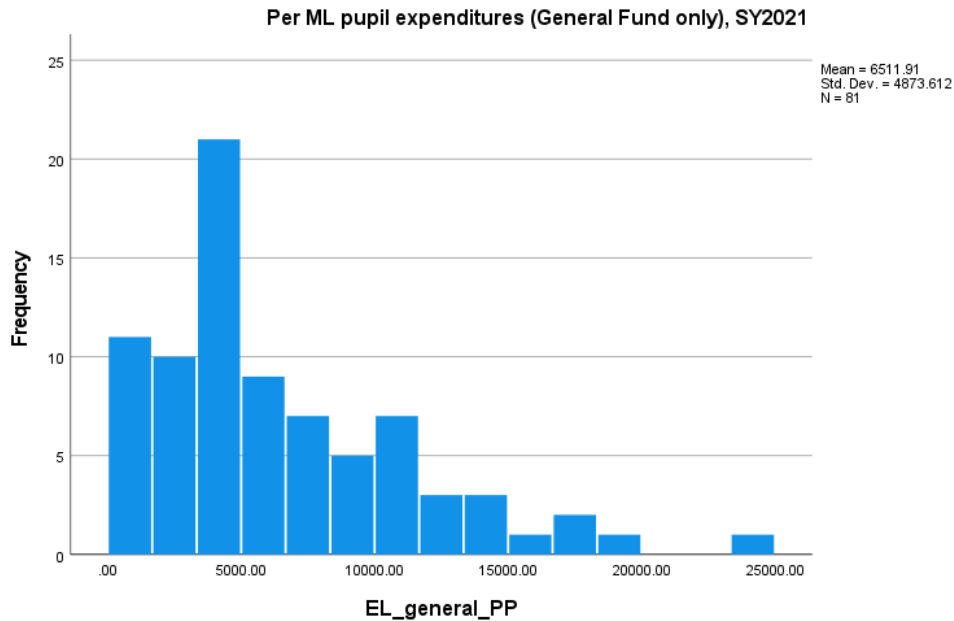
To be included in the analysis of per pupil spending, SAUs must have both recorded ML enrollment and ML expenditures from the General Fund.

Table 1. Districts used in expenditure analysis*

| SY2021 | # of SAUs |
|---|-----------|
| Enrollment of one or more ML students | 114 |
| ML enrollment and ML expenditures reported | 81 |
| ML enrollment and no ML expenditures reported | 33 |
| ML expenditures but no reported ML enrollment | 7 |
| No ML expenditures and no ML enrollment | 70 |

*Sample: 191 regular public districts; expenditures = General fund and program code = 4100; enrollment = attending

There was wide variability across districts in spending per ML student as can be seen in the histogram below. Per pupil expenditures in SY2021 ranged from \$101 to \$24,931.



On average, districts spent \$6,512 per ML student but the median is \$4,904, reflecting the fact that there are a handful of high spending districts pulling up the average. By the rule of thumb that amounts three times the standard deviation above the mean (\$21,134 in this case) are substantially atypical outliers, there is one district – RSU25 – which spent \$24,931 per student and has only two ML students. The total of \$49,862 was spent exclusively on staff salary and benefits. The other districts with the highest expenditures per ML student also tended to report low ML attending enrollments: 6 SAUs with the next highest expenditures had 1 to 5 ML students and they spent between \$14,442 and \$18,710 per student.

Expenditures by District ML Enrollment Size Group

The table below displays ML expenditures by ML enrollment size group (using the size categories used for the EPS weights) for the 81 districts discussed above, districts with both reported ML enrollment and expenditure data. Because per pupil district level data vary widely and can be skewed by a few small, high spending districts, in the table we

compare overall per pupil spending for three ML enrollment districts categories (small, medium, large) by combining spending for all districts and students in each category. This reduces the influence of outliers with small numbers of students by pooling data with other smaller sized districts. The overall per pupil expenditure describes the total ML expenditures for all the SAUs in that enrollment size category divided by the total number of ML students across all the districts within that size category. However, because we are also interested in district level contexts and decisions, we also report district-level per pupil spending by mean, median, and minimum/maximum.

