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UPDATE...

November/December 2016

School leaders call on LePage to nominate DOE Commissioner

With the announcement this past week that Deputy Commissioner William Beardsley, who was acting as head of the department, is resigning effective Dec. 23, the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association are calling on the governor to nominate a commissioner who would go through the normal, legislative approval process.



That process would include an interview with the State Board of Education, followed by a public hearing before the Education Committee, which would then vote on the nominee. Ultimately, the candidate would have to be approved by the Senate. The new Legislature was sworn in on Dec. 7, and comes back to Augusta to begin work on Jan. 4.

Acting Commissioner Robert Hasson, a former superintendent, will be in charge of DOE operations and has been suggested in the media as a likely candidate for the job. He has not been officially nominated for the post as of this writing.

"We wish Dr. Beardsley well, but it is time to move forward and name a commissioner who is vetted through the traditional process," said MSBA President Becky Fles. "Our districts deserve it and above all, our students do."

MSBA Delegate Assembly, representing school boards from across the state, passed a resolution in October calling for just that. It read:

"In recognition of the important relationship between school districts and the state Department of Education, the Maine School Boards Association is calling on the governor's office to outline the process and qualifications it wants in a permanent commissioner and to nominate a candidate for legislative approval in the upcoming session. The absence of a permanent commissioner has left the state without an official leader to articulate education policy and direction and has caused disruption and turnover among DOE staff, whom districts rely on for information and guidance.

If the governor's office does not put forth a permanent commissioner nominee, the next Legislature needs to express and advance viable options for filling this key position."

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NSBA President Beard inspires

NSBA President Miranda Beard kicked off MSMA's 43rd Annual Fall Conference with an emotional speech that challenged school board members and administrators to remember that public education really can change and save a child's life.



The student-centered theme was carried on throughout the two-day conference, which drew more than 600 people and offered 50 professional development clinics.

Using her own story as illustration, Beard, who still serves as president of her local school board in Laurel, Mississippi, said poverty or a troubled home life shouldn't sentence a child to a lifetime of disappointment or low-income. Sometimes what it takes is for just one adult in the system to recognize what's really going on and reach out to help, she said.

As school leaders, "we have to get whatever we can out of this child."

"Some children require more than others," she said. "Sometimes we have to shift our resources. There's a difference between equality and equity. Some kids just need more."

Beard also touted NSBA's Stand up For Public Education campaign saying for the vast majority of the audience, "who you are today began with public education."

She made an analogy between a child and a tiny mustard seed that can grow to be 20 feet tall with the right nurturing.

"In every child there is potential to do something great. And, guess what? They're planted in our schools. Our schools provide the water they need; the fertilizer they need," she said.

"Save a life; change a life," she challenged. "That's what we should do and that's what public education can do."

ESSA state plan in the works

An advisory group of school administrators, board members, teachers, researchers, staff from the Department of Education and interested members of the public have been meeting to help craft the state's plan to implement the new federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) – a replacement for the unpopular No Child Left Behind.

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MAINE SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

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MSBA Delegate Assembly adopts resolutions

The MSBA Delegate Assembly at its annual meeting on Oct. 27 adopted the following resolutions. Legislators have been contacted and language is being drafted on four resolutions that call for law changes. MSMA will keep members up to date on the legislation and its progress.

4.37 Local Control of Student Transfers

The Maine School Boards Association would like to reconfirm our position that a student transfer should be a local decision made by the two superintendents involved in a request. We see three steps in this process to pass such legislation.

- There should be a legislative review that examines the current criteria used by the Department of Education and the State Board of Education to make their decision in an appeal of a local decision.
- A commission should be created composed of stakeholders to review that information and develop criteria that would then be subject to substantive rulemaking that would be used to guide superintendents in their decision-making.
- If both superintendents agree on a transfer request, it should be enshrined in statute that their decision is binding and should only be appealed within the scope of bullets one and two.

4.41 Teacher Retirement Costs

The Maine School Boards Association strongly reiterates its opposition to rising teacher retirement costs that were shifted onto school districts by the state in 2013 – costs which continue to grow at an alarming rate with no legislative oversight. Those costs went from \$30 million a year in the 2013-2014 biennium to \$38 million a year in the current biennium. They are going up to an unprecedented \$46 million a year starting in 2017-2018. The Legislature needs to conduct an immediate examination to determine why these rates are rising so rapidly and adopt legislation that involves legislative oversight and a public review of how the rates are set.

