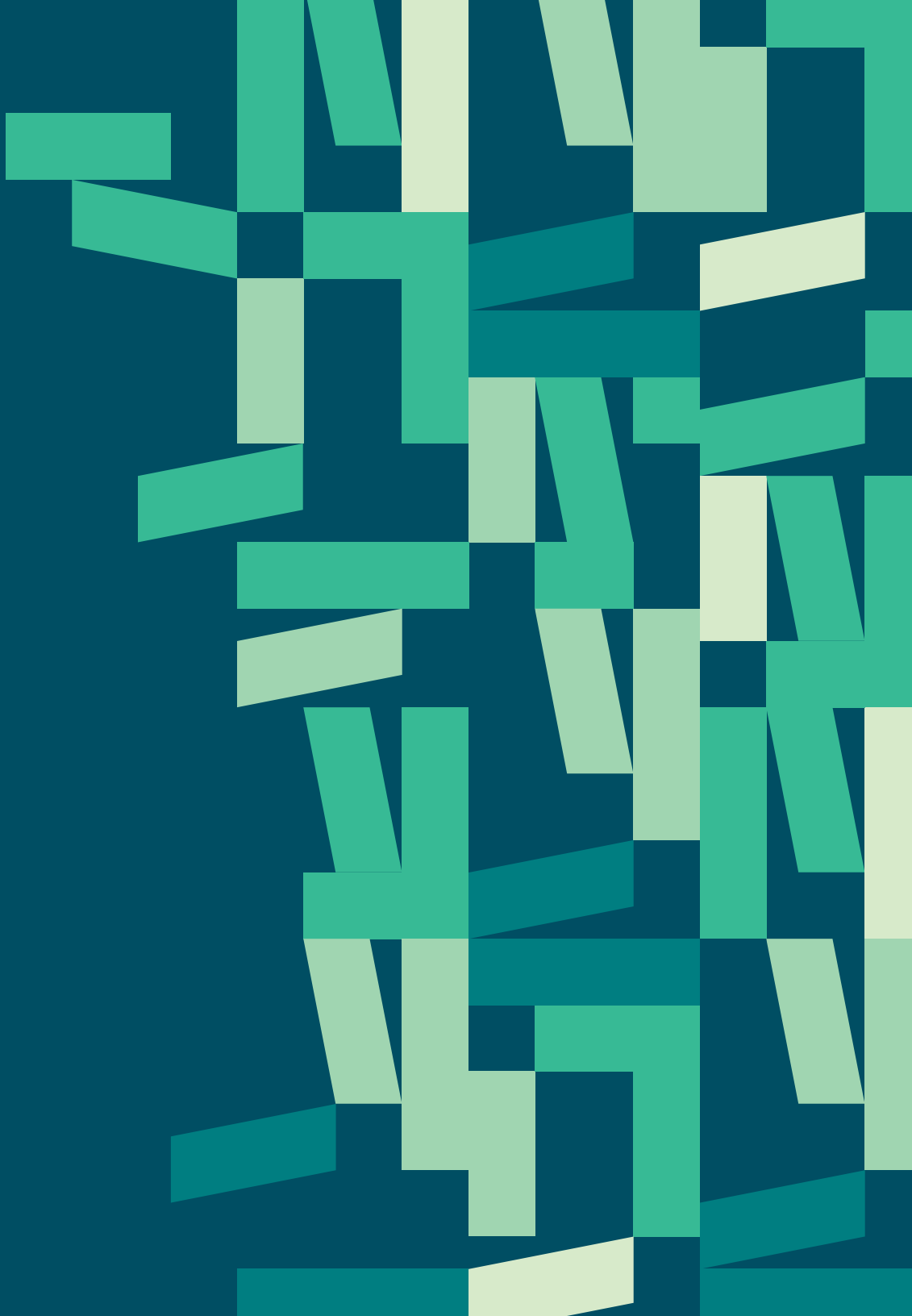


# Educate Maine

2025 Annual Report



# 2025 IN THE BOOKS

## Research and Advocacy

**Educate Maine's unique and comprehensive Education Indicators report continued to be a powerful resource in 2025.** The section on the educator workforce was updated in 2025 and remains the only comprehensive, available demographic profile of Maine's public school teacher workforce. Of special interest to employers, families and policymakers is the information about early childhood educators. A key takeaway in that area is that ECE teachers are paid chronically low wages for their critical work:

**The median wage of a childcare educator in Maine is about \$34,000. Maine's current childcare workforce is estimated to be around 7,500 people.**

**Educate Maine's Kim Russell, backed by the Right from the Start Coalition,** flexed her years of advocacy experience to lead efforts in Augusta to preserve, enhance and build the early childhood education available to Maine families. Her testimony and other advocacy (including by Executive Director Jason Judd) helped to advance solutions in childcare and ECE. Wage protection, preservation of Head Start programs and other victories became the foundation for an ongoing effort to support this critical public benefit.



