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# UPDATE...

March 2016

## MSBA, MSSA brainstorm on EPS taskforce

The legislative committees representing school boards and superintendents met for a rare joint session in March to discuss their positions on a governor's task force to reform public education funding and improve student performance.

Creation of the task force was included in a bill that gave public schools an additional \$15 million in General Purpose Aid for the 2016-2017 school year.

Gov. Paul LePage wants to lower the cost of education while improving student performance and is using the task force as a first step.

The Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association have pointed to the rapidly rising costs of special education; the shift from the state onto local districts of \$38 million annually for teacher retirement; and, skyrocketing health insurance premiums as major cost drivers.

The governor's task force, which will begin meeting in May and meet at least six times this year and six times next, is charged with looking at more than a dozen areas. They include:

- Evaluate the current funding formula and recommend changes;
- Identify causes for increased per pupil costs and ways to contain them;
- Examine special education funding;
- Identify disparities across the state in student performance and ways to improve performance;
- Review existing school consolidation laws and identify ways to help lower costs and improve outcomes for districts;
- Assist school boards and municipal leaders to find ways to leverage resources and reduce costs; and
- Review federal and state mandates and propose options.

Maine School Management Association was asked to recommend one member of the task force to represent

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## Landmark diploma bill headed to full Legislature

Legislation that describes a process for all public school students to earn a diploma under a standards-based system of learning sets a new deadline that would require full implementation by the time the Class of 2025 walks across the stage.

The bill, L.D. 1627, "An Act To Implement Certain Recommendations of the Maine Proficiency Education Council," gives public high schools an extra four years to certify their graduates are proficient in all eight content areas defined under state standards known as the Learning Results. Under current law and through a system of extensions granted by the state Department of Education, all students would be required to be proficient by 2021.

The bill also supports local control of that timeline since districts that are ready sooner can move more quickly to require proficiency in the standards.

Those standards include the so-called core four – English, Math, Science and Social Studies – and the additional subjects of Art, Foreign Language, Health and Physical Education and the softer skills encompassed under Career and Education Development.

The bill, which received unanimous support from the Education Committee, sets up a timeline that allows public high schools to ramp up to full proficiency and allows students to choose which subject areas to add first after the required core four based on their interests.

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## What's ahead with new federal ESSA

The Every Student Succeeds Act – the federal law replacing No Child Left Behind – is under review in Washington, with the expectation that the federal government's role in public education will decrease, leaving more decision making in the hands of the state Department of Education and local school districts.

A seminar put on by attorneys from Drummond Woodsum on March 25, updates by the Maine DOE and articles in the national Education Week newspaper have started to paint a picture of what life under ESSA could be like for local schools.

While the law passed in December, discussion of the details is now just getting underway in terms of designing rules that will outline how it's going to work. The full implementation year is slated for 2017-2018.

Preliminary or “negotiated” rulemaking is currently going on in Washington around two significant topics – testing and the supplement not supplant requirement under Title I that says federal dollars for low-income students must supplement not supplant state and local funding.

A more comprehensive process of general rulemaking on all aspects of the new federal law could begin in May or June, with a comment period to follow.

For now, Maine school districts are still living under the federal flexibility waiver that took away some of the most onerous aspects of NCLB – most importantly ending the system where schools were labeled as failing for not meeting adequate progress toward proficiency in math and English.

That waiver expires in August of 2016 and 2016-2017 will be what the Drummond Woodsum attorneys are calling a “gap year”. During that year districts will continue to post report cards on student achievement data, but will not have to post information on teacher qualifications. The state will continue to identify and support schools whose student achievement puts them in the lowest 5 percent.

The state also will use the gap year to develop a plan on how to implement the new ESSA, which pushes more control down to the state and local level in terms of adopting education standards, assessments and a statewide accountability system. The state plan has to be developed by the Department of Education in consultation with a group of stakeholders, which will include legislators, representatives from local school units, charter schools, teachers, instructional support staff, principals, administrators and parents.

Where NCLB and its waiver system were very federally prescriptive, under ESSA, the federal government defines the required goals, but allows the state, in consultation with its local units, to make it happen.

