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UPDATE...

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Additional school aid needed to avoid property tax hikes

The Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association are urging all their members to contact legislators and advocate for an additional \$20 million in state aid to avoid increasing the burden on local property taxpayers.

The proposed increase in the local mill rate for schools from 8.2 mills to 8.44 mills, which represents a \$20 million increase in local property taxes statewide, is being driven by circumstances out of the control of individual school districts.

It includes:

- \$12 million increase in the cost of education statewide, largely due to special education cost increases and maintenance of effort spending required by the federal government.
- \$6 million more going to charter schools due to enrollment increases in existing schools and the addition of two new charter schools next year.
- \$1.4 billion drop in statewide property values.

There are at least two legislative options to appropriate additional funding that is needed to prevent cuts in current state aid in 131 school districts. Click [here](#) to see the spreadsheet.

One includes a Democratic amendment on the tax conformity bill currently sitting on the unfinished business calendar. Both Republicans and Democrats want some form of tax conformity to pass, but disagree on a business tax credit. The Democratic proposal on that bill is tied to \$23 million in additional aid for schools.

Another is a stand-alone bill that Education Committee Chairman Sen. Brian Langley, R-Hancock, proposed to legislative leaders on Thursday. That bill was tabled but could be taken up again by the Legislative Council. It would give \$20 million to schools, and Sen. Langley said the hearing on it would allow legislators and the public to better understand the cost drivers that are putting more burden on local property taxpayers.

Both would be funded all or in part by a state budget surplus.

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Board members discuss priorities at retreat.

Board focuses on member services

The MSBA Board of Directors held a retreat at the end of January to go over the association's strategic plan, mark off what has been accomplished and set new goals for the future in order to continuously improve service to members.

While always mindful that improvement is an ongoing process, the board recognized some significant accomplishments since the original plan was drafted in May of 2013.

Some highlights include:

Outreach to school boards through their geographic regions

- For the second year, regional meetings were held at the annual Fall Conference to discuss critical issues and attendance was up.
- Regional workshops are being held. This school year's include Collective Bargaining held in September in Presque Isle and two on Legislative Advocacy, one in Augusta for the Kennebec Region in January and another planned in March in South Portland for the Cumberland and York Regions.
- Regional Candidate Forums in all 9 regions in the last legislative election year and plans underway to hold them again this fall.

Increased awareness of MSBA

- Higher media profile, most recently taking the lead on

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Anatomy of a news story

Gov. LePage is not DOE commissioner

It's an unusual news day when we here at MSMA have to put out an alert declaring that Gov. Paul LePage is still the governor and not the new commissioner of the Department of Education.

That happened on Feb. 11 when the Lewiston Sun Journal correctly reported on Gov. LePage's comments to a chamber breakfast crowd in Lewiston. Miffed at reports that there weren't enough votes on the Education Committee to make Acting Commissioner Bill Beardsley the official commissioner, the governor said he would keep Beardsley on in a deputy capacity and he would serve as commissioner.



Beardsley

The story took off on Facebook and Twitter and was picked up by other news outlets.

Gov. LePage later clarified he would sign paperwork when needed, but not get involved in the day-to-day operation of the department. The story, however, had what's known in the business as "legs" at that point, and lived on through the evening news cycle.



Gov. LePage

The story had its roots several days earlier when Gov. LePage pulled Beardsley's nomination for commissioner after being told he did not have enough votes on the Education Committee to make it happen. Democrats side-stepped questions about their support for the governor's candidate, but it was apparent the nomination did not have clear sailing.

Now that Beardsley's nomination for commissioner has been pulled, what happens next is unclear.

Beardsley's acting commissioner status expires in April. Gov. LePage says he will keep him on in some capacity to run the department. The question that remains unanswered is whether the department can remain without a commissioner indefinitely.

Victoria Wallack

Key bills to watch

Protection of School Board policy authority

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.

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.

Here are talking points and background to support the ONTP majority.

- Public schools are charged with educating all our children on a budget approved by voters. The number of students we serve fluctuates from year to year and without notice. Student needs vary, as do student interests. Change is constant and flexibility is critical.

- L.D. 1544 would take away that flexibility by requiring teacher assignments to be negotiated. It would prevent schools from acting quickly and responsibly when classes become too large or too small to be effective and efficient. **It most certainly would add to the cost of education locally and statewide.**

- This bill is the **first step in eroding the School Board's right to adopt policy** in other critical areas – authority that was established by the Municipal Public Employee Labor Relations Law passed in 1969 and affirmed nearly 30 years later in a landmark Maine Supreme Court case.

- The court upheld the law saying "The Legislature deemed 'educational policies' to involve value choices so fundamental that binding decisions concerning them should be made **by persons directly responsive to the people.**"

- Those persons are School Board members, elected by their communities, who must represent teachers, parents, taxpayers, support staff, local businesses, retirees and newcomers and above all, **students.**

- This bill would erode the board's authority to keep the **interest of students first.**

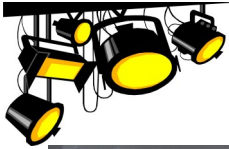
Extension of Teacher Evaluation Pilot Year

An Act To Delay Any New Statewide Assessment Tests, L.D. 1459, which initially would have delayed required standardized testing, was amended and standardized testing is moving forward. The bill now **extends the pilot year for teacher evaluations by one year.** In the 2016-2017 pilot year, the pilot will apply to all schools in the district. The amendment also says the Department of Education or any other state agency cannot use standardized test scores to grade schools prior to the 2017-2018 school year. The Education Committee supported the amended bill and it now will go to the full Legislature for a vote.

