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Charter schools cost \$5 million and rising

Charter schools are expected to pull around \$5 million out of regular public schools next school year, and that amount will grow if charter enrollment grows. On average, the cost is \$9,000 per pupil in state and local funding, which the sending school has to pay to the charter school.

That cost to taxpayers has raised concerns among those who now hear commercials for the newest charter, virtual Connections Academy, which is scheduled to open in September. It is being advertised as a "free public school." It is not free, they argue; rather taxpayers are footing the bill.

There are currently five charter schools already operating in Maine, and Connections Academy will make six, if it can meet the conditions in its contract. State law limits the number of schools that can be approved by the commission to 10 until 2021 - 10 years after the charter law was enacted.

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Teacher evaluation rules finally adopted

The rules guiding how teacher evaluation systems are supposed to be developed and implemented in schools have been adopted after the Legislature overrode the governor's veto.

The final rules are now online at the DOE website. Click on: adopted rule.

The Legislature made several significant changes to the rules initially proposed by the Department of Education. Those changes were most recently outlined in a letter from Education Commissioner Jim Rier.

Those key changes include:

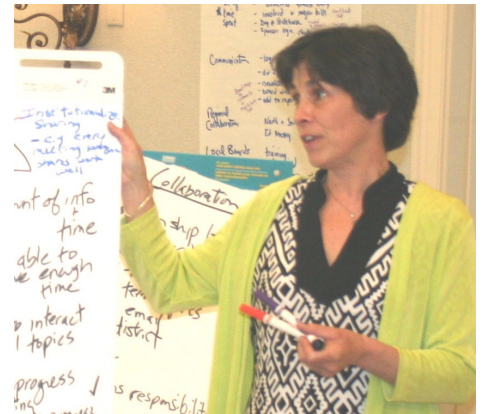
Stakeholder Group to Develop PE/PG System Using Consensus Process

- SAUs will be required to form a stakeholder group to develop their PE/PG systems.

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MSBA Board planning for future

The Maine School Boards Association Board of Directors held a retreat on May 17 to discuss progress made on goals set in 2013 for the association and to look ahead on how to best serve the 1,600 members serving on boards across the state.



Facilitator Sally Loughlin

A key topic was board training. Over the last year, MSBA staff have done 24 board training workshops, with more planned. Those training sessions are tailored to board needs.

It was suggested that in addition to overall board training, there should be sessions for board chairs and vice-chairs. The point was made that a key skill is learning to listen to one's fellow board members and trusting those to whom work has been delegated.

There also was a discussion about how to recruit more people to run for local boards and generate interest in board elections. One suggestion for greater participation in board elections is to hold them on the same day as state or national elections. Research shows that those boards whose members are chosen in higher-turnout elections tend to be higher performing. (See story on page 2.)

On progress made on key goals, highlights include:

- Legislative advocacy has increased substantially and was evident on key bills including protection of GPA;
First-ever School Boards Day at the Statehouse;
Greater press presence particularly in the state's major dailies;
Work underway on new MSMA website; completion expected by August; and,

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MSBA Board planning

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- School Board training improved and tailored to needs.

This year there will be a focus on helping the state's school boards work together in their designated regions, which follow the same geographic lines as the state's superintendent regions.

Those regions are represented on the MSBA Board of Directors, and board members talked about the need to do outreach to fellow boards in their region and communicate with them about issues discussed at MSBA board meetings.



Maine School Boards Association directors

Board leadership affects student performance

A new study about the influence school boards have on public education shows those board members who make academic performance a priority are more likely to be in districts where students “beat the odds” when it comes to performing better than one would expect.

The study done by the Fordham Foundation and released in March shows this focus on academics by school boards is not the norm.

“There is little consensus that improving student learning is as important as or more important than other concerns, such as ‘development of the whole child’ and not placing ‘unreasonable expectations for student achievement’ on schools,” the study found.

Those districts that are more successful academically have board members who assign a high priority to improving student learning, according to the study.