88%

Employment Rate

Percentage of Maine Career Catalyst alumni currently employed

2,500

Beautiful Hours

Experience earned by our first registered cosmetology apprentice

23.8%

More Girls Who Code

99 campers inspired over three sessions in 2025



# LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## Dear friends,

We've heard it over and over: "Maine is a small town." And each time, we find ourselves agreeing—in our wonderful state, if you meet someone, nine times out of 10, there's a personal or professional connection (usually discovered in the first five minutes of conversation). With a population just north of 1.4 million and as the most rural state in the nation, that's as unsurprising as it is gratifying. It's just the way life should be.

As a Maine-grown organization, Educate Maine specializes in connections. Whether we're linking students to educational opportunities, educators to professional development, or job seekers to career pathways, the connections we provide and foster help make our state a better place to live and work.

That mission was increasingly realized last year, as we came close to meeting our MaineSpark goal: 60 percent of Mainers will hold the credentials that position Maine and its families for success.

Never content to rest on our laurels, Educate Maine doubled down on leveraging connection in 2025 (it was even the theme of our annual Education Symposium, which brought more than 500 business leaders, educators and innovators together for an invigorating day of learning and networking).

### We also connected:

- More than **900 Maine students at 29 schools** to life-sciences learning aboard the **Maine Mobile Biolab**.
- **500-plus interns to companies and organizations in Maine**. Of interns surveyed afterward, 70 percent said they would consider permanently living and working here.
- **99 young people to the world of coding and technology** through our annual **Girls Who Code camps** (including two first-ever overnight camps).
- **150 educators to computer-science learning**—and opportunities to integrate CS into their classrooms. Through these teachers we connected **20,000+ Maine students** to the CS education they will need in a lifetime of work.
- **20 new apprentices and pre-apprentices to life-changing opportunities** in fields from auto technology to banking to cosmetology

Sometimes the connections fostered by Educate Maine feel deeply personal. Take Jacob Curtis, an alumnus of Maine Career Catalyst with two summer internships under his belt. His relationship with mentors at both Unum and MaineHealth propelled him not just to a great job in healthcare tech, but into graduate school at the Roux Institute. He cites those mentor connections as pivotal to his success as a first-gen college student.

Or consider Biolab educator Anna Stehlik, whose odyssey to Costa Rica with Educate Maine partner Hurricane Island Outward Bound connected her with new lifetime friends—and lessons she uses every day aboard the rolling classroom. "I found myself learning about all kinds of different ways to teach and connect on new levels," she said.

We've also leveraged our networks to successfully bring new sources and levels of support to the work. In 2025, Educate Maine attracted support from multiple organizations, including a grant to support early literacy efforts, funding for an expanded teacher apprenticeship program, and a National Science Foundation award for Project Login.

If 2025 was a year of celebrating connections, what does 2026 hold? At Educate Maine, we look forward to building and strengthening those networks and creating the future Maine we all want to see, one relationship at a time.

Cheers to connecting in 2026!

Jason Judd, Ed.D  
*Executive Director*



## Connecting Factors

The workforce team at Educate Maine notched some key victories in 2025. As the “connective tissue” between employers, prospective workers, the state Department of Labor and industry groups, our role is to create as many good-fit opportunities as possible.

We deliver this work by supporting paid summer Internships for college students and serving as a sponsor for Registered Apprenticeships and Certified Pre-Apprenticeships in partnership with the Maine Department of Labor.

### This year, Educate Maine created:

- **Five new employer relationships** resulting in **four apprenticeships**
- **One new pre-apprenticeship** in a burgeoning field
- **Maine’s first cosmetology apprenticeship** focusing on diverse and multi-ethnic hair styling

### Through Maine Career Catalyst and in partnership with FocusMaine, Educate Maine:

- **Supported more than 500 interns** in an array of industries and among multiple companies and organizations across Maine
- **Conducted intern-retention research** that showed both success (more than 70

percent of interns surveyed would consider permanent employment in Maine) and opportunity (interns who had lived in Maine were more likely to stay than out of staters).