Those goals include:

- Challenging academic content standards aligned with entrance requirements for credit-bearing coursework in public higher education and relevant Career and Technical Education standards. The standards do not have to be approved by the U.S. DOE. Maine already has rigorous

standards under its system of Learning Results and those standards are now tied to graduation requirements.

- As under NCLB, assessments must be given once a year in grades 3-8 and high school in English and math, and twice in the lower grades and once in high school for science. (Maine tests grades 5 and 8, and in the 3rd year of high school.) The new law also allows local districts to use a nationally recognized test with state approval. In that regard, Maine is ahead of the curve since it is returning to a modified SAT for its high school assessment.
- Creation of an accountability system designed to measure, compare and report the performance of all schools. This was required under NCLB, but the big difference is it will be designed by the state, not the federal government. And the action plans and consequences for lower performing schools will be determined at the state and local levels.

## Effective school boards

What makes an effective school board – one that positively impacts student achievement? From a research perspective, it's a complex question. It involves evaluating virtually all functions of a board, from internal governance and policy formulation to communication with teachers, building administrators, and the public.

But the research that exists is clear: boards in high-achieving districts exhibit habits and characteristics that are markedly different from boards in low-achieving districts. So what do these boards do? Here are eight characteristics:

1. Effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision.
2. Effective school boards have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn, and of the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels.
3. Effective school boards are accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve student achievement.
4. Effective school boards have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals.
5. Effective school boards are data savvy: they embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement.
6. Effective school boards align and sustain resources, such as professional development, to meet district goals. According to researchers LaRocque and Coleman, effective boards saw a responsibility to maintain high standards even in the midst of budget challenges.
7. Effective school boards lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust.
8. Effective school boards take part in team development and training, sometimes with their superintendents, to build shared knowledge, values and commitments for their improvement efforts.

*-Center for Public Education, National School Boards Association*



## Employee Spotlight Meet Denise Joy



Denise has been employed at MSMA as a Workers' Compensation Claims Representative since May 1993 and despite her considerable experience in the job, she is always learning.

Denise's responsibilities include investigation and management of claims involving lost time from work. She coordinates appropriate

medical care and engages the assistance of nurse case managers. She works closely with members and legal counsel as necessary to effectively manage risk and claims.

Denise enjoys the job because it is challenging and she is constantly learning something new.

"My favorite aspect is learning about medical conditions, the ever changing medical treatments, and coordinating appropriate medical care to achieve the ultimate goal of discharge from medical care and return to work," Denise said.

She works closely with MSMA administration, participating in various committees and working with colleagues to effectively manage claims and enhance membership experience. She currently sits on the Board of Directors for the Workers' Compensation Coordinating Council, representing Maine School Management with issues involving self-insured's and matters with the Workers' Compensation Board.

Denise is a Canadian born citizen, with French being her first language. She grew up in a small border town. She received her Business Degree from the University of Maine and her Associate in Claims in 1994. Denise first worked in the workers' compensation claims industry in high school and returned to it upon college graduation.

She has been married 28 years and has two children and a beagle. Her daughter will receive her BS in Nursing in 2017 and her son is a junior in high school. She enjoys spending time with her family, friends, music and attending sporting events, particularly her son's baseball games.

### **MSBA, MSSA brainstorm**

(continued from page 1)

MSBA and MSSA. RSU 17 Supt. Rick Colpitts was chosen because in addition to his administrative experience — Colpitts was named Superintendent of the Year this year — he also served as chair of his hometown school board in Dixfield.

Supt. Colpitts was part of the round-table with the MSBA and MSSA legislative committees at their March 25 meeting called to help inform the task force's work. Topics and concerns discussed included:



Board members Jackie Perry, Jerry Nault and Dave Kolodin.

