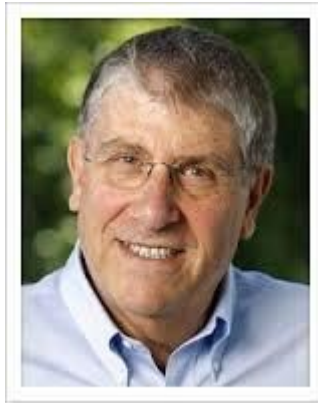


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Cutler lays out education plan



Independent gubernatorial candidate, Eliot Cutler, came to the Maine School Boards Association Board of Directors January meeting and outlined his platform for K-12 education, including broadening the tax base to support public schools and getting away from reliance on the property tax.

All three candidates for governor, including Democrat Michael Michaud and Republican Governor Paul LePage have been invited to present before the board over the coming months.

Cutler said that while no school system can assure a child's success, all children have to be given the opportunity to succeed.

"We can't guarantee anyone's outcome in life, but we have a responsibility to give every child in the state of Maine substantial equality of opportunity," Cutler said.

In order to do that, Cutler said Maine has to move away from its reliance on the local property tax to fund public education, which he described as "providing opportunity based on a child's zip code."

"The property tax is the most unfair, regressive tax in our structure," he said. "We have to move to a broader tax base."

Cutler put a caveat on that proposal, saying there will have to be substantial tax reform legislation passed in order to broaden that base.

Cutler also confirmed his support for charter schools, but went on to say virtual charter schools are in a different category.

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Awaiting outcome on virtual education bill

A bill that would put a moratorium on the approval of virtual charters school to give the state time to create a virtual academy or exchange serving all Maine students is working its way through the Legislature, as this newsletter goes to press.

The bill, L.D. 1736, Resolve, To Create a State-run Virtual Academy Providing Maine Students with Access to Online Learning through Their Existing School Districts, would help all Maine students have access to quality, online curriculum and cost a fraction of what the state and local taxpayers would spend on a virtual charter school. It was approved by the Education Committee in an 11-2 vote.

L.D. 1736 is good for Maine students because it would: -- make sure all students have access to quality online courses in subjects that have been cut in some school districts because of budget constraints;

--level the playing field between small and large districts (continued on page 2)

Board Statehouse Day March 24

The Maine School Boards Association will be hosting a "Day at the Statehouse" on March 24 and School Board members from across the state are encouraged to attend. This day will allow board members to meet with their legislators and talk to them about the important issues facing public education.



Email invitations have been sent out to School Board chairs to organize delegations from each district. If you would like to attend, please coordinate with your chair.

The day will begin with a sign-in, starting at 10 a.m., followed by a press conference at noon, and time allocated to meet with legislators. Details will be provided by your board chair.

Cutler lays out education plan

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“I’m strongly in favor of charter schools and have been a proponent of charter schools for years simply because I think they spur innovation. They offer opportunities to kids that don’t respond to the opportunities available in public schools, for whatever reason,” he said.

Cutler said he believes the state needs to take over funding for charter schools, so individual sending districts aren’t penalized. He used as an example RSU 54 in Skowhegan, which was hard hit when two charter schools – Cornville Elementary and Good Will-Hinckley’s Maine Academy of Natural Sciences – opened up in the district.

Cutler drew the line, however, at virtual charters.

“Particularly for-profit virtual schools are simply collections of tools that have been fashioned into a school and operate as a mechanism to make people some money,” he said.

Instead of creating stand-alone virtual schools, Cutler said the virtual learning tools should be available to all school districts and used in combination with “real classrooms and real teachers.”

In his “A State of Opportunity” book, where Cutler outlines his platform in several key areas including education, the candidate also proposes:

- Improving and expanding early childhood education
- Tying teacher and principal compensation to student achievement
- Lowering the cost of higher education

Cutler added he put virtual charter schools in a different category than brick-and-mortar ones.

Awaiting outcome on virtual education bill

(continued from page 1)

and rich and poor ones by allowing schools, for a reasonable price, to enhance their curriculums despite budget cuts and declining enrollment;

-- allow school districts to negotiate better prices on the virtual courses they already are purchasing today;

-- and, keep the money we spend on virtual learning in the state to help all students, instead of sending it to out-of-state, for-profit corporations that would take up to \$9,000 for each student enrolled in a virtual charter school. That adds up to just under \$3 million in year one, and \$7 million in year five as enrollment in the virtual charter school is allowed to increase.

School Boards and Superintendents did an outstanding job talking to their legislators about L.D. 1736 and more help will be needed if the bill passes and the governor vetoes it, as expected. MSMA will keep members posted on the progress and outcome of the vote through bulletins.

Revenue reforecast Feb. 21

The state’s Revenue Forecasting Committee is meeting this Friday, Feb. 21, to reforecast how much tax revenue will be coming into the state this fiscal year and next – a critical meeting since many are hoping that tax receipts will increase enough to help pay for an estimated \$165 million hole in the state budget.

The meeting will start at 9 a.m. in the Appropriations Committee room and can be heard by clicking [this link](#).

The reforecast is of great interest to public schools because the governor’s Office of Policy and Management has recommended that GPA be cut by \$9.5 million in 2014-2015 to help fill a \$35 million hole that was actually put in as a placeholder in the biennial budget.

One of the rationales for cutting schools that much is not all districts have spent the GPA they received for this fiscal year since the biennial budget was passed so late. Education Commissioner Jim Rier bolstered that argument earlier this month when he estimated that \$18.5 million was being carried over by schools into the 2014-2015 school year.

