



Kelly Bickmore, *President, RSU 22*
Marlene Tallent, *President-Elect, Surry (Union 93)*
Becky Fles, *Vice President, RSU 11*
Kristin Malin, *Past President, Georgetown (AOS 98)*
Cornelia L. Brown, Ph.D., *Executive Director, cbrown@msmaweb.com*
Robert G. Hasson, Jr., Ed.D., *Deputy Executive Director, rhasson@msmaweb.com*
Elaine M. Tomaszewski, *Associate Executive Director, etomaszewski@msmaweb.com*
Victoria A. Wallack, *Director of Government Relations & Communications, vwallack@msmaweb.com*

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Michaud talks union issues

Gubernatorial candidate Congressman Michael Michaud is an unabashed union supporter, but told the Maine School Boards Association board of directors that should not be a concern to them because he also supports employee accountability.



“I’m a union member myself and feel strongly about collective bargaining rights,” Michaud told the board at its March 15 meeting. “I also support accountability of employees.”

All three candidates for governor have been invited to present before the MSBA board. Candidate Eliot Cutler came before the board in January and Gov. LePage has been invited, but will be represented by his education policy director, Tom Desjardin, in April.

When it comes to teacher evaluations and the debate over how much weight student achievement data should be given in an overall score, Michaud said his concern is that “everyone learns at a different pace and every school department is different.” He said there should be flexibility in the system.

In terms of whether education policy should remain the domain of local school boards versus making it a subject of collective bargaining – a move the teacher’s union has unsuccessfully pushed in the past – Michaud said he was not sure.

(continued on page 3)

MSBA Statehouse Day first-year success

The first Maine School Boards Association Day at the Statehouse drew an impressive turnout from across the state, with more than 100 people gathering in the Hall of Flags for speeches on the need for the state to make education funding a top priority.

MSBA President Kelly Bickmore kicked off the rally saying that while school districts were relieved the Legislature acted to prevent a threatened \$9.5 million curtailment in General Purpose Aid, the bigger issue of adequately funding schools is not being addressed.



(continued on page 4)

Focus on Boardsmanship

Talking To and Learning From New Board Members

By John Bulina, President, New Jersey School Boards Association

“Welcome New Board Members,” is a phrase I have uttered countless times – at NJSBA’s orientation programs, at Workshop, at county programs, and at meetings of my own board. Every time I say it I think back to when I was a new board member 25 years ago, and was just starting out on this journey.

When I do meet new board members, they often have questions for me about board service. But they’re sometimes surprised when I tell them that we veteran members also have lessons to learn from the newbies.

Here is what I want to tell new board members:

You have a lot to learn. What I often hear from board members with a few months’ experience under their belts is “I didn’t know what I didn’t know.” This job that you’ve signed up for as a school board member is one that involves familiarity with a specialized body of knowledge. To do the job well, you need to know something about education law, curriculum, finance, labor relations and policy. You don’t have to know everything – your superintendent, business administrator and the entire staff of NJSBA is here to help you. But trust me: As a new board member you have a lot to learn. Listen carefully at board meetings, don’t hesitate to ask questions when you are unsure about something, and do your homework.

You can’t accomplish anything single-handedly. You are one member of a team that includes not only your fellow board members, but also the professionals working in your district. If you have joined a board with the idea that you are going to single-handedly install a new curriculum or restore courtesy busing to your neighborhood, you’re in for a surprise. Remember you have one vote out of a board of perhaps seven or nine members. That means you need to cooperate and work productively with your fellow board members and the district administrators. That’s how things really get done.

You need training – and it is easily available. Your first stop will be orientation training offered by your district. Either your superintendent, board chair or both will provide the basics and specific local information. Maine School Management Association offers customized board workshops tailored specifically to the needs of boards throughout the state. Our annual MSMA Fall Conference, scheduled this year for Oct. 23 and 24, offers more than 50 clinics, nearly half of which pertains to board-related issues and leadership. If you have question, call MSMA for assistance.

Here is what I like to see from new board members:

A reminder of the enthusiasm that comes with being a brand new board member. As a new board member, what you don’t need to learn is how to care about your community’s schools. You wouldn’t be here if you didn’t care. Sometimes we board member veterans get a little world-weary. Seeing the energy and enthusiasm that new members bring to a board is invigorating for us, and reminds us why we signed on, too.