The study also found that political moderates tend to be more informed than liberals or conservatives when it comes to money matters, and educators and former educators are less informed.

“Members who describe themselves as conservatives are less likely than liberals to say that funding is a barrier to academic achievement, regardless of actual spending in the district. Conversely, liberals are more likely than conservatives to say that collective bargaining is not a barrier to achievement, regardless of actual collective bargaining conditions,” the report says.

“Political moderates are the most likely to have accurate knowledge regarding school funding and class size in the district.”

Another interesting finding of the study is that school boards elected at-large in elections synched with state or national voting days are more likely to govern districts that beat the odds academically.

“Districts that elect a larger percentage of board members from at-large (from the entire district rather than from sub-districts, wards or precincts) and in on-cycle elections (held the same day as major state or national elections) are substantially more like to beat the odds. Merely holding elections at the same time as state or national elections is associated with a student proficiency rate about 2.4 points higher than a comparable district that has off-cycle elections,” according to the study.

To read more go to: <http://www.edexcellence.net/publications/does-school-board-leadership-matter>

Teacher evaluation

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- ◆ The majority of the stakeholder group will be teachers – one-third endorsed by a majority of the SAU's teachers; one-third endorsed by the school board; and one-third endorsed by both the school board and a majority of the SAU's teachers. The other members of the stakeholder group will be principals, administrators, parents, members of the public and school board members. (Note: If the SAU already has a group developing its PE/PG system, it can continue with that group if a majority of teachers in the SAU vote to allow that group to continue rather than being reformulated.)
- ◆ The stakeholder group has to develop the PE/PG system using a “consensus decision-making process.”

Student Achievement Data

- ◆ It will be up to the stakeholder group to determine what percentage of student achievement data will be used in the evaluation system. (The DOE had proposed a minimum of 20 percent.) The rule still requires that student learning and growth measures must be a “significant factor” in the overall evaluation score.

School Board Authority

- ◆ The school board still has the authority and responsibility to adopt or reject the PE/PG system developed by the stakeholder group. *(continued on page 5)*

Focus on Boardmanship

Writing Wrongs: Developing Strategies for Dynamic Change

First, please note that the title of this article is not misspelled.

Writing Wrongs is exactly what was intended and if the play on words, using “writing” instead of *righting*, captures your attention, well...that was the intent.



What's wrong

That depends. Ultimately, it hinges on a myriad of items that can affect the collective efficiency of your board. However, if you volunteer that, “Nothing is wrong”, then I applaud you and discourage you from reading further. Certainly, some boards are not plagued by circumstances that affect their ability to govern effectively. Still, although many boards are operating very effectively, there are those who are not and who are apparently oblivious to that fact.

However, I am not specifically addressing the types of issues that are catastrophic for boards and detrimental to school corporations. Even if your board is not ready to implode, that does not suggest that simple issues are unimportant or should be ignored. Rather, I am inferring that a board's best constructive contributions are realized when the board has effectively addressed the items that may be hindering its best performance. Even good school boards have more than one issue they need to address. Perhaps identifying these concerns as *wrongs* seems a little harsh, but if these concerns are preventing your board from being all that it can be, then how can they be *right*? Yes, writing to right wrongs is important and I will explain what I mean by that play on words, but for now I will just indicate that that activity needs to be intentional, well-planned and well-orchestrated.

Systematically tackle the issues

Being proactive is important. It is extremely counter-productive to simply do nothing, burying your heads in the sand, when you suspect there are issues that need to be addressed; however, it is completely irresponsible when you *know* there are issues. Waiting, hoping that the fallout from issues will not overtake you is simply unrealistic. The truth is we would rather pretend that issues are not there because if we acknowledge them, then we are accountable for their resolution. However, ignored problems are seldom resolved by the passage of time. If anything, turning a blind eye to issues allows them opportunity to become more firmly entrenched in the system, making them more difficult to uproot. Regardless, the board is accountable either way, if it admits problems exist or if it ignores them.

