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# UPDATE...

October 2016



## Douglass named MSMA director through June 2017

Former Maine School Management Association Executive Director Dale Douglass, who had been serving as interim director since July, has been named director through the end of June, 2017, to assure a smooth transition as the

association looks for a permanent replacement.

Douglass served as MSMA's executive director for 17 years, retiring in 2012.

The Policy and Action Committees of the two organizations served by MSMA -- Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association -- voted to extend his appointment to give stability to the organization until a permanent director is named.

"We're pleased that Dale has agreed to remain with MSMA through the end of June. His presence will give the organization stability as we look for a new director, and assure our members are well served. He also will provide steady leadership during the upcoming legislative session," said MSBA President Becky Fles.

The action of the committees naming Douglass as director goes into effect immediately.

## Governor again raises school consolidation

Gov. Paul LePage has once again called for greater consolidation of school districts, even as more regional school units forced together under the Baldacci administration are breaking apart.

Ever since the penalty used to force school consolidation in Maine was lifted in 2012, 26 school units have left their former partners, and at least half a dozen are planning for a potential breakup.

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## Countdown to 43rd MSMA Fall Conference

The 43<sup>rd</sup> annual MSMA Fall Conference, scheduled for Thursday and Friday, Oct. 27 and 28, at the Augusta Civic Center, is shaping up into a success with brisk registration for a strong program focused on professional development and sharing ideas.

In addition to 19 legal clinics, on topics ranging from basic collective bargaining to constitutional rights in the classroom, there will be timely updates on key initiatives, including teacher evaluations and computers in the classroom.

The Department of Education will be sharing important information in one-to-one sessions and clinics, including a school construction update now that a new Major Capital School Construction rating cycle has begun; meeting new pre-school requirements; integrating STEAM in the classroom; and, an opportunity to meet and ask questions to Acting Deputy Commissioner William Beardsley.

Several clinics will focus on proficiency-based learning; better understanding of special education rule and law; and, ways to support and nurture students and staff.

As promised, there will be a legislative lobbying clinic, with handbooks available, to help School Boards and superintendents put together productive meetings with newly elected senators and representatives following the Nov. 8 election. The clinic will include an overview of what is likely to be taken up by the new Legislature in 2017.

The keynote speaker for Thursday is NSBA President Miranda Beard, who in addition to her speech will be presenting two clinics, including one on NSBA legislative priorities at the federal level. Attorney Harry Pringle of Drummond Woodsum will share his reflections on his long experience working with Maine school boards and superintendents.

A new tradition also will be continued with regional breakout meetings right before lunch on Thursday, allowing school board members and superintendents from the state's nine educational regions to come together and share concerns. (See story on page 5.)

Registration for Fall Conference should be made through the superintendent's office.

## Commission looks at K-12 cost drivers and concerns



Members of the Blue Ribbon Commission discuss ideas.

The Blue Ribbon Commission on education, charged with exploring the success and shortcomings of the current school funding formula, completed its basic training Oct. 17, with members saying it's time to work on key issues like rising special education costs, teacher pay, professional development, and student performance.

The meeting Monday was the second of two focused on explaining how school funding works in Maine. At the end of the meeting, held at the Lewiston Regional Technical Center, Commission Chair Robert Hasson declared the group was ready to tackle its real work.

While it is not clear what shape that work will take, the commission, made up of legislators, public school administrators, teachers, a municipal manager, a member of the State Board of Education and Charter Commission, and the heads of Maine's University and Community College systems, struck some similar themes.

Special education has been identified as a major cost driver and expenditures have gone up 46 percent in the last 10 years, according to information provided by the Department of Education on spending trends.

Former Education Commissioner Jim Rier shared his expertise on school funding with the group and explained that today 80 percent of the districts in Maine base their special education costs on last year's budget, not enrollment – a federal maintenance of effort requirement that is a factor in rising costs.

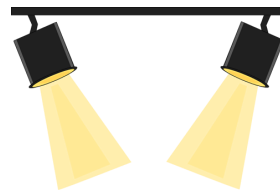
The commission also got an overview of the Picus Report – a \$450,000 study by a California-based company that looked at the fairness and adequacy of Maine's Essential Programs and Services formula, which determines the cost of an "adequate" education in Maine. Picus identified areas where the state should be spending more than it does, but did not tackle special education costs.