Table 2a. Expenditures by district using EPS ML enrollment size group*

| | EPS enrollment size group | | | All |
|---|---------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| | 1-15 ML students | 16-250 ML students | 251 or more ML students | |
| # of SAUs | 57 | 20 | 4 | 81 |
| Total # of Els | 392 | 980 | 3,602 | 4,974 |
| Total EL expenditures | \$2,464,405 | \$4,945,967 | \$12,071,057 | \$19,481,427 |
| Overall per EL pupil expenditure for size group | \$6,287 | \$5,047 | \$3,351 | \$3,917 |
| SAU level median (mean) per pupil expenditures | \$5,408 (\$7,072) | \$4,998 (\$5,558) | \$3,233 (\$3,297) | \$4,904 (\$6,512) |
| Range of SAU per pupil expenditures | \$100-24,931 | \$402-10,274 | \$2,876-3,846 | \$100-24,931 |

**Sample includes regular public districts with both ML attending enrollment and reported ML expenditures in SY2021. Expenditures = General fund and program code = 4100

Districts with fewer ML students (1-15) had the highest per pupil expenditures, both in terms of the overall rate calculated using the pooled sample of districts (\$6,287) and at the district-level, where both median (\$5,408) and mean (\$7,072) are higher than for districts in the two groups with larger ML enrollment. Spending per ML student decreases as EL enrollment increases, both overall using pooled size category samples and

at the SAU level. This pattern of per student spending is consistent with expected efficiencies gained through economies of scale.

Because of the wide variation in per pupil spending across districts, the negative relationship between ML enrollment and per pupil spending, consistent with expected economies of scale, is not statistically significant using standard statistical analysis ($r = -0.146$, $p = 0.194$). There is a statistically significant relationship between per pupil spending and size category (1-15, 16-250 and 251+), which makes sense because a district's spending approach likely changes once there is a critical number of students to establish targeted services, separate classrooms, etc. However, because there is still so much variation, statistically, the effect is weak: (standardized beta -0.200 , r-squared 2.8%, $p = 0.073$). Note: the statistical support for an economies of scale effect is somewhat stronger when a different categorization of size is used (see table below): standardized beta -0.245 , $p = 0.027$.

Table 2b. Expenditures by district using alternative ML enrollment size group*

| | Alternative enrollment size group | | | All |
|---|-----------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | 1-10 ML students | 11-50 ML students | 51 or more | |
| # of SAUs | 43 | 29 | 9 | 81 |
| Total # of MLs | 217 | 575 | 4,182 | 4,974 |
| Total ML expenditures | \$1,534,261 | \$3,232,588 | \$14,714,579 | \$19,481,427 |
| Overall per ML pupil expenditure for size group | \$7,070 | \$5,622 | \$3,519 | \$3,917 |
| SAU level median (mean) per pupil expenditures | \$6,540 (\$7,577) | \$5,063 (\$5,621) | \$3,846 (\$4,296) | \$4,904 (\$6,512) |
| Range of SAU per pupil expenditures | \$100-24,931 | \$402-13,762 | \$2,770-7,543 | \$100-24,931 |

*Sample includes regular public districts with both ML attending enrollment and reported ML expenditures in SY2021. Expenditures = General fund and program code = 4100

How are districts spending their ML funds?

Here we continue to refer only to the 81 regular public districts with both ML enrollment and expenditures in SY2021. The table below displays the proportion of spending by category for districts grouped by ML enrollment size. We used both the EPS ML enrollment size category and our alternative size categorization. The results are similar across the two different size categorizations. Note: we use the second alternative size categorization because it supports statistical analyses better than the EPS size categories (where the largest size has only 4 districts).

Not surprisingly, districts with small numbers of ML students spend relatively less on teachers and more on contracted professional services.