- Supported new apprenticeship agreements for **women in the building trades**

The team also grew by one very important new member! Workforce Specialist **Morgen Leighton** joined Educate Maine in the late summer. She supports workforce and experiential learning initiatives, helping strengthen the connections between education providers and employers to expand career pathways.

## A Career, Catalyzed

**Jacob Curtis, a two-time Maine Career Catalyst alumnus**, has a few words for young people in Maine wondering about grad school.

That’s what he told himself starting undergraduate work as a first-gen college student. “And for grad school, I listened to 18-year-old me. If you want to be competitive in the (job) market, even if you’re already working full time, this is a step you can take.”

Curtis, a Roux Institute masters’ student and fulltime software expert for a large medical provider, says his graduate work was the next logical step for him in an unlikely career progression. How unlikely? He was the first in his family to attend college, and his life

growing up in and around Bangor did not prepare him for the demands of academia or a corporate career. When he landed at the University of Southern Maine, he was on his own.

Curtis actively sought out programs that would help him thrive; he worked for two summers as an intern in the Maine Career Catalyst program. At Unum and MaineHealth, he broadened his scope of knowledge, learned lifetime career skills and not incidentally, acquired valuable mentors from both organizations. He landed a post-grad job doing software implementation for Intermed, PA, a large medical provider in Portland. One of Curtis’ MCC mentors recommended he also challenge himself with a tech-heavy masters’ program—an MS in data science rather than a traditional MBA. Now, Curtis has advice for anyone considering grad school: “Just start!”



# STORIES

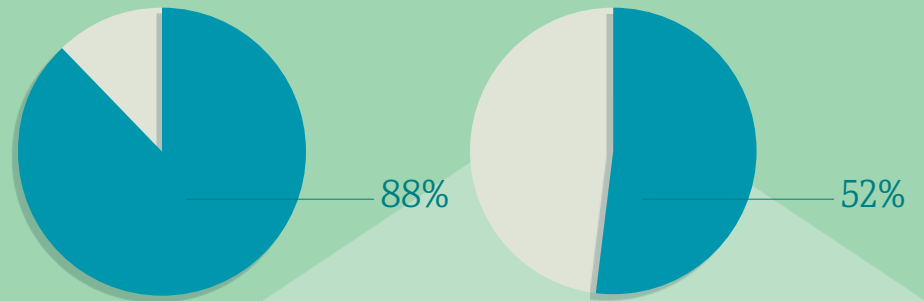
## Beauty is in the eye of the apprentice

One great pathway to a career in beauty and personal care is an apprenticeship in cosmetology. Educate Maine is thrilled to introduce you to Boncoeur, who started work in May as our first registered cosmetology apprentice. She is working at Rhona Beauty in Biddeford, and she looks forward to 2,500 hours (or about a year) of experience. One special aspect of her work will be fully inclusive hair experience, working with all types of tresses, including BIPOC hair, which many cosmetology apprenticeships in Maine do not routinely include.



## MCC Program Leads Interns to Consider Maine for Their Future

Research and ongoing analysis of Maine Career Catalyst alumni have yielded some interesting results. Among them:



- A large portion of MCC alumni—88 percent—are currently employed. Nine percent are in graduate school.
- Most of those are Mainers or those who attended college here.
- More than half—52 percent—are employed in Maine.
- One third of those employed in Maine work for an MCC employer partner.

The takeaway is that the MCC connection can be a pathway to employment and to retaining talent in Maine. We also learned that we have opportunities to recruit talent more heavily to the state. A significant number of survey respondents indicated that they would be open to jobs in Maine.

## Making the Right Connection With Electrical Apprenticeship

Matt Brannen was in an interesting predicament when he came across the opportunity for an Electrician Apprentice role at Bates College through Educate Maine. A longtime food service worker who later completed an A.A.S. in electrical engineering technologies, his job search in his new specialty was taking a long time. In three years of applying for work in the field, he was told by employers that he needed "relevant" experience along with his college degree. He found it increasingly difficult to explain the cross-functional skills he developed in food service that are applicable to other undertakings.