4.42 Department of Education Leadership

In recognition of the important relationship between school districts and the state Department of Education, the Maine School Boards Association is calling on the governor's office to outline the process and qualifications it wants in a permanent commissioner and to nominate a candidate for legislative approval in the upcoming session. The absence of a permanent commissioner has left the state without an official leader to articulate education policy and direction and has caused disruption and turnover among DOE staff, whom districts rely on for information and guidance.

If the governor's office does not put forth a permanent commissioner nominee, the next Legislature needs to express and advance viable options for filling this key position.

4.43 Special Education Costs

The Maine School Boards Association is calling on the 128th Legislature to form a stakeholder task force to make recommendations to address the rising cost of special education while maintaining quality services that accommodate the needs of all children. It is critical that we find innovative and efficient ways to deliver services because the 46 percent cost increase we have seen in special education over the last 10 years is unsustainable.

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is overdue for a revision and action is anticipated. Maine needs to have a voice in any proposed changes through a stakeholder group made up of people in public education, including a representative from MSBA. This resolution also directs the MSBA officers to connect with Maine's congressional delegation to make them aware of the current levels of concern on this critical issue.

4.44 School Unit Collaboration

The Maine School Boards Association directs MSMA staff to prepare and submit to the First Regular Session of the 128th Maine Legislature a package of legislative proposals to facilitate voluntary joint efforts to improve educational outcomes for students by clarifying and strengthening the statutes relating to inter-local cooperation and by eliminating unnecessary legal barriers to cooperation among the different types of Maine school units.

4.45 Continuation of Maine Learning Technology Initiative (MLTI)

The Maine School Boards Association reaffirms its support for the Maine Learning Technology Initiative (MLTI) that provides computers to seventh- and eighth-graders and teachers, and facilitates the purchase of them by school districts for other grades, including the state's high schools. Funding for MLTI must be continued as more options are explored for using computers as teaching tools and relevant data on impacting student learning is documented.

Concerns, ideas shared at regional meetings



Western Region



Aroostook Region

School board members and superintendents met in their nine regional groups at Fall Conference to discuss general concerns and implementation of teacher evaluations, proficiency-based diplomas and rising costs.

Some general themes emerged, including:

- Need to improve image of public schools with the public
- Rising cost of health insurance alarming
- Retirement cost increase is an unfunded mandate
- Role of school administrators needs to be promoted
- Special Education costs are wildcards in budget planning
- Parents and taxpayers don't understand proficiency-based learning
- Concern about rollout of all eight content areas under standards-based diploma
- Just require core four
- Not enough teachers in all content areas
- Too little time to implement major initiatives
- Lack of DOE leadership hurting districts
- Incentivize don't mandate

School Board training ideas included:

- Make clear roles and responsibilities of board members
- Talk about pitfalls of micro-managing
- Videotape training sessions so they can be shared
- Explore regional approaches for training
- Make training materials available to those that can't attend
- Increase new board member training



York Region

ESSA state plan

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ESSA puts more decision-making in the hands of states and local school districts, while still requiring that students be tested annually in reading and math. It also will take into account graduation rates, proficiency of English language learners, and other indicators suggested by states.

It still requires that states identify their lowest performing 5 percent of schools, but gives them more latitude on how to address performance and support improvements.

Maine's ESSA working group has broken into teams to work on specific areas, including what kind of support will be given to low-performing schools and what accountability measures should be used in Maine's state plan.

To help in that effort, the Maine School Superintendents Association in October unanimously endorsed using the national Redefining Ready standards on what it means to be college and career ready as one of the indicators in Maine's proposed state plan application. Redefining Ready relies on more than a single test score and looks at multiple academic measures available in districts across the state. It also considers career readiness skills like attendance, community service and workplace learning experiences. The proposal was put together by the national superintendents' association and is being used by a number of other states in their ESSA plans.

Bangor Supt. Betsy Webb, Gorham Supt. Heather Perry and MSAD 33 Supt. Fern Desjardins all serve on the ESSA working group and helped present the Redefining Ready proposal at the group's last meeting on Nov. 30.

Maine's state plan application has to be into the federal DOE either by April 3 or Sept. 8 of 2017, according to the final rules around ESSA released in late November. Those rules also said states will have until 2018-2019 to identify their lowest performing schools – a full year reprieve based on feedback from across the country that the process was moving too fast.