Table 3a. Expenditures by type and EPS ML enrollment size group*

Average (range) % of total per pupil ML expenditures, by spending category
(EPS ML program size categories)

| | 1-15 ML students | 16-250 ML students | 251 or more | All |
|----------------------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| # of SAUs | 57 | 20 | 4 | 81 |
| Teacher salaries | 41% (0-98%) | 65% (0-94%) | 66% (51-86%) | 49% (0-98%) |
| Ed Tech salaries | 9% (0-93%) | 10% (0-61%) | 7% (0-20%) | 9% (0-93%) |
| Tutor salaries | 5% (0-74%) | 2% (0-87%) | 0% | 4% (0-87%) |
| Contracted prof services | 21% (0-100%) | 1% (0-93%) | 2% (0-3%) | 15% (0-100%) |
| Administration | <1% | 0% (0-7%) | 6% (0-14%) | <1% (0-14%) |
| Ebooks, subscriptions, etc | 4% (0-100%) | <1% (0-3%) | 2% (0-3%) | 3% (0-100%) |
| Professional development | 1% (0-46%) | <1% (0-2%) | <1% (0-2%) | <1% (0-46%) |

*Sample includes regular public districts with both ML attending enrollment and reported ML expenditures in SY2021. Expenditures = General fund and program code = 4100

Table 3b. Expenditures by type and alternative ML enrollment size group*

Average (range) % of total per pupil ML expenditures, by spending category
(alternative ML program size categories)

| | 1-10 ML students | 11-50 ML students | 51 or more | All |
|----------------------------|------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| # of SAUs | 43 | 29 | 9 | 81 |
| Teacher salaries | 42% (0-98%) | 53% (0-94%) | 66% (51-86%) | 49% (0-98%) |
| Ed Tech salaries | 8% (0-93%) | 10% (0-61%) | 9% (0-20%) | 9% (0-93%) |
| Tutor salaries | 2% (0-74%) | 9% (0-87%) | 0% | 4% (0-87%) |
| Contracted prof services | 23% (0-100%) | 6% (0-93%) | 1% (0-3%) | 15% (0-100%) |
| Administration | 0% | <1% (0-7%) | 3% (0-14%) | <1% (0-14%) |
| Ebooks, subscriptions, etc | 5% (0-100%) | <1% (0-3%) | 1% (0-3%) | 3% (0-100%) |
| Professional development | 1% (0-46%) | <1% (0-2%) | <1% (0-2%) | <1% (0-46%) |

*Sample includes regular public districts with both ML attending enrollment and reported ML expenditures in SY2021. Expenditures = General fund and program code = 4100

58% (25 of 43) of the districts with 1-10 ML students reported any teacher salary expenditures (often for part-time teachers) compared to 83% (24 of the 29) of districts with 11 to 50 ML students and all 9 of the districts with 51 or more ML students. On a per ML student basis, districts with 1-10 ML students spent on average 42% of their General fund expenditures on teacher salaries compared to the 53% spent by districts with 11-50 ML students and 66% spent by districts with 51 or more ML students.

Districts with small numbers of MLs rely more on contracted professional services compared to those with larger numbers of ML students attending. Districts with 1-10 ML students spent on average 23% on contracted services while districts with 11 to 50 ML

students spent an average of 6% of all their funds on contracted services and districts with 51 or more ML students spent only 1%. Districts with smaller ML enrollment may also be relying more heavily on e-books, regular books, and online subscriptions to complement or augment other ML programming.

Despite the wide variability in the share of ML spending being allocated to teachers versus contracted services and small sub-sample sizes there is statistical evidence consistent with the premise that districts with small ML enrollment might be saving money when they use contracted professional services instead of teachers.