The Picus Report was honed by a special state EPS Commission that recommended more funding to help disadvantaged students through extended day and summer

school programs; increasing professional development time for teachers; expanding pre-kindergarten programs; and, looking at federal Title I distribution – recommendations the Blue Ribbon Commission could consider in its work.

Some members of the commission asked to hear directly from the "practitioners" of public education – school superintendents and teachers – to find out how individual districts handle areas like special education and professional development.

The next meeting of the Blue Ribbon Commission is scheduled for Oct. 31, with a location to be announced.



## Employee Spotlight Meet Doug Burdin



Doug Burdin, who has been with MSMA for 32 years this month, is officially in charge of Unemployment Compensation Services, but wears many hats from serving as the in-house computer expert to handling statewide salary and benefit data collection.

He started at MSMA in October of 1984 as the unemployment claims manager, and within a year took over the quarterly reporting responsibility. He now manages the MSMA Unemployment Trust Fund.

As the use of technology grew in the workplace and personal computers started populating desktops, he took on those responsibilities as well.

His favorite things about his job are the people he works with, both in the office and in the schools districts MSMA serves.

"I have made many friendships with payroll and bookkeeping personnel, as well as administrators, some of whom I've known for over 20 years," he said. "I look forward to coming to work every day and assisting anyone who needs my help."

The youngest of six boys, Doug grew up in Guilford, the son of a World War II veteran who parachuted into France on D-Day. He attended Piscataquis Community High School and graduated from the University of Maine.

He has been married to his wife, Bobi-Jo, for 34 years and they have two sons and Wilson, their golden retriever. They live in Gardiner.

Doug loves and lives sports. He recently retired from refereeing high school and college basketball for 32 years and still umpires baseball in the spring and summer.

He is a die-hard Red Sox fan who enjoys playing golf, reading and cranking old-school rock 'n' roll music.

# Maine Schools in Focus:

## Declining School Enrollment Likely to Subside in the Next Decade

**October 6, 2016**

**Editor: Gordon Donaldson**

With the new school year off and running, it's a good time to take stock of trends in enrollment. Over the coming years, what decisions will districts face preparing for future cohorts of children entering—or leaving—their schools?

We've all heard repeatedly about Maine's population trends. We are the "oldest state in the nation" with a median age of 42.7. Maine's children (under age 18) constitute the smallest percentage of our state's population (20.7 percent) when compared to the percentage of children in all other states except Vermont (Maine Office of Policy and Management, 2013). We hear news reports all too frequently about economic hard times and the forced out-migration of families. These public observations create doubt about the sustainability of schools, particularly those most rural and least populated, and fuel the long-standing preference of some to consolidate and bus more students longer distances.

Enrollment in Maine public schools dropped by 9.4 percent over the past decade. This represents a slowing of enrollment loss since 1999. Importantly, losses have been lowest over the most recent six years (MDOE). Maine's Office of Policy and Management (OPM) assembled population projections in 2013, however, that shed some light on how our school-age population has changed and is projected to change. The statewide data reveal:

1. That the numbers of school-age Maine children (ages 5–19) is declining at a slower pace (9 percent between 2012 and 2022) than it did between 2003 and 2012 (11 percent).
2. That the numbers of pre-school-age children (0-4) is expected to hold constant between 2012 and 2022, essentially stabilizing the incoming school cohorts.
3. That the decline in school-age population is projected to be substantially lower between 2022 and 2032 (2 percent) than at any time this century.

In other words, while we're still in a period of decline, we can anticipate—if the projections hold true—that the numbers of children entering our schools will stabilize and hold relatively constant through the 2020s. This leveling-off trend is already evident in the pre-school-age population. That's the picture, at least, at the statewide level.

More useful (and more difficult to report here in detail) than these statewide figures are county trends. The OPM reports that, between 2022 and 2032, the numbers of school-age children are projected to drop by over 6 percent only in Hancock and Lincoln Counties. Aroostook, Franklin, Penobscot, and Kennebec Counties are expected to see modest gains or flat growth. All others show declines between 1 and 6 percent.

County data reveal an important fact: in many counties, the declines and increases in school-age children are rarely large enough to significantly affect school staffing, facilities, transportation, or costs. That is, changes of 6 percent or less over 10 years are gradual. Often, they amount to under 400 children, coming or going. (The biggest declines, in Hancock and Lincoln Counties, are in the vicinity of 700 children in the 13-grade span over 10 years). Such changes do not require precipitous alteration of staffing or facilities as much as gradual personnel adjustments and more diverse use of space. But they do recommend taking the long view so as to be prepared for the time when incoming cohorts will require significant adjustments. We need to keep in mind, too, that these more stable enrollments, though they may level infrastructure costs, have had little effect on the ever-increasing demand for special education, technology, student support and staff training services.