Board dynamics

This is a sensitive area, but a crucial one. Boards throughout the state have a tough task. Most boards, with only a few exceptions, are comprised of 5 or 7 members. Board members are housewives, doctors, engineers, farmers, salespersons, business owners, funeral directors, professors, bus drivers, consultants, educators, and so on. Of course, this list is by no means exhaustive; if you can think of a profession not already mentioned, there is likely someone from that profession serving on a local school board somewhere in the state. This diversity is one of the strengths of local governance, helping insure that issues are fairly weighed from multiple perspectives and experiences.

If that is true, then perhaps the obvious question is, “Why can't we all just get along?” That is a great question and there are many reasons *why*, but essentially, effective board dynamics are dependent upon members relinquishing personal power (real, implied, or imagined) and adopting leadership roles that are collaborative. It is also dependent upon an individual willingness to yield to decisions that are determined by a simple majority of members. That sounds easy, but in reality, not every board member easily relinquishes hold of his or her personal position in favor of a shared leadership style.

Although some board members struggle with the thought of relinquishing control or sharing leadership, the very act of combining multiple personalities into one governance voice accomplishes what no individual board member can on his or her own.

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Writing Wrongs

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Community Member or Special Interest Groups

It is sometimes difficult to know where allegiances reside. Board members are representatives, mostly elected, but sometimes appointed, to represent the best interests of their constituencies in matters pertaining to public education within their respective school corporations. It is important to understand that, although all members represent their constituents, no one is obligated to cast his or her vote supporting of any sub-group within their constituency. Board members are elected to make decisions based on their individual interpretations of information and objective data, not the misinformation or popular opinion that all too often drives public opinion.

Tradition

Traditions are integral parts of every school corporation: some are a source of school and community pride, and most are benign. However, when a tradition prevents necessary changes in governance, it is important to consider if, “This is the way we do things here!” really represents a responsible defense for denying progressive change. Responsible boards are always assessing and reviewing their governance practices or, the processes by which they operate.

Governance Oversight vs. Management

Board members have the very best job in public education. They do not have to do *anything!* Do not get excited... although board members are not managers in school corporations, and although they do not have any supervisory authority, they are still accountable for *everything*. That means that, while they are not *hands on* in the day-to-day management of the school corporation, they are regularly apprised of the health of the corporation through the superintendent. They also work in conjunction with the superintendent to routinely assess the progress of the corporation as it fulfills its educational obligations as defined by statute and as it is engaged in locally adopted corporate goals and objectives.

When the school board intentionally embraces an oversight approach, it allows every school employee to fulfill the responsibilities of their positions and regularly report progress through their respective lines of authority and ultimately to the school board through the superintendent. Governance oversight does not suggest an absence of authority. Rather, it is a liberating board position emphasizing accountability throughout an organization.

What do I mean about *writing wrongs*?

The play on words is meant to emphasize that you cannot simply talk about issues or circumstances that are preventing your board from accomplishing its purpose, that being, providing effective governance for your respective school corporations. Confronting issues and verbalizing them is a great first step, but you must go further if you ever hope to correct them.

Correcting problems is very much like vision planning. It begins with an acknowledgement of what is and what can be, but if you never take the process any further than your thoughts or informal discussion, nothing is likely to happen. There is little, if any, commitment within a thought. However, if you want to achieve real results, you first need to give your thoughts substance... **WRITE THEM DOWN!** That is always the first step to goal attainment. A written thought, idea, or plan of action anchors future planning and activity. Committing your ideas to paper is the first tangible evidence of a thought and will ultimately be necessary to measure progress. A thought is elusive and is seldom thought twice, but you can always return to a thought or idea captured on paper.

You may wish things would change, hope that the board will come together, and believe that everything will be better tomorrow, but if you are not intentionally engaged in a process to identify areas where improvement can occur and then to systematically embark on an improvement plan to make things better, nothing will happen. It is really not a question of whether your board is broken; it is a twofold question that asks, “Can you be better and are you willing to?”