Spending additional state subsidy

An Act to Facilitate the Use of State Education Subsidies, L.D. 1475, sponsored by Sen. Rebecca Millett, D-Cumberland, is a bill Maine School Management Association requested. It would enshrine in statute that voters can approve a warrant article

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Employee Spotlight

Meet Ed Antz



Ed Antz is the Risk and Safety Manager here at MSMA. He is responsible for assisting members of the Workers' Compensation Trust in reducing injuries, identifying areas of improvement with respect to safety and compliance, and providing trending data so that members can target problem areas.

The Workers' Comp Trust was established decades ago as a self-funded workers' comp mechanism for Maine public schools systems. The

Trust focuses solely on providing the best workers' comp services possible for its members.

Ed meets routinely with members to discuss and review safety practices and procedures, workers' comp loss information, and loss prevention strategies and techniques. He also assists members with developing, providing and conducting training for members. He routinely inspects school buildings to look for areas of safety improvement and ways to minimize risk of injury.

Ed's favorite part of the job is meeting with the various people -- superintendents, facility managers, custodians and other -- in the schools.

Ed joined MSMA in 2008 after working for several years in the Maine Department of Education as the facility and safety coordinator. Prior to that, Ed worked for many years in the Maine Department of Environmental Protection as the program manager for the asbestos and lead hazard control section. In fact, Ed retired at 47 from the DEP as one of the younger retirees in Maine history.

He grew up in Gardiner and now hails from Portland, where he is rehabbing an older home. He and Anne, his wife of 30 years, also have a home in Sebastian, Florida, and hope to be snowbirds when they retire. They have three children, the youngest trying to get a degree in engineering at Ed's alma mater, U-Maine Orono.

Ed met his future wife through friends at a New Year's party and proposed to her live on the radio (WBLM) in 1986 before such public engagements became a fad. He enjoys sports and ran in more than 10 Beach to Beacon races before being banned for giving away his badge one year. He also enjoys music, attending an estimated 100 concerts throughout the years; skiing, as a Loafer for more than 50 years; travel; and simply spending time with family and friends.

Additional school aid needed

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"There's a \$72 million budget surplus and a portion of that money needs to go to public education," said MSBA President Becky Fles. "It's imperative all sides come together for the good of students in the state of Maine."

The legislative committees of MSBA and MSSA have not taken a position on tax conformity.

"We are not taking a position on the tax conformity debate," said MSSA President Susan Pratt. "Our knowledge and experience is in public education not tax policy. We are asking both sides of the aisle to find a way to increase funding for public education by \$20 million to avoid increasing the burden on local property taxpayers for schools."

Board focuses

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increased GPA for 2016-2017 school years. Click on link below for story:

<http://www.pressherald.com/2016/02/04/maine-property-owners-could-feel-hit-from-20-million-gap-in-school-funding/>

- New MSBA and MSMA logo on all printed materials and electronic communications.
- High quality marketing campaign that explains what MSBA and its umbrella association Maine School Management Association offers to members in the areas of legislative advocacy, policy development, professional development, superintendent services and insurance.
- Presence on social media, including Facebook and Twitter.
- Redesigned website that now includes all newsletters, bulletins and a searchable contract database.

Increased training for local board members

- Since the strategic plan was first adopted, MSBA has put on 64 basic board training workshops; 4 strategic planning sessions; and 5 workshops on specific topics requested by boards.

Going forward the board encouraged:

- Greater communication among board members in a region.
- Greater communication between MSBA regional representative and local boards.
- Providing online training and training videos on the website; more live links; updated content.
- Sending an electronic update to all local boards after MSBA board meetings.
- Growing participation with association's Facebook and Twitter accounts.
- Exploring ways mentors can be identified to help local boards.



MSBA Executive Board. Pictured from the left, starting in the front row seated, are, Arthur Herbest of Brownville Jct., Kristin Malin of Georgetown, Jane Scease of Topsham and Jerry Nault of Windsor. Standing, from the left, are Mary-Anne LaMarre of Oakland, President Becky Fles of Gardiner, Past President Marlene Tallent of Surry, Lucy Richard of Presque Isle, Lester Harmon of Hollis, President-Elect Jim Grant of Brunswick, Vice President Maureen King of Kennebunkport, Kim Bedard of Kittery, Susan Hawes of Bangor, Skip Greenlaw of Stonington, David Kolodin of Pemaquid, Everett Grant of Addison, and Mike Williams of Greenbush. Not shown are Jackie Perry of Scarborough and Denise Rodzen of Livermore Falls.

Key bills to watch

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giving the School Board the option of using additional GPA in the upcoming school year when the Legislature is late passing the state budget. The committee unanimously supported the bill after an amendment was added that says the warrant article authorizes using the **additional funding for school purposes and/or lowering the tax burden**. Schools can also carry funds over as they do today. We need support for the bill from legislators when it finally is reported out of the Education Committee, which should be soon.

Diploma Requirements

The Education Committee is slated to consider a bill outlining diploma requirements on Monday, March 7. L.D. 1627, An Act To Implement Certain Recommendations of the Maine Proficiency Education Council, recommends changes to current statute on proficiency-based diplomas. The majority consensus is requiring proficiency in all content areas to graduate is not workable. There is not, however, unanimity around how many should be required for graduation. The bill proposes requiring proficiency in math and English and then allowing the student to choose two other content areas. **The MSBA legislative committee is recommending four required areas including math, English, science and social studies.** The bill requires giving all children learning opportunities in all content areas, from math to fine arts, and supporting them to become proficient in all areas. Those proficiencies would be noted through special certification.



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