While these estimates factor in migration and economic trends, actual changes in future enrollment can be best documented locally. It is incumbent upon local educators, boards, and citizens to monitor good indicators of population shifts in their own communities such as annual births, housing starts, and the arrival or departure of employers. Local and regional chambers of commerce, planning commissions, and economic development zone officials can be very helpful in this respect. U.S. Census reports, such as population estimates released in 2015 (see C. Milneil, *Portland Press Herald*) offer community-specific data and projections.

Sources: MDOE ([maine.gov/doe/dataresources/warehouse.html](http://maine.gov/doe/dataresources/warehouse.html)); Governor's Office of Policy and Management (2013) *Maine population outlook to 2030*. ([maine.gov/economist/projections/index.shtml](http://maine.gov/economist/projections/index.shtml)); Milneil, C. (2016). *Interactive: Population change in Maine towns, 2010 – 2015*. ([pressherald.com](http://pressherald.com))

*Maine Schools in Focus* is intended to share information that stimulates thinking, planning, and action to fulfill the mission of Maine's preK-12 schools. Submissions must present ideas and data relevant to schooling in Maine and pose questions and suggest avenues for policy and action. They must be limited to 750 words.

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**School consolidation**

(continued from page 1)

In an Oct. 4 interview on radio station WVOM, Gov. LePage said he could see a plan where there were 30 districts statewide, or perhaps districts broken down by county or by Career and Technical Education regions – the latter an idea also floated by Gov. John Baladacci but ultimately rejected.

“I’m not going to agree that it was the best program,” Gov. LePage said of the Baldacci consolidation plan. “I’m going to say it was a great effort.”

Gov. Baldacci ultimately championed a law passed in 2007 that was supposed to reduce Maine’s 290 school districts to 80. It never came close.

Today, with all the breakups, there are 260 School Administrative Units, including the state’s 9 new charter schools. (Members of Alternative Organizational Structures and Unions are counted individually.)

To see the Department of Education list of those who have withdrawn from consolidated districts since 2013 click here: [http://www.maine.gov/education/Withdrawal\\_Procedures\\_RSU\\_SAD/WithdrawalList.html](http://www.maine.gov/education/Withdrawal_Procedures_RSU_SAD/WithdrawalList.html)

There are various reasons why those who came together to avoid a financial penalty have chosen to break apart. They include fear of school closings, particularly at the elementary level; a desire for greater local control; and, pent up frustration that they were forced to merge in the first place.

Others, including some districts that were in place before consolidation was mandated, are losing members, largely driven by the cost-sharing requirements for local-only expenses that fall disproportionately on wealthier communities.

**Consolidation history**

Gov. Baldacci, in what was described in the press as a “bombshell”, announced in his inaugural address in January of 2007 that he wanted to reduce the number of school administrative units from 290 to 26 to mirror the geography covered by the 26 Career and Technical Education districts. He also determined the savings from such a plan would reap \$36 million in administrative costs in the first year of implementation. The proposal was included in the biennial budget.

The Education Committee was initially charged with filling out the details – a charge it did not fulfill.

The majority voted to simply cut \$36 million out of state aid to education, rather than force consolidation. They also called for creating 26 planning alliances that would look for ways to save money in non-instructional areas through regional cooperatives.

Former Senator Peter Mills, who now runs the Turnpike Authority, was on that Education Committee. He proposed a minority report calling for financial incentives to get districts to come together. He explained his position in an opinion piece that year in the Kennebec Journal.

“The choice is not between mere facilitation on the one hand or executive imposition on the other. There is a third way taught to us by the successful incentives of the Sinclair Act of 1957. Pay money, increase subsidies and help build new buildings in those areas where district consolidation is welcomed,” he wrote.

Ultimately the task to craft consolidation law was given to a four-member sub-committee of the Appropriations Committee. Their plan used penalties rather than incentives. The biennial budget included the \$36 million cut in administrative costs, which was achieved by actually reducing the per pupil allocation for administration – a cut that remains in effect today.

**Carrots versus sticks**

The law was amended in 2008, after legislators started hearing from people in their districts, particularly in rural parts of the state. The most often repeated requests were for more time; an alternative governance structure that allowed for “super unions”, which ultimately became Alternative Organizational Structures; and, replacing penalties with incentives.