Many schools, in fact, that already had passed their local budgets by the time the biennial budget was finally passed on June 26, were encouraged to carry over funds to help mitigate property tax increases and budget cuts in 2014-2015.

Social media bill now a study

A bill that would have prevented school personnel from even asking to see a student’s Facebook page or other social media exchanges when it was believed that students or others were at risk of harm has been turned into a study.

The Judiciary Committee voted to turn L.D. 1194, An Act To Protect Social Media Privacy in School and the Workplace, into a study when legislators became divided over who should be regulated by the proposal. At one point in the debate, it was suggested that businesses be exempt from the bill, leaving it to apply only to public schools.

Questions also were raised about whether a prohibition on even asking to look at a student’s social media exchange would prevent school administrators from investigating bullying cases, as required by current law.

The amended version of the bill, if approved by the full Legislature, would authorize a study that would be brought back to the Judiciary Committee in 2015.




Focus on Boardsmanship

Speaking With One Voice

By Sally Howell, Executive Director, Alabama Association of School Boards

Here is the dilemma: You are a member of the board, and the board, by majority vote, has made a decision with which you disagree. The decision has been implemented [site selected, person hired, curriculum adopted] and you still—strongly—disagree with the decision. What do you do?

- 
- A. Work with community groups or others who support your view to overturn the board's decision, even though it has been implemented?
 - B. Complain bitterly at every opportunity about the board's "bad" decision?
 - C. Continue to vote against any measure even remotely related to the decision to signal your continuing protest?
 - D. Accept the will of the majority and fulfill your responsibility to continue to implement the decision in the best manner possible?

No doubt, the best answer is D.

Unfortunately, that is not the most practiced answer. Answers A, B and C reflect a fundamental misunderstanding of a board member's unique role. Only answer D reflects understanding of the difference between being a politician and being a statesman, as well as the duties of an "executive branch" body.

Of all the bad choices, answer A is the most offensive to the principles of good boardsmanship. Board members, whether elected or appointed, are representatives of the people. But the board member's *duty* is to the board and the system. A school board, state or local, is an executive branch agency. It is not a purely legislative body like the state Legislature or Congress. Legislators can revisit issues as part of their legislative function, but boards, in their executive branch function, must also implement policies. Board members who work to overturn board decisions directly run afoul of the board's executive branch duty. Unless the majority of the board and superintendent want to change policy [decision], board members are bound to carry out the will of the board. Actively working against the board's stated course of action violates the board member's duty of loyalty.

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Speaking with one voice

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Some board members operate under the mistaken belief that because they are representatives [elected/appointed] of the citizens, they are required to continue to voice their constituents' views even though they may be contrary to the board's decision. This is a slippery slope for any board member to stand on. First, absent a reliable poll of constituents, it would be difficult for any representative to say they are representing the majority of their constituents. Even though school board members hear from interested parties, sometimes in large numbers, there usually is no empirical data on which to claim this is the people's will. Board members have a duty to do what is in the best interest of the system. Sometimes, what the public *wants* is not always in the best interest of the system or even the right thing to do. Rarely do citizens want to see jobs cut or schools closed, but it can be a financial imperative. Fifty years ago, most citizens opposed integration of schools. That didn't make it right. Working against the will of the board shouldn't be justified based on a misunderstood notion of representative governance.

Answer B is problematic because it turns the board table into a political forum. Continuing to debate an issue that has been decided, when there clearly is not majority support for reversing the decision, will quickly isolate a board member. That member then runs the risk of becoming alienated because of his or her inability to work toward consensus and focus on the business at hand. Such antics erode working relationships with both fellow board members and the focus of members on the team. If one member of a football team keeps talking about what happened last season during the huddle, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to keep the team focused on the play being called, let alone the game plan. The distraction causes resentment and leads to alienation.

Answer C combines elements of A and B. The board member who chooses this option is largely seen as counterproductive, choosing to put perceived political gain over the work of the board. More significantly, the board member who chooses this option disenfranchises his or her constituents by failing to participate in related decisions before the board. These constituents have no input when their representative votes in a way that is purely symbolic. For example, if a board member who opposed building a new school fails to participate in the decisions related to its construction and design, the board member deprives residents of that board district of the opportunity to shape a significant community investment.

For board members, once a decision is made the politics need to stop and the statesmanship begins. Board members should always vote their conscience, but to vote against or try to override board decisions when the majority is clearly content with the decision is not good boardsmanship. Worse, it undermines public confidence and impacts staff morale.

No one ever said boardsmanship was easy. Board members, when they chose this special form of community service, chose to subordinate their rights as citizens in exchange for a direct participation in the governance process. They let the board's vote speak for them—and that is called “speaking with one voice.”

-Alabama School Boards, Fall 2013



Senate endorses Rier as Education Commissioner

Jim Rier is now officially the state's Commissioner of Education after the Senate unanimously approved his nomination on Feb. 18.

Rier had been serving as acting commissioner after his predecessor Stephen Bowen left to take a job with Council of Chief State School Officers.

When asked what kind of reforms he would support in K-12 education, Rier said they must be student-centered.

“I'm committed to any kind of approach that will help improve opportunities for students and inspire students. The reason students are successful is because they are inspired to do things,” he said.

Rier is well known in the education community and has been with the Department of Education since 2003, serving as the finance director and then deputy commissioner. He served on the state Board of Education from 1997 to 2000 and helped craft the state's Learning Results and the Essential Programs and Services funding model. He is considered the state's expert on how that school funding formula works. He also served on the local school board in Machias.

Trained as a project engineer for Buick, he ran his family's dealership in Machias prior to joining the DOE. He said his one regret was that he didn't get involved in education sooner in his career.