To Protect the Health of Students and Staff, Governor Mills Announces Additional Financial Support for School Systems Across Maine

September 23, 2020

Governor Janet Mills today dedicated an additional $164 million in CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF) to support school systems as they continue to implement health and safety protocols to protect students, staff, and their families amid the COVID-19 pandemic. These new funds build on the Mills Administration's initial investment of $165 million earlier this year.

> *"School officials across Maine are working day and night to protect the health of their students, their staff, and their communities while providing a high quality education. They deserve our full and unwavering support," said Governor Mills. "This funding helps ensure that our schools are best equipped as they can be to meet the challenges they face now as well as any that may arise this fall."*

> *"We recognize the incredible efforts of school communities across Maine who are working tirelessly to protect the health and safety of staff and students," said Pender Makin, Commissioner of Education. "These funds are critically important to address the immediate need for increased staffing, supplies and technology to ensure that schools can safely and flexibly meet the educational, social-emotional and nutritional needs of their students during these unprecedented times."*

Beginning next week, the funds will be distributed to School Administrative Units (SAUs) based on an equitable, weighted formula that the Maine Department of Education developed in collaboration with School Superintendents from across the state. The Maine Department of Education will first provide each SAU with its maximum allocation according to the formula. SAUs will then complete an application describing how the funds will be spent in order to remain within the constraints Congress has placed on the use of CRF monies and attest to their compliance with the health and safety requirements of the Framework for Re-Opening Schools and Returning to In-person Instruction. Once the applications are approved, SAUs can begin submitting receipts for reimbursement of approved expenditures.

> *"These funds have been critical to schools' ability to open safely," said MSSA Executive Director, Eileen King. "The first round of funds were frequently allocated to facility and technology upgrades that were needed for a safe and efficient return to school, where possible. This second round of funding will assist school and district leaders as they address the continued needs that arise from evolving and flexible plans, and ensure they have the resources and staffing for a safe learning environment."*

In August, Governor Mills signed an Executive Order (PDF) authorizing the Maine DOE to provide one year emergency teaching certifications to qualified individuals. In partnership with Eastern Maine Community College, the DOE is also offering a certification for "Learning Facilitators." These pre-teacher level staff members can staff learning centers or serve as an in-person learning assistant for a remote instruction teacher.

Schools may use these additional CRF funds to pay for substitute teachers or learning facilitators as well as other needs such as transportation and facility modifications to support physical distancing; cleaning supplies for buses or buildings; contract custodial, tutoring, and medical staffing; technology and ongoing connectivity needs; and professional development for teachers who must become fluent in hybrid and remote learning models in order to accommodate all students, among other possibilities.

With this second investment, the Mills Administration has dedicated $329 million to support Maine students and teachers as school districts pursue in-person, hybrid, or remote learning options, meeting the total need for start-up and ongoing operational costs for schools identified by the Maine Department of Education earlier this year.

Recognizing that more funding would be needed for ongoing operations, Governor Mills authorized an initial disbursement of $165 million in CRF funds to help schools prepare for in-classroom instruction in July.

For additional information on the use of CRF funds to support Maine schools, please visit the Department of Education website.

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