For more information on the DOE's ESSA advisory group's work and the state plan as it develops go to:

<http://www.maine.gov/doe/essa/advisoryworkgroup/index.html>

Blue Ribbon priorities include help for disadvantaged and pre-K

Members of the Blue Ribbon Commission on school funding discussed priorities at their Nov. 28 meeting and reached general consensus around the need to close the achievement gap for economically disadvantaged students and support pre-kindergarten programs.

Commission Chairman Robert Hasson said his goal was to have some recommendations ready for a report back to the new Legislature in January. The commission is authorized to work through this year and next, with a second report back due to the Legislature in January of 2018.

The group agreed to a general goal of reducing achievement gaps that were tied to economic disadvantage, but differed on the details.

Some supported a proposal presented by former DOE Commissioner Jim Rier at an earlier meeting to increase the amount allocated to districts for disadvantaged students under the Essential Programs and Services funding formula. Currently districts are allocated an additional 15 percent.

Rier's recommendation would increase allocations based on the percentage of disadvantaged students in the district:

- Up to 40 percent disadvantaged would get the current 15 percent
- 40 to 60 percent would receive a 20 percent increase
- Above 60 percent would receive 25 percent

Senator Justin Alford, D-Cumberland, a member of the commission, said he would like to increase the allocation for disadvantaged students by the same amount for all districts, rather than follow Rier's sliding scale.

There also was support on the commission for increasing pre-kindergarten programs, which several members pointed out would help economically disadvantaged students.

The Blue Ribbon Commission's Dec. 12 meeting was cancelled due to the snow storm and rescheduled for Dec. 19. MSMA will send out bulletin updates.

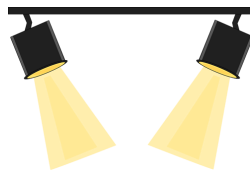
School leaders call on LePage

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The Maine School Superintendents Association took a similar position in a letter they sent to Gov. Paul LePage in June. In that letter they said the uncertainty around the position had diminished the department's stature and caused disruption at a time when major education initiatives are underway, including proficiency-based diplomas and implementation of the new federal Every Student Succeeds Act.

That position was reaffirmed by MSSA President Steven Bailey following the announcement of Beardsley's resignation

"With the announcement that Dr. Beardsley is resigning comes an opportunity to set in motion the process to appoint a permanent commissioner," Bailey said. "That leadership role is critical to bring stability back to the DOE, whose staff superintendents rely on to do their job."



Employee Spotlight Meet Wendy Douglas



Wendy Douglas is the Client Services Manager for three of MSMA's insurance trusts, doing customer service for both trust members and school office staff.

She started with MSMA in 2001 in medical billing, and took on her current job in 2006, supporting both the short-term and long-term disability programs, life insurance and dental.

Her favorite part of the job is assisting the trust members and school staff and "working with a wonderful, family-friendly staff here at MSMA," she said.

Wendy is also MSMA's unofficial health advocate, offering advice on what to eat to stay healthy or tea to soothe a sore throat. She literally walks the talk every day, spending break time walking outside with a co-worker. She also has participated in five Patrick Dempsey Challenges to support the Dempsey Cancer Center in Lewiston – an event she does with her two daughters, sister and grandson to honor the memory of her mother and father.

Wendy has lived in Monmouth her entire life and married her high school sweetheart, whom she started dating at the age 14.

Her hobbies include photography, gardening, reading, hiking, snowshoeing, kayaking and generally staying active to stay healthy.

Cornville charter to add high school, pre-K

The Maine Charter School Commission on Dec. 6 voted to allow Cornville Regional Charter School, now serving 144 elementary students, to add a high school program that will eventually serve 160 students in downtown Skowhegan and a pre-kindergarten program serving 32 children.

The expansion did not go through the review process required to start a charter school outlined in state law, but rather was done by amending Cornville's original charter.

The amendment to the charter was recommended by a three-person review team made up of commission members doing a review to determine whether the school's original charter should be renewed for an additional five years. That renewal was granted by the full commission last month.

The addition of a high school and pre-kindergarten program did not have a separate public hearing in the community, but rather was discussed as part of a hearing on Cornville's charter renewal, according to the review team's report.

Cornville Regional and the Maine Academy of Natural Sciences (MEANS) on the campus of Good Will-Hinckley were the first two charter schools approved in Maine after the charter law went into effect in 2011.

Maine School Boards honor Sue Burge and “Set for Success”

Sue Burge was honored Friday, Oct. 28, by the Maine School Boards Association for the “Set for Success” back-to-school program in the Boothbay Region serving students in AOS 98.