Table 4a. Statistical analysis in support of districts with small ML programs using funds differently

| Correlations | 1-15 MLs (n=57) | 16 or more MLs (n=24) |
|--|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Overall per ML pupil expenditures and % of expenditures on teachers | r = 0.524, p < 0.001 | r=-0.282, p=0.184 |
| Overall per ML pupil expenditures and % of expenditures on contracted professional services | r = -0.411, p=0.002 | r=0.021, p=0.924 |
| % of per ML pupil expenditures on teachers and % of per ML pupil expenditures on contracted services | -0.594, p < 0.001 | r=0.378, p=0.070 |

Reflecting the fact that districts with smaller ML enrollments (1-15) tend to use either teaching staff *or* contracted professional services, the association between the proportion of ML funds spent on teachers and the proportion spent on contracted services is negative and significant (r= -0.594, p<0.001). Larger programs are more likely to use a combination of both, hence, the association between the share of ML expenditures spent on teachers and the share spent on contracted services is positive and significant though the effect is weaker.

Among the 57 districts with 15 or fewer ML students there is a negative correlation between the proportion of expenditures per ML student spent on contracted services and overall per ML student spending (r= - 0.411, p=0.002) and a positive correlation between

the percentage of funds spent on teachers and overall per student spending ($r=0.524$, $p<0.001$), indicating that districts that use more teaching staff have higher per ML pupil spending compared to districts that spend more per ML student on contracted professional services.

Among the 24 districts with 16 or more ML students, there is no statistically significant association between overall per ML pupil spending and the percentage of funds used to pay teachers or pay for contracted services. This suggests that for these larger programs, it does not produce a cost savings to contract for ML services instead of paying teachers, an outcome of which may be that schools contract with professionals to supplement their teaching staff instead of serving in place of them.

Finally, smaller ML programs that spend a greater share per student on ebooks and online subscriptions also spend less per student overall. This does not hold true for larger programs.

Table 4b. Statistical analysis in support of districts with small ML programs using funds differently

| Correlations | 1-15 Els (n=57) | 16 or more Els (n=24) |
|---|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Overall per ML pupil expenditures and % of expenditures on e-books, online subscriptions, books | $r = -0.281$, $p=0.068$ | $r= -0.215$, $p = 0.194$ |

Taken together, the correlational analysis is consistent with the idea that smaller ML programs can reduce overall spending by contracting for ML services rather than hiring teachers and by using on-line services. We are, of course, speculating here. Additional research into the design of ML programs and local costs would be necessary to make firm conclusions.

Expenditures over time

Not all districts appear in the administrative data year to year. To avoid confusing data reporting issues with actual changes in ML enrollment and spending, we use only

districts with reported enrollment and expenditures in both SY2018 and SY2021 (n=71) to examine changes over time.

Among the 71 public school districts reporting ML students and ML expenditures in both SY2018 and SY2020, there were a total of 5,399 ML students in SY2018 and 4,937 in SY2021, a 9% decline. The decline may have been influenced by the 2018 policy change moving students out of ML student status when they achieve an ACCESS exam score of 4.5 out of 6 rather than the previous threshold of 5 out of 6.

Table 5. ML enrollment and expenditures between SY2018 and SY2021

| | SY2018 | SY2021 | % change |
|------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|----------|
| # of ML students | 5,399 | 4,937 | -9% |
| Total ML General fund expenditures | \$16,497,294 | \$19,306,211 | +17.0% |
| Overall per ML pupil spending | \$3,056 | \$3,910 | +28% |

*Sample includes the 71 public school districts reporting ML students and ML expenditures in both SY2018 and SY2021. Expenditures = General fund and program code = 4100

While the number of attending ML students declined, ML spending did not. Total statewide spending increased by 17%, from \$16,497,294 to \$19,306,211, approximately 9% of which can be attributed to the cumulative rate of inflation between SY2018 and SY2021. Statewide per pupil spending increased by \$854 per student, from \$3,056 to \$3,910, an increase of 28%. The increase in per pupil spending despite a decline in students may reflect continued building out of programs and services to accommodate incoming ML students and the need to continue to monitor former ML students even after they have been exited from formal ML programming.