(continued on page 3)

No GPA curtailment

A supplemental budget that explicitly prevents a proposed \$9.5 million cut to GPA passed in the Legislature on March 21 with strong bipartisan support.

The budget, which passed in the Senate 33-to-1 and in the House 121-to-6 contains language that says GPA cannot be curtailed in 2015 to fill a \$9.5 million hole imbedded in the biennial budget last year.

The bill, L.D. 1843, essentially represents half of a supplemental biennial budget since most of the items in it address shortfalls in the current 2014 fiscal year, the most substantial being in the state's Medicaid account. A second bill is expected to address shortfalls in fiscal year 2015.

The budget is now awaiting the governor's signature.

The DOE is cautioning that while the curtailment may have been prevented, most of the 2015 budget has not yet been addressed, including language that sets down in statute what the state and local share is for support of public education.

Michaud talks union issues

(continued from page 1)

"I'd have to look at it," Michaud said of making education policy a negotiable item. He said if elected he would explore the issue by asking all sides to weigh into the debate.

"My leadership style is to sit down and not be afraid to talk to folks and find commonality," he said.

The former state legislator who was elected to Congress in 2003 in the state's 2nd District, also outlined what his education priorities would be if he wins in November.

"My first priority is making sure students get a good quality education regardless of where they live throughout the state of Maine," he said, and "I don't support expanding charter schools beyond what we already have."

On the budget, Michaud said increasing the state share of public education to 55 percent is the goal, but it will take time to get there. What he would like to see in the interim is more stability in education funding. Michaud would support a constitutional amendment that would require the Legislature to pay for programs as they go versus creating a state budget shortfall.

What I Want to Tell New Board Members

(continued from page 2)

Innovative ideas Often new board members bring specialized expertise and new ideas to a school district. Both are valuable commodities. School districts face unprecedented challenges these days. Thinking outside of the box is welcomed!

What the community is thinking. New board members typically have ties to different community members than veteran board members. If the new board member is young, he or she may be connected to parents of young elementary school students; while

veteran board members may have older or grown children and may not know many people from this demographic anymore. I am always interested in hearing about the concerns of community members, and new board members are often a great source of information on the topic.

Learning the skills necessary to be an effective school board member takes time and effort, but it is satisfying to know that you are contributing to one of society's most noble goals: helping all children learn and achieve their full potential. Welcome to the board.

-Adapted from NJSBA *School Leader*, Volume 44 · 4, January/February 2014

MSBA Statehouse Day

(continued from page 1)

“Friday’s vote was a stop-gap measure,” Bickmore said of the Legislature’s approval on March 21 of a supplemental budget that blocks the curtailment. (See story page 2.) “Unless we change the discussion around funding public education in this state, we are going to be here again next year and the year after that, fighting to hold onto state funding that only represents 45 percent state share.

Funding for education is critical, Bickmore said.

“Kids who can’t read, don’t succeed,” she said, and students in poverty don’t perform as well as their peers without extra help.

“To improve achievement for all students, we have to invest in a longer school year, more one-on-one coaching with students and better trained teachers,” she said, and all that costs money.

The Day at the Statehouse was set up to bring school board members to Augusta to meet with their legislators and collectively support sustainable funding for public schools.

There were board members from Calais to Elliot and scores of communities in between.

Following a morning reception, board members literally filled up the gallery overlooking the House of Representatives where they received warm regards from the House after being announced by Speaker Eves.

The group then gathered in the Hall of Flags on the second floor of the Statehouse and were first greeted by members of the Education Committee, who thanked them for their service and heard their message around necessary school funding.

In addition to calling on the state to live up to its promise of 55 percent, MSBA President Bickmore called on the more than 200 school boards across the state to ramp up their advocacy efforts.

“Together we have a strong voice to advocate for adequate state funding and policies that support, not tear down, public education. Together we can help change the negative drumbeat against public schools. Together we can find ways to share best practices and learn from each other’s mistakes, and by doing so can continue to raise the bar on what constitutes excellence in education and, most important, what best serves our children,” she said.

MSBA President Elect Marlene Tallent, Vice President Becky Fles and former president, Susan Campbell, then moved to the podium and each gave overviews of the budget cuts going on in their district after several years of reduced or flat-funding from the state.



If you have questions about any articles in this newsletter or suggestion for improving this publication, let us know.

You can contact me, MSBA Executive Director, Connie Brown. cbrown@msmaweb.com

MSBA Day at the Statehouse