Burge received the MSBA Distinguished Service Award at the annual Maine School Management Association Annual Fall Conference in Augusta before an audience of school board members and superintendents from across the state.

The “Set for Success” program was born out of Burge’s vision to ensure that all students in the region, regardless of their socio-economic background, return to school with the supplies they need to have a great start to the school year. She contacted community members and statewide vendors, and asked school secretaries to send her the teachers’ supply list. The program, in the beginning, distributed free colorful backpacks, sneakers, school outfits and supplies.

The first “Set for Success” day in August of 2011 drew more than 500 students. It has grown into a community celebration and to a new level. Added to the list are free haircuts, manicures, eye and dental screening, health advice and help with setting up college savings accounts. There’s a food tent now and a Clothing Boutique.

“Thanks to Sue’s vision and her commitment to children in the Boothbay Region, the third Sunday in August has now become a day when the whole community comes together to celebrate students and make sure they are indeed set for success,” said MSBA President Becky Fles in awarding the honor.

Burge was nominated for the award by the AOS 98 School Committee and Boothbay-Boothbay Harbor CSD board.



Sue Burge and her family stand with AOS 98 Supt. Eileen King, on the left, before going in to receive her honor.

School Board members honored for service

The following school board members were honored at Fall Conference for having served 12 years or more. The list includes those that had not been recognized in the last five years.

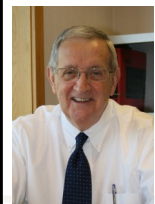
School Board Service Certificate 2016		
	Board Member	Years of
School Board	Name	Service
Blue Hill School Board	Ben Wooten	13
Brooksville School Board	Helen Condon	12
Brooksville School Board	Brad Jones	15
Brooksville School Board	Charles Tarr	13
Brunswick School Board	Janet Connors	19
Brunswick School Board	Corinne Perreault	16
Castine School Board	Joe Spinazola	14
Charlotte School Board	Herbert Clark	46
Charlotte School Board	Janet Moholland	18
Dennysville School Board	Howard McFadden	16
Easton School Board	Gaylen Flewelling	29
Easton School Board	David Hopkins	12
Easton School Board	Mary Lee Keep	27
Easton School Board	Tom Osgood	20
Greenbush School Board	Michael Williams	19
Kittery School Board	Kimberly Bedard	15

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School Board members honored

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School Board Service Certificate 2016		
	Board Member	Years of
School Board	Name	Service
Medway School Board	Gregory Stanley	16
Medway School Board	Dawn York	18
MSAD 1/RSU 79 School Board	Curtis Culberson	20
MSAD 1/RSU 79 School Board	John Johnston	21
MSAD 1/RSU 79 School Board	Lori Kenneson	20
MSAD 1/RSU 79 School Board	Lucy Richard	20
MSAD 1/RSU 79 School Board	Terry Sandusky	27
MSAD 23/RSU 87 School Board	Debbie CoWallis	22
MSAD 23/RSU 87 School Board	Phyllis Johnston	14
MSAD 28 School Board	Marcia Dietrich	22
MSAD 33 School Board	Rose McQuarrie	14
MSAD 33 School Board	Bernard Nadeau	22
MSAD 33 School Board	Sandra San Antonio	18
MSAD 49 School Board	F. Stewart Kinley	25
MSAD 52 School Board	Elizabeth Bullard	13
MSAD 52 School Board	Diana Morgan	13
MSAD 52 School Board	Jon Woodard	12
MSAD 61 School Board	Philip Shane	23
Pembroke School Board	Dixie Beaudoin	17
Pembroke School Board	Katharine Evans	18
Penobscot School Board	Jerry Markley	15
Perry School Board	Eileen Curry	14
RSU 4 School Board	Robert Gayton, Jr.	17
RSU 18 School Board	Charley Clark	17
RSU 21 School Board	Maureen King	18
RSU 22 School Board	Cindy Mitchell	12
RSU 73 School Board	Jackie Knight	12
RSU 73 School Board	Denise Rodzen	20
RSU 73 School Board	Cindy Young	14
Vassalboro School Board	Kevin Levasseur	15
Waterville School Board	Maryanne Bernier	13
Waterville School Board	Joan Phillips-Sandy	20
Waterville School Board	Sara Sylvester	12
Winslow School Board	Earl Coombs	12
Winslow School Board	Ronald Whary	13



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

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