



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

MaineSpark Coalition Announces Ambitious New Goal for Education and Training for Working Mainers that Builds on Major Progress over the Past Decade

PORTLAND, Maine, June 2 , 2026 –The [MaineSpark](#) Coalition, a partnership of employers, educators, and nonprofit leaders launched in 2016, announces an ambitious new education and training goal for Maine: by 2035, 70 percent of working-age Mainers will hold postsecondary credentials, opening opportunities to good jobs and creating pathways to prosperity in their communities.

"Over the last decade, Maine has made tremendous progress in the number of working adults having earned a degree or credential, advancing from 43 percent in 2014 to 55.5 percent in 2024," said Jason Judd, Ed. D., Executive Director, Educate Maine, a key partner in the Coalition. "We're confident in our state's ability to grow, and we have launched a new goal for 2035 thanks to robust input from local communities across Maine. We've shown that with a shared purpose, we can make great strides helping Mainers gain postsecondary credentials for good jobs."

For the past ten years, coalition members have worked together to build systemic supports and pathways to ensure that Maine's workforce is more productive and competitive. Organizations connected the people of our state with the education, training, jobs, programs, and resources needed to thrive in our robust and changing economy.

"I have no plans to retire, so I needed to reinvent myself," said Karen Winfree, who enrolled at Kennebec Valley Community College at age 57 after a lifetime of working jobs such as cleaning houses while moving frequently as a military spouse. Winfree earned an associate degree in psychology and is now pursuing a bachelor's degree at Thomas College. "To work in my 60s, 70s and 80s, I needed to change focus from working jobs that challenge me physically, to work that challenges me mentally," she said.

To reach the new goal of 70 percent of Mainers holding a post-secondary credential, the coalition identified seven priority action areas as well as a number of key measures to track progress.

MaineSpark partners will continue successful initiatives focused on strengthening academic, career, and wrap-around supports that reduce structural and financial barriers. More than 400 specially trained Navigators statewide will work one-on-one with students to make sure they are aware of, can seamlessly access, and make use of supports that include:

- Credit transfers, flexible & online learning options, stipends/grants/financial aid resources;
- Childcare, transportation, healthcare;
- Apprenticeships, internships, job search, resume-building, and interview practice.



Many of these initiatives are co-developed with employers so they match existing and anticipated workforce needs. Engaged businesses help ensure curricula and student experience are relevant, accessible, and lead to in-demand careers. In return, businesses can hire and retain the workforce they need to function and grow.

"At Darling's, our skilled professionals arrive through every door - from high school Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs to community college internships to apprenticeships at all ages - and they keep growing through professional certifications we invest in along the way," says Kim Cotta, Talent Development Manager, Darling's Auto Group. "I am one of them: I started in a high school automotive CTE program 23 years ago, and I am still building my career here today. That's the kind of opportunity MaineSpark's initiative can unlock for Mainers."

Included in the 10-year goal is a commitment to increasing equity for economically and regionally disadvantaged Mainers as well as historically underrepresented and/or marginalized groups. MaineSpark is also committed to strengthening early childhood care and PreK-12 education, so 4th grade reading & math proficiency increases significantly.

"Children in elementary classrooms don't just learn skills or concepts, though those are important; they begin to learn who they are and picture who they could become," says Danielle Pelletier, 2024 York County Teacher of the Year and 3rd grade teacher in Saco. "Creating engaging learning experiences, collaborative environments, and fostering critical thinkers in these formative years is integral to the success of students in whatever career path they choose to walk after they graduate from high school."

MaineSpark was launched in 2016 and is a statewide coalition of education, business, and community leaders. The initiative is guided by key partners Educate Maine, Maine Development Foundation (MDF), Alford Scholarship Foundation, University of Maine System, Maine Community College System, and Finance Authority of Maine (FAME). More than 120 businesses, institutions, and community groups joined the effort in the coalition's first decade. We welcome new members and encourage others to join [here](#).

MaineSpark's work on the 2035 attainment goal is made possible by funding from the [Nellie Mae Education Foundation](#). For more information visit our [website](#).

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