The opportunity at Bates had a prerequisite requiring a degree from the Maine Community College System, that Matt met. After an interview, he landed the job. "I've been thrilled with the structure and clear path forward that this apprenticeship presents, and the support I've been given," Matt said. "I would recommend (this type of program) to anyone seeking a new path to explore the opportunities offered to them."



**Project Login had an impactful 2025, bringing educators, learners and employers together in multiple events and venues, all helping to diminish the digital divide in Maine and reduce the gender and urban-rural equity gap in computer science and technology.**

Much as coding itself—the language of CS—is a powerful connector linking systems and bridging the gap between pure logic and real-world solutions, PL’s programs in 2025 affected thousands of Maine people through access to STEM learning.

**That looked like:**

## CS Summer of Fun

More than 150 educators spent four days learning, connecting and creating in the third annual CS Summer of Fun, designed to help teachers integrate CS into their curricula and enhance STEM in their classrooms. The annual CS Summer of Fun (in partnership with the Maine Mathematics and Science Alliance) offered four days of sessions designed to help teachers integrate computer science learning and skills into their curricula. From very basic CS learning to more advanced pathways, classes this year covered everything from children’s books to music to Esports, supporting a wide range of interests and grade levels.

**The reach: 26,000 Maine students.**

Connections at Summer of Fun were also very personal. In addition to district cohorts and longtime colleague groups who came to the program together, there were three mother-daughter pairs in attendance.

Kayleigh and Kara Getty, Kymberli and Shelby Bryant and Beth and Olivia Whitehouse all came to the Summer of Fun as package deals.

“It’s been wonderful. We’ve been given so many resources and I really enjoyed being (at the conference) with my mother,” said Kayleigh Getty, who teaches chemistry and forensics and leads the robotics team at Leavitt Area High School in Turner. “We are having lots of conversations about what is possible, and what we will bring back to our classrooms.” Kayleigh’s mom, Kara Getty, teaches gifted and talented classes across the grade levels for MSAD52.

Kara Getty noted that CS learning from basic coding to advanced pathways is essential for every student graduating from Maine

schools. “What employers tell us is that they are looking for those skills in their employees. Problem-solving individuals are going to be in demand by employers, and we need to make that a priority with our students.”

## Computer Science Connected Learning Experience

Twenty-three educators visited multiple Maine businesses in the latest professional development opportunity offered by Project Login and the MMSA. Whether touring ski resorts or farms, learning about the technical processes at Maine Grains, participants got a ground-level look at the technical proficiencies required by employers.





## Girls Who Code

Project Login hosted three Girls Who Code camps in 2025, including the first two overnight camp options, at Thomas College and the University of Maine. The weeklong sessions, which included field trips and social time, attracted 99 campers (a 23.8 percent increase from 2024) from 14 counties. More than three quarters of the campers reported in a post-camp survey that they now had more interest and enthusiasm for coding/CS.

**“I’ve never felt so confident about coding,” one overnight camper reported. “This camp showed me I belong in tech.”**

GWC addresses the still-dire gender equity gap in STEM and computer science particularly. Nationally, women make up only 26 percent of professionals in computer and math

occupations, and the diversity challenges are deeper for nonbinary representation with only about 1 percent of college CS majors. Many women cite early stereotypes around coding and CS, and a “boys club” atmosphere in CS programs and classes.

For the campers, connecting with similar young people was as important as acquiring new CS skills. “I really liked making new friends. ... Everyone was welcome to join,” said one.

## Incredible Opportunity

A generous grant from the National Science Foundation in 2025 will support the team in creating a project to **CSforME: Integrating CS/CT in Maine’s Rural High Schools**. This project will explore and plan resources for core curriculum teachers integrating computer science and computational thinking into social studies, English language arts, math, and science classes in grades 9-12.

Educate Maine is partnering with the Institute for Advancing Computing Education (a national nonprofit research institution that supports education research, researchers, and practitioners). Project sites include Penobscot Valley High School (PVHS), Mattanawcook Academy, and other schools in Penobscot County.

**“This opportunity is extremely exciting,” said STEM Pathways Director Angela Oechsle. “We think it holds great promise for fostering more STEM profession opportunities and higher earnings for rural learners. CSforME will also investigate the potential to scale this model for the state of Maine—and other states with significant rural populations”**

*\*This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Award No. 2524344*

## Leadership Honors

**Director of STEM Pathways and Innovation Angela Oechsle**

was recognized for her leadership in tech equity and named a Microsoft TechSpark Alumni Fellow, after two consecutive years as a TechSpark Fellow. In this role she leads national conversations on tech equity and innovation, continuing to increase the visibility of Project Login's programs.