The penalties were delayed in 2009, which was the same year a repeal of school consolidation was on the November ballot. The repeal failed, but amendments to the consolidation law continued the following year. By 2012, the penalties had been lifted.

Mills said the outcome was predictable.

“Experience proves that penalties will first be resented then evaded, eroded and finally repealed. Legislators lack the will to preserve or enforce them. The 2008 mandates for consolidation began to fall apart almost as soon as the legal ink was dry,” he said.

“Consolidations under the 1957 Sinclair Act lasted because state subsidies, including the funds to build high schools, were tied to political reform.”

Rep. Brian Hubbell, D-Bar Harbor, wasn’t a legislator when he helped his community fight forced consolidation on Mount Desert Island. Through MDI’s effort, Alternative Organizational Structures were allowed, which left local school boards and community decision-making in place.

Asked why he thought forced consolidations were breaking up, Rep. Hubbell said false expectations were given.

*(continued on page 5)*



## Attend Your Regional Meeting

Board members and superintendents are encouraged to attend meetings of your region in a Fall Conference break-out session scheduled for Thursday, Oct. 27, starting at 11:20 a.m. and running until noon. You will meet others from your area of the state, discuss key issues facing schools, and share your concerns at the local level.

<u>REGION</u>	<u>ROOM</u>
Aroostook (1)	Lincoln/Oxford Room (A-6)
Penquis (2)	Kennebec/Penobscot Room (A-4)
Washington (3)	Arnold Room (A-3)
Hancock (4)	Capitol Room (B-23)
Mid-Coast (5)	Pine Tree Room (B-22)
Western Maine (6)	Howard Room (A-2)
Cumberland (7)	Augusta Room (B-21)
Kennebec (8)	Washington/York Room (B-24)
York (9)	Fort Western Room (A-1)

### School Consolidation (continued from page 4)

“I agree with the common conclusion that cost savings from administrative consolidation are elusive. Districts that were coerced into reorganization under threat of penalties found cost shifts were more significant than cost savings,” he said. “Understandably, smaller communities that found they were being assessed more in larger districts often found at the same time they were also having programs cut by larger regional boards. It’s not surprising that these communities rebelled as soon as the law was relaxed.”

As for what should happen next, he said, “I think we still have a lot of work to do. But I believe we need to learn from the failures of coerced consolidation and work towards advocating for more collaborative models based on improving opportunities for students and targeting those improvements through incentives.”

As for timing, even Gov. LePage told the WVOM radio host he doesn’t believe anything will happen quickly, since any new consolidation plan would have to get through the Legislature.

“I probably won’t be the one to do it,” said LePage, who will be termed out of office in 2018.

## Wayfinder withdraws charter application

A charter school applicant, Wayfinder Schools, which was moved ahead to the public hearing phase of the Maine Charter School Commission’s approval process on a 3-to-3 vote, has withdrawn its application.

Announcement of the withdrawal was sent out Oct. 19 by commission staff.

Wayfinder Schools, established through the merger in 2011 of The Community School of Camden and Opportunity Farm in New Gloucester, essentially wanted to turn its current private school operation into a public charter school. Wayfinder operates a residential program serving 16 at-risk students, and also offers a home-based program for parenting or pregnant teens.

Wayfinder was applying for the last charter available under state charter law that limits the number of charter schools to 10 through 2021.

## Three Maine National Blue Ribbon Schools

Falmouth Middle School, Reeds Brook Middle School in Hampden, and Sea Road School in Kennebunk were among the 329 public and private schools across the country named 2016 National Blue Ribbon Schools by U.S. Department of Education Secretary John King.

All three Maine schools were honored as “Exemplary High Performing Schools.”

“To be named a National Blue Ribbon School, schools must meet strict criteria, and these three Maine schools deserve great credit for their dedication to the mission of educating our children. I commend the educators, parents, and students who all work to make these schools such proud examples of excellence in the state of Maine,” said Deputy Commissioner of Education William Beardsley.

The National Blue Ribbon Schools Program honors public and private elementary, middle and high schools where students either achieve very high learning standards or are making notable improvements in closing the achievement gap. The award affirms the hard work of students, educators, families and communities in creating safe and welcoming schools where students master challenging content.

More information about the National Blue Ribbon Schools program can be found at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/nclbbrs/index.html>.



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

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