-Indiana School Boards Association, *The Journal*, Fall 2013, by Dr. Michael T. Adamson, Director of Board Services



Hiring back retired teachers

For those districts looking to hire back retired teachers, legislation was passed this year that allows them to be rehired at 100 percent salary, versus the 75 percent cap that has been law since 2011.

L.D. 39 "An Act To Expand the Number of Qualified Educators" amends the law regarding the restoration of service for teachers. It says that, effective August 1, 2014, a classroom teacher, who has reached normal retirement age, retired after September 1, 2011, and who is restored to service must be paid 100 percent for the position through one-year contracts, with a limit of 5 one-year contracts per SAU. The compensation is the one established for the position, at a step determined by the school administrative unit.

If a teacher wants to work more than five years at the same SAU, the salary will then go back to 75 percent, and the employment cannot last for more than another five years.

L.D. 39 also establishes a working group to look at the impact of the 75-percent pay restrictions still in effect for other school personnel, including superintendents, to see if the law should be changed to allow them to come back at 100 percent as well.

The bill had been vetoed by the governor, but that veto was overridden.

Charter schools

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That means four slots will be available over the next six years.

The Maine Charter School Commission is about to start soliciting new applications for the 2015-2016 school year, with letters of intent due June 25.

The five schools already in operation include:

- Good Will-Hinckley's Maine Academy of Natural Sciences
- Cornville Regional Charter School
- Fiddlehead School of Arts and Science in Gray
- Baxter Academy for Technology and Science in Portland
- Harpswell Coastal Academy

The Maine Connections Academy contract was approved April 6.

A major concern for the school is whether it will meet the necessary minimum enrollment, which had been set at 243, or 10 percent below the projected enrollment of 270. The contract gives the school a loophole to come in below 243, allowing it to ask the commission to change the minimum enrollment language, if it successfully makes the case the school can operate with fewer students.

State releases spreadsheet showing GPA distribution

The Department of Education has released a spreadsheet showing how General Purpose Aid is being distributed across the state in the 2014-2015 school year.

The spreadsheet is based on adjusted calculations that went out to individual districts in April in the form of new ED 279s. State aid is staying essentially the same for 2014-2015 as compared to this school year.

The spreadsheet can be seen by clicking on the following link:

[2014-2015 GPA](#)

The new calculations corrected errors in data initially reported to the DOE, and as a result the overall cost of education statewide went up. The new minimum local mill rate each district must raise for public education is now 8.1 compared to 8.07.

Key drivers in distribution continue to be enrollment and property valuations, although variations in other areas like special education spending can have a significant impact.

A law change now requires property values used in the distribution of GPA to be based on a rolling average. The valuations used for this coming school year were based on values from 2012 and 2013. Next year and going forward, three years of valuations will be used in an effort to even out spikes.

Teacher evaluations

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Fallback Plans if Consensus Isn't Reached by June 1, 2015

- ◆ There is a June 1, 2015 deadline for the stakeholder group to reach consensus, or the rule provides fallback plans. If the group fails to reach consensus on just the weight of student growth measures, then the weight must be 20 percent (or its equivalent on a matrix) and the rest of their consensus goes forward as the plan. If the stakeholder group fails to reach consensus on other issues, the SAU must adopt a State Model PE/PG system, which will be developed by the Maine DOE by this July.

Pilot Year

- ◆ While SAUs are still required to pilot their systems during the 2014-15 school year, they are not required to include all of their student growth measures in the pilot, though they are encouraged to do so.

Different Standards for Assessments

- ◆ The adopted rule replaces the terms "valid and reliable" in reference to assessments and instead provides more detailed criteria in keeping with work already going on in the field.

For more information about the requirements of **the adopted rule** or for technical assistance on standards and supports for teacher and principal effectiveness, contact Maine DOE Educator Effectiveness Coordinator Mary Paine at mary.paine@maine.gov or 207-624-6748.



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

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