**Program Specialist Shelby Bryant** was selected as a 2025–26 Computer Science Teachers Association (CSTA) IMPACT Fellow. The yearlong fellowship is a leadership development program aiming to create systems and solutions for more equitable CS teaching and cultivates a network of influential CS educators



# MAINE MOBILE BIOLAB



The educators aboard the Maine Mobile Biolab roll up their sleeves long before the famous classroom on wheels rolls up to a rural schoolyard. By the time students eagerly line up outside the brightly colored trailer, **Heather Carlisle** and **Anna Stehlik** have been busy in their “magic schoolbus,” laying out sophisticated measuring tools, booting up videos and slideshows for the lab’s two big screens, and preparing experiments.

**“We’ve got it down to a science,” Stehlik says, deadpan. (Puns are not unknown aboard the Lab, where the atmosphere is both focused and fun.)**

The Biolab, now in its second year bringing STEM curriculum to Maine middle-grade students, had a busy 2025 visiting schools and community events in all 16 counties. Since it first hit the road, the lab has reached: **158 teachers; 9,194 students, 73 middle schools and 17 community events and programs.**

The Biolab team meets students where they live and learn, engaging them in the life sciences with an emphasis on rural and under-resourced communities. By leveraging the strengths of Maine’s life science ecosystem, the fully subscribed lab visits create a unique opportunity for students to learn about meaningful, in-demand careers that allow them to live, study, and work in Maine.

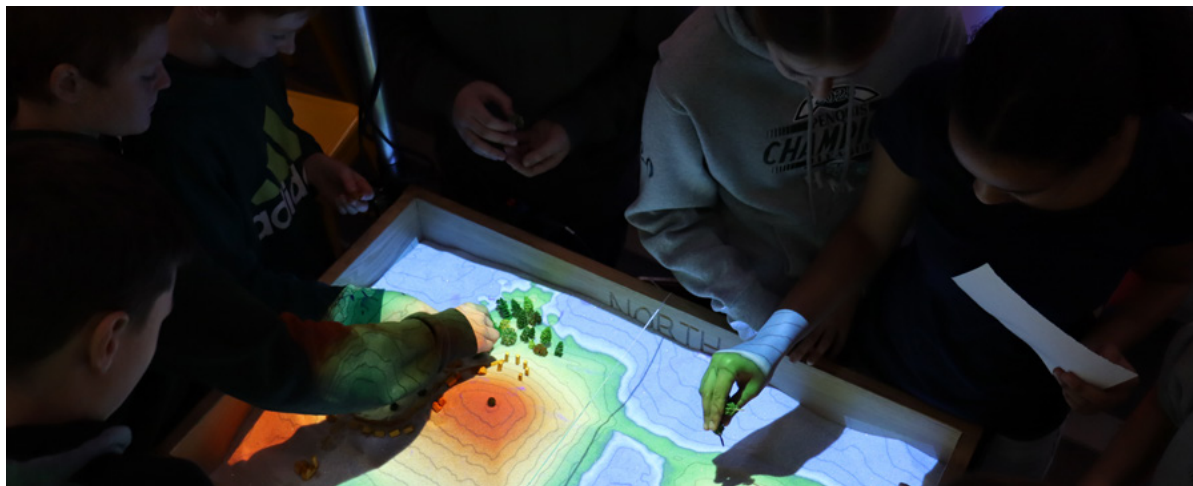
A typical lesson for younger students might look like a challenge to remove “invasive species” (glow in the dark glitter) from grassland (a small AstroTurf mat) using only rudimentary tools students select and “buy” from the lab. These tools might include tweezers, fans, straws, flashlights and aquarium nets. Every step must be diligently recorded. By the end of the class, students have learned 1) Scientific methods, including trial and error, hypothesis and conclusion; 2) the importance of record keeping and having



the right equipment and 3) the challenge of battling invasive species in Maine’s diverse ecosystems.

Another class might look like creating a test tube rainbow with food coloring, but wind up teaching solid laboratory measurement techniques (with state of the art “micropipettes”) and a lesson about the visual spectrum (did you know that bees can see ultraviolet light?).