In the table below we examine the change in district-level spending between SY2018 and SY2020 by ML program size. We focus on changes in median per ML pupil spending instead of average per pupil spending because medians are less impacted by high spending districts (note: the large increase in mean per pupil spending among small ML programs is driven by a handful of districts that made large per student increases).

The increase in spending between SY2018 and SY2021 is driven primarily by

districts with medium sized ML programs (11 to 50 ML students). Despite experiencing the largest relative drop in ML enrollment (20%), mid-sized programs increased their per pupil spending the most with their median per ML pupil spending increasing by 70% compared to only 16% among smaller ML programs with 10 or fewer MLs and 10% among those with 51 or more ML students.

Table 6. ML enrollment and expenditures between SY2018 and SY2021, by ML program size

| | ML enrollment size group | | | All |
|--|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | 1-10 ML students | 11-50 ML students | 51 or more | |
| # of SAUs | 29 | 34 | 8 | 71 |
| ML enrollment SY2018 | 173 | 782 | 4,444 | 5,399 |
| ML enrollment SY2021 | 180 | 627 | 4,130 | 4,937 |
| % change in ML enrollment | +4% | -20% | -7% | -9% |
| District level per ML pupil sending, mean (median), range SY2018 | \$4,500 (3,928) \$24-13,133 | \$4,237 (3,345) \$181-10,360 | \$2,944 (3,227) \$2,159-3,623 | \$4,199 (3,365) \$24-13,133 |
| District level per ML pupil sending, mean (median), range SY2021 | \$7,469 (4,541), 561-24,931 | \$6,974 (5,688) \$119-16,874 | \$3,891 (3,559) \$2,770-5,695 | \$6,829 (5,063) \$119-24,931 |
| % change in district level per pupil spending, mean (median) | +66% (+16%) | +65% (+70%) | +32% (+10%) | +63% (+50%) |

*Sample includes the 71 public districts reporting ML students and ML expenditures in both SY2018 and SY2021. Expenditures = General fund and program code = 4100

Summary of Findings

- Based on a sample of public school districts with reported ML enrollment and expenditures in both SY2018 and SY2021, the number of ML students declined but per ML pupil expenditures increased. The increase in per pupil spending despite a decline in students may reflect continued building out of programs and services to accommodate incoming ML students and the need to continue to monitor former ML students even after they have been exited from formal ML programming.
- There was wide variability across districts in spending per ML student. Per pupil expenditures in SY2021 ranged from \$101 to \$24,931. On average, districts spent \$6,512 per ML student but the median was \$4,904, reflecting the fact that there are a handful of high spending districts pulling up the average. The districts with the highest expenditures pulling up the average tended to have very low ML attending enrollments.
- Districts with fewer ML students (1-15) had the highest per pupil expenditures. Spending per ML student decreases as EL enrollment increases, both overall using pooled size category samples and at the SAU level. This pattern of per student spending is consistent with expected efficiencies gained through economies of scale. We find statistical support for the economies of scale effect but because there is so much variation in per pupil spending the strength of statistical effect is weak.
- Overall, districts with small numbers of ML students spend relatively less on teachers and more on contracted professional services and on-line services compared to districts with larger ML programs. We find some statistical support for speculation that smaller ML programs can reduce overall spending by contracting for ML services rather than hiring teachers and by using on-line services. Additional research into the design of ML programs and local costs would be necessary to make firm conclusions.

This report does not address how district expenditures may have been influenced by the 2018 policy change moving ML students out of ML student status when they achieve an ACCESS exam score of 4.5 out of 6 rather than the previous threshold of 6 out of 6. Note that total numbers of ML students in SY2018 was 5,878, which is higher than the 2020-2021 ML reported enrollment of 5,304. This may reveal the outcome of the policy change in how students are categorized as EL students, not a decreased need for ML services, especially given the still increasing volume of immigrants speaking languages other than English to Maine. An analysis of district level expenditures and student outcomes focused on this question may warrant further study.