### EPS Funding Formula Shortcomings

- Labor market areas or regional cost adjustments
- Reduction of Title I funding from district allocations
- Ratios in EPS that allocate part-time staff to small schools
- Minimum receiver allocations
- State needs to pay 55 percent

### Causes of Per-Pupil Cost Increases

- Special education costs
- Health insurance
- Transfer of retirement costs from state to local districts
- Mandates requiring more professional development
- Increased demand for schools to provide services beyond the classroom

### Special Education Cost Increases

- More high-needs students
- Cost of litigation
- Increased autism identification

### Student Performance

- More nuanced evaluation on school report cards needed
- Need to talk about student growth along with proficiency
- Relationship between poverty and performance

### School Consolidation/Municipal sharing

- Carrot not stick approach
- Explore regional collaboratives as ways to share
- Sinclair Act good model
- Share services between schools/municipality
- Hire "efficiency expert" at DOE to help



## Key bills to watch

### School Board policy bill in Senate

L.D. 1544, An Act To Improve Teaching Assignments in Maine's Public Schools, is an attack on the school board's right to set education policy and currently is

in the Senate awaiting action.

It came out of the Education Committee with a bipartisan ought-not-to-pass (ONTP) vote of 10-3. Our concern is there may be an attempt to amend it on the floor.

Please contact your legislators and ask them to support the ought-not-to-pass recommendation of the committee.

If L.D. 1544 passes, it would be the first step in eroding the School Board's right to adopt policy that keeps the interest of students first.

### Legislature approves warrant bill for late GPA

L.D. 1475, An Act To Facilitate the Use of State Education Subsidies, is working its way through the House and Senate with strong votes.

It is a bill Maine School Management Association requested and would enshrine in statute that voters can approve a warrant article authorizing the School Board to use additional funding for school purposes and/or lowering the tax burden when local budgets are passed before state General Purpose Aid is approved by the Legislature.

### Diploma Requirements

L.D. 1627, An Act To Implement Certain Recommendations of the Maine Proficiency Education Council, got unanimous support from the Education Committee (see story on Page 1) and is expected to come before the full Legislature soon, possibly next week.

### Mill Town Bill

With the announced closing of the mill in Madison, a bill sponsored by Somerset County legislators last year is likely to resurface as a mechanism for helping towns who have lost valuation due to mill downsizing. The bill, L.D. 281, Resolve, To Modify the State Valuation of the Town of Madison To Reflect the Loss in Valuation of the Madison Paper Company and To Modify the State Valuation of the Town of Skowhegan To Reflect the Loss in Valuation of the S.D. Warren Company, was carried over from last year and currently is being reviewed. MSMA will keep members apprised of its progress through legislative alerts.

### Landmark diploma bill

(continued from page 1)

The timeline is:

Class of 2021 – core 4  
 Class of 2022 – core 4 plus 1  
 Class of 2023 – core 4 plus 2  
 Class of 2024 – core 4 plus 3  
 Class of 2025 – all 8

The bill also outlines requirements for Career and Technical Education students to show proficiency and recognizes that successful completion of the CTE program itself is evidence of meeting the standards, particularly in the area of technology and science. The core four in CTE is English, Math, Social Studies and successful completion of a state-approved CTE program course.

The CTE timeline is:

Class of 2021 – CTE core 4  
 Class of 2022 – core 4 plus 1  
 Class of 2023 – core 4 plus 2  
 Class of 2024 – core 4 plus 3

The section of the bill dealing with students with special needs requires proficiency in all content areas but underscores the right of all students to demonstrate that proficiency in different ways. In the case of students with special needs, the student's individualized education program (IEP) team will determine the performance tasks required to show proficiency.

The bill also creates proficiency certifications that must be awarded to students who master the coursework in each content area as districts ramp up to full implementation of the law. These certifications will be part of a student's permanent academic transcript and can be used by students looking for work and applying to college. The state will collect data on the certifications as a measure of the success of adopting a standards-based system.

L.D. 1627, which soon will be voted on by the full Legislature, was the result of work by many hands. Education Committee Senate Chair Brian Langley, R-Hancock, and Rep. Brian Hubbell, D-Bar Harbor, were the key collaborators on the committee and did outreach to stakeholders, including superintendents, curriculum directors, statewide advocacy organizations and experts in the Department of Education. Their work was informed and improved by all Education Committee members who helped craft a bill with bipartisan support.

Many people from across the state weighed in on the proposal, with a remarkable 60 pieces of testimony delivered during the public hearing.



**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](mailto:cbrown@msmaweb.com)**