**“(The lab) gave my students such a great opportunity,” said one middle school teacher. “They were using state of the art equipment that they wouldn’t otherwise have access to and learning about life-science opportunities in the working world that they didn’t know about.”**



# MAINE TEACHER OF THE YEAR

**Teachers never stop learning.** That's why the tremendous professional development opportunity that is Maine Teacher of the Year attracts hundreds of nominations and annually selects 16 motivated educators for 12 months of networking, advocacy training, curriculum development and personal growth.

## The Talented 2025 MTOY Cohort

**The 2025 MTOY program welcomed a diverse and multi-talented cohort, who quickly formed a tight network of mutual support, guidance and learning.** Whether learning how to advocate under the Capitol Dome in Augusta, exchanging classroom management techniques or integrating new ideas into their lessons, they enthusiastically embraced their year of development. Nationally they were represented by **Becky Hollowell, MTOY 2025** whose outdoor and place-based focus made her a valuable resource to her cohort. Becky teaches 4th grade and is known locally as “the mushroom lady” for her abiding interest in (and lessons taught) around local fungi.

## The 2026 Teacher of the Year

**The 2026 Teacher of the Year, selected in 2025, is Julia Edwards, a vocal arts educator and choir teacher at Poland High and Middle School.** Julia is a talented musician and performer herself, and her notable support for her fellow teachers and innate ability to understand and support students make her a terrific choice.

At the “surprise” announcement ceremony in October, students, faculty and staff gathered in the auditorium of Poland Regional High School/Bruce Whittier Middle School to honor Edwards. The surprise was all hers, though, when “her” chorus performed a song she had written. Rehearsed in secret, and rendered beautifully, the folk song about a woman sailor finding her way was the perfect celebration of Edwards’ talent, dedication and drive.



# TEACHER-CENTERED, TEACHER LED

## Celebrating Dolly Sullivan

**Dolly Sullivan—and her rich legacy of work with educators in every Maine county—**were celebrated in May at the University of Maine (Dolly’s alma mater). More than 100 people crowded the Buchanan Alumni House to sing the praises of the woman once described as “Maine teachers’ best friend.”

After a career leading, promoting and supporting Maine educators, most notably in the Teacher of the Year program, Dolly retired in 2025 to focus on her next chapter.

She served as director of Maine Teacher of the Year for many years, and led the incorporation of the state’s County Teachers of the Year into the statewide program. Her enthusiasm and passion for teaching (the University of Maine alumna was trained as a classroom teacher) helped her connect with thousands of educators over the decades..

She was instrumental in elevating the teacher recognition program and transforming it into a coveted year of professional development, networking and learning for the state’s top educators.



“It’s a chance to learn and grow in the profession,” Sullivan said frequently. “Teacher of the Year is about leadership and about advocacy.”

Sullivan also led the Education Leaders Experience program developed by Unum, and most recently launched the brand-new Teach Maine Center.

Fittingly, she had the last word at her goodbye party: “Public education makes a difference. Keep supporting our teachers and students.”

## Teach Maine Center

The program created by and for Maine teachers built on its many critical connections in 2025, especially links between the TMC design team and their schools, districts and networks, and grew into a powerful program of advocacy and professional development.

Maine and the nation face significant teacher workforce shortages. The Teach Maine Center gets to the heart of that challenge, providing teachers with access to professional development, arenas and events to connect, network and build their careers, and providing a central hub for advocacy efforts on compensation, certification and professional pathways.

In addition to multiple PD opportunities, the highlight of TMC’s year was the **Every Teacher a Leader Conference**, which brought together more than 100 teachers from around

the state for three days at Colby College and education on topics as varied as arts integration, outdoor learning and Native studies.

Critical support and resources were provided by the U.S. Department of Education and the John T. Gorman Foundation.

## Education Leaders Experience

The mighty Nu class of Education Leaders Experience spent 2025 learning, growing and doubling down on the relationship of education and business in Maine.

The annual program, developed and funded by Unum and managed by Educate Maine, **gathers 30 educators for monthly trips** to business locations from the southern counties to the Crown of Maine. The ELE cohorts (14 and counting) not only develop a strong network of fellow educators and business contacts; they learn what skills and interests employers seek from young job-seekers.

One standout session involved a trip to the Shelter Institute and the Wiscasset Speedway.



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