

\$5.00
Sunday,
October 5, 2025

Maine Sunday Telegram

WEATHER:
Mostly sunny
and still warm
High 73°
Details, B8

NEW ENGLAND'S 2025 NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION BACKLOG REACHES A RECKONING

Aging infrastructure plagues districts across the state. The money needed to address the crisis just isn't there.



At George E. Jack School in Standish, portable classrooms are still in use years longer than intended. (DARYN SLOVER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)

By **RILEY BOARD**
and **DYLAN TUSINSKI**
Staff Writers

The sound of basketballs often reverberates through Laura Luchetti's class.

"We can't have gym and art on the same day," she said, from her room in the basement of the George E. Jack School, directly below the court. "It's too loud."

The Standish elementary school, like so many across the state, was built in the 1950s to accommodate the postwar baby boom, but it no lon-

ger reflects today's educational needs. It's made of wood but lacks sprinklers. It's not compliant with the Americans With Disabilities Act. Its heating and cooling system leaks. The library and music room are housed in portable classrooms that are still in use years longer than they were built to last.

"The needs have changed, and the functionality of this building has just gone down," said Clay Gleason, superintendent of School Administrative District 6, which includes Standish.

Please see **SCHOOLS**, Page A4

AMONG THE TAKEAWAYS

- 1. MORE THAN HALF** of Maine's schools were built in the 1950s, '60s and '70s.
- 2. THE COST TO BUILD** a school has risen dramatically, even as available funding has not kept pace.
- 3. DECLINING ENROLLMENT** will likely necessitate consolidation, an option many Maine communities resist.

VISITING ACADIA DURING A SHUTDOWN

Empty tollbooths and closed visitor centers don't deter tourists as the Trump administration considers 'irreversible' cuts.'



By **DYLAN TUSINSKI**
Staff Writer

ACADIA NATIONAL PARK — The entrances to America's seventh-busiest national park were open Friday, but unmanned. Visitor centers were closed. Park rangers were scarce, most having been furloughed by the government shutdown.

The parking lots and Island Explorer buses remained full of guests determined to enjoy one of Maine's most popular tourist destinations at the height of leaf peeping season, but the experience looked a little different.

"It's confusing to know what's open, what's closed, what we can do, what we can't do," said Chris DeMichieli, who was visiting from Michigan. "We know they have limited services, but because the visitor centers are closed down, it's been hard to find any information."

The government shutdown that began last week has disrupted every federal agency, including the U.S. Department of the Interior, which manages the National Park Service. As Republicans and Democrats in Congress continue to cast blame and an end to the stoppage seems elusive, President Donald Trump has threatened to use the shutdown to carry out mass layoffs.

The Portland Press Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram spoke to a dozen Acadia National Park visitors from across the country on Friday, day three of the shutdown. Most said their trips were largely business as usual, though the absence of park rangers and staff made finding their way around the park much more difficult.

DeMichieli and her travel compan-



Russ and Cheree Cheatham, of Alabama, take in the view from a section of the Park Loop Road between Sand Beach and Thunder Hole during their visit to Acadia National Park this weekend. At top, a park pass kiosk at the Halls Cove Visitor Center informs travelers that it is out of service because of the shutdown. (PHOTOS BY BRIANNA SOUKUP/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)

ion, Diana Griffin, had stopped at the Halls Cove Visitor Center to buy a day pass and grab a map. But after walking up a couple flights of stairs from the parking lot, they found the center's gift shop and restrooms were closed.

So, they returned to the Island Explorer bus stop at the parking lot, only to

find the self-service kiosk for day passes was out of order. A crowd of people had gathered around the machine, attempting to scan a QR code to buy a pass online after having made the same round trip as DeMichieli and Griffin.

Please see **ACADIA**, Page A6

INSIDE

'IT WAS ALL SO UNSERIOUS': How a potentially monumental Oval Office meeting failed to stop the federal government shutdown / **A3**

FACT CHECK on the shutdown / **A3**

INDEX



NEW FICTION
Island residents in Down East Maine struggle as climate change reshapes lives
BOOKS / E4

Advice/TV.....	H5	Horoscope.....	H5
Almanac.....	A3	Jobs.....	D6
Antiques.....	H3	Travis Lazarczyk.....	C1
Art Review.....	E2	Lottery.....	A3
Audience.....	E1	Maine Millennial.....	D4
Classified.....	D6	Opinion.....	D1
Crosswords.....	H4-5	Public Notices.....	D6
Deaths.....	B5-7	Roll Call.....	B3
Deep Water.....	E5	Scene & Heard.....	E6
Food & Dining.....	F1	Sports.....	C1
Hiking in Maine.....	C1	Varsity Maine.....	C1
Homes.....	H1	The Wrap.....	F3



Volume 138
Number 16
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Maine Trust
for Local News

Persistent drought hurts Maine farmers

After a wet planting season, the agricultural community hoped for a stretch of blue summer skies. What they got was a long dry spell that caused heavy losses by eating into crop yields. And the pain isn't over yet.

By **PENELOPE OVERTON**
and **ROBERT LOWELL**
Staff Writers

Heath Miller has been on the hunt for water since June.

That is when the first summer heat wave hit Maine and the Newburgh dairy farmer realized the two wells that he relies on to water his 260 milking cows were running low. His cows need 50 to 80 gallons of water a day, depending on how hot it is, and Miller was worried.

"The cows can't run out of water," Miller said. "A dry cow won't milk."

Miller decided to haul water from his home to make up the difference until the rains came — but they didn't, at least not enough to re-

plenish the wells.

This year, Maine saw its sixth-driest summer on record, with nearly 3 fewer inches of rain than the historical average of 11 inches, according to the National Weather Service. As of Oct. 2, more than half of the state was in severe or extreme drought.

The Maine agricultural economy is grappling with significant long-term repercussions from the persistent drought, which deprived crops of critical water in July and August and now threatens next year's harvests, state officials said Thursday at a meeting of the state's Drought Task Force.

Please see **DROUGHT**, Page A12



Bob Parsons says his family harvested about 20% less corn this year on his farm in Gorham. "The corn started out good ... and then it was like someone turned off the irrigation pump," he says. (GREGORY REC/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER)