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UPDATE...

January 2016

State charter aid at \$14 million \$600,000 shortfall identified

The state Department of Education has come up \$600,000 short in what it owes of the just over \$14 million in subsidy promised to charter schools and is borrowing more than half of that from the Maine Charter Commission and finding the rest elsewhere.

This is the first year of the new funding formula for charter schools where the state covers the entire per pupil cost versus requiring sending school districts to pay the money in what amounted to a charter school tuition.

The state's estimates were off because of the mix of students attending charter schools, including higher than expected numbers of students with special needs, and because the Maine Charter School Commission raised the enrollment cap on one school and forgot to inform the state DOE.

Of the shortfall, the state is borrowing \$400,000 from the charter commission's budget, specifically the 3 percent of state subsidy the commission is allowed to take, under law, to cover its administrative expenses. The remaining \$200,000 will come from "identified savings" in other accounts, according to DOE Acting Deputy Commissioner Suzan Beaudoin. Beaudoin said the money borrowed from the charter commission will be paid back.

While most of the shortfall was an estimation error, approximately \$100,000 of it was the result of the commission's failure

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Maine Virtual Academy	\$2.4 million
Maine Connection Academy	\$3.3 million
Good Will Hinckley MEANS	\$1.3 million
Fiddlehead School	\$964,600
Baxter Academy	\$3.2 million
Harpswell Coastal Academy	\$1.9 million
Cornville Regional	\$1.1 million

The chart above lists how much subsidy each of the state's seven charter schools are scheduled to get this school year.

School Board Recognition



Sen. Rebecca Millett, D-Cumberland, center, sponsored a resolution marking January as School Board Recognition Month. With her at the Statehouse, from the left, are MSBA board members Jerry Nault, Lester Harmon and President Becky Fles. See resolution on page 5.

Legislative Update

Below is a list of the major bills affecting public K-12 education this session and their latest status before the Education Committee or other committees as noted.

- **An Act to Improve Teaching Assignments in Maine's Public Schools**, L.D. 1544, sponsored by Sen. Linda Baker, R-Sagadahoc. This bill would infringe on the school board's legal right to set education policy by amending labor relations law to allow teacher assignments to be negotiable. This is the latest attempt over the years to chip away at the school board's legal right to determine education policy. The bill had its public hearing on Jan. 25.
- **An Act to Protect All Students in Elementary and Secondary Schools from Sexual Assault by School Officials**, L.D. 1540, sponsored by Sen. Scott Cyrway, R-Kennebec, whose district includes Waterville. This bill is being heard before the Criminal Justice Committee. While many people assume it is a crime for a teacher or other adult authority figure at school to have sexual contact with a student regardless of his or her age, the law only extends that protection to students under the age of 18. This bill recognizes there is a

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State charter aid underestimated

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to inform the DOE it has raised the enrollment limit on the Fiddlehead School, serving pre-K through grade 2.

The shortfall was announced at the January meeting of the commission and despite the lack of funds, Charter Commission Executive Director Bob Kautz says he wants to raise the enrollment cap for the virtual Connections Academy, and others, if requested.

“We want charter schools to be able to increase if there’s a demand,” Kautz said. “I don’t want the funding mechanism being the inhibitor for them to expand.”

The discussion around raising the limit for Connections Academy occurred at the same meeting where it was announced the state’s newest virtual school, Maine Virtual Academy affiliated with K-12 Inc., was having a problem with truancy and churn where students sign up but then leave the school.

As of early December, 76 students in the original group of 297 were no long at the school, having officially left or simply never logging in again. Some of those students have been replaced by others, but churn and truancy is a problem at both of the state virtual schools.

Under the new funding mechanism adopted by the Legislature last session, the charter schools receive a per pupil allocation based on the Essential Programs and Services funding model that is completely covered by state General Purpose Aid, with no local share.

Legislative Update

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power differential between an authority figure and a student, and would make it a crime to have sexual contact with a student regardless of age. This bill is scheduled to have its public hearing on Feb. 1.

- **An Act To Delay Any New Statewide Assessments Test**, L.D. 1459, sponsored by Rep. Ellie Espling, R-New Gloucester. The bill addresses replacement tests for Smarter Balanced. It already has had a public hearing and one work session. The Education Committee did not support a test delay, but is still considering the issue of how the test should be used when it comes to teacher evaluations. A second work session was held on Jan. 26 and another is expected. MSSA and MSBA opposed the bill but tasked for the DOE’s commitment to pull the plug on the test for this year, if it determines the test is not ready. As of this writing, the DOE said the tests would be available on the DOE portal in February.
- **An Act to Amend the Laws Governing Education Standards in Maine**, L.D. 1492, sponsored by Rep. William Tuell, R-East Machias. This bill, which proposed replacing the Common Core with new standards, was voted on by the Education Committee on Jan. 20. Instead of getting rid of the Common Core, the committee voted unanimously to adopt a more rigorous and timely review process that allows more public input and includes a wider range of stakeholders.

- **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 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.
- **An Act To Enable Alternative Organizational Structures To Purchase Group Health Insurance for All Employees**, L.D. 1517, sponsored by Rep. Brian Hubbell, D-Bar Harbor. This bill would allow AOSs with common employment contracts to purchase a single-group health insurance policy, so all their member towns would pay the same rate. Because the bill could increase health insurance costs, it may not be viable for all AOSs, but allows the local option. The bill had a hearing and vote on Jan. 25 and was unanimously approved with some technical language changes.
- **An Act to Amend Certain Education Laws**, L.D. 1576, sponsored by Rep. Brian Hubbell, D-Bar Harbor, is a DOE requested bill in response to a lawsuit regarding a hard to place student from a district without a high school or a contract with another school. This bill gives the DOE Commissioner the right to place the student in a school district. The home district is responsible for special education costs for the student and will be invited to be part of the IEP process in the receiving district. The bill also says when the Commissioner or State Board of Education overrides a student transfer denial at the local level, the district that receives the student is entitled to the same special education funding for that student as the sending school or a special education hardship allocation from the state.
- **An Act To Allow Trained, Nonmedical Employees in Schools To Administer Emergency Rescue Medications**, L.D. 1491, sponsored by Rep. Justin Chenette, D-Saco. This bill was brought on behalf of the Epilepsy Foundation. The Education Committee voted unanimously against the bill, but did support language requiring better communication and training on what the law already requires in terms of using non-medical employees to administer emergency medication.

Carry-Over Bills

- **L.D. 1370, An Act to Improve the Quality of Teachers**, sponsored by Sen. Rebecca Millett, D-Cumberland. This bill, in its original form, would raise standards for admission into teacher preparation programs; require teachers to get a master’s degree within five years of being employed in the state; and raise minimum teacher salaries to \$40,000.
- **An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Strengthen the Adequacy and Equity of Certain Cost Components of the School Funding Formula**, L.D. 1394, reflecting the work of an EPS study commission. The commission’s report focused on the need to provide more educational services to lower-income students; increase teacher professional development; and expand pre-kindergarten programs. The bill’s future is uncertain because of its price tag of more than \$50 million.

School Leadership

Public Advocacy: Data Messages

Talking about student data with teachers and parents

By Daniel Kaufman

In my last column, I offered some sample messages and tips for talking with parents, teachers, and others about the new, often precipitously lower, student test results tied to higher standards that have just been released in many states. This month, I want to address a closely related communications issue: how to talk generally with those same audiences about the uses and misuses of student data.

Teachers, schools, and districts have long gathered, analyzed, and used data to inform instruction and provide students with targeted services—whether through formal methods such as tests and quizzes, IEPs, and collecting attendance, behavioral, and demographic data, or through more informal techniques such as parent conferences and classroom observations.

Yet, with the increased focus on standardized testing, high-stakes accountability, and in-class and online technology, much more quantitative data is being amassed today than was done just five or 10 years ago.

In theory, this wealth of data can be tremendously helpful to teachers, parents and caregivers, and school and district leaders for tracking the progress of students, and then pursuing the right interventions to boost learning and close achievement gaps.

Understandably, however, it also has led to concerns across the country about rising workload and collecting data for data's sake from already time-strapped teachers. Also, parents and privacy advocates worry about potential data breaches associated with new education technology and the risks of outside companies sharing personally identifiable student information.

How can school board members and administrators proactively minimize these concerns and ensure that everyone at the school and district level is using and protecting student data effectively?

One way to help your district avoid a popular backlash against data collection and use is to develop comprehensive and sensible data use and privacy policies, share them with teachers, staff, parents and the public, and update them regularly.

At the same time, make sure to examine thoughtfully and critically how many different forms of data are being collected at every grade level through testing and other avenues, and how truly useful they are.

Smart and transparent communications also can play a critical role. It starts with crafting messages about data for key audiences such as teachers and parents. Distilling recent research conducted in this area, the following are some examples of message points and arguments that tend to resonate with these audiences—and others that fall flat.

Teachers: They generally are very open to messages about data, as most of them are already using data constructively in many ways to enhance instruction. But they tend to be conflicted about the value of data vs. the burden it places on them. And they are turned off by any hint of data being used punitively against them or their students, by having to attend meetings to discuss data that are not directly relevant to their work, and by receiving results from standardized assessments months after the tests are taken, when it's too late to do anything with them.

With this in mind, some data statements appropriate for teachers include:

- Data can be a useful tool to determine whether students are making good progress and getting the help they need, provided teachers are given adequate time for planning and training and timely information on their students to use that data effectively.
- Data are about much more than test scores and numbers. Teachers can gather helpful information about students from a variety of formal and informal sources.
- Technology is not a panacea, but it can make data collection and analysis easier by helping teachers spend less time scoring tests and making sense of data—and more time focusing on instruction.
- The responsibility to protect student data and information should be taken seriously. All of us—the district, educators, parents, and students—have an important role to play in protecting sensitive information.

Parents: They are more removed from how student data are used by teachers, schools, and districts, and their primary interest is in their own child's achievement and growth. Communicate with parents straightforwardly, using specific examples of the types of data used to evaluate students' progress, and tying in how you use this data to address issues they care about, such as class size and resource distribution. On one hand, the vast majority of parents crave more information about their child and respect teachers' role as professionals in collecting and analyzing data to meet students' needs. On the other hand, some parents fear that their child's data will be compromised.

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Employee Spotlight

Meet Leslie Carr



Leslie Carr is an administrative assistant in the Workers' Compensation Department at Maine School Management Association and is the knowledgeable voice on the phone for adjusters and medical providers.

She deals with no less than four adjusters on a daily basis, sends correspondence, enters all claims and medical payments, and answers provider questions. She

also does supply ordering for all of MSMA.

Leslie started with the organization 12 years ago this April, and says she loves coming to work every day. She is proud of her customer service skills and work ethic, enjoys her co-workers and helping people out.

Prior to coming to MSMA she worked in her local Post Office.

She lives in the same town where she was born and married her high school sweetheart. The two built their own home with the help of family and friends. They have adopted sibling pointer dogs from Texas.

"It's been a joy to fill their lives full of love and to experience new things with them, including Maine snow," Leslie says.

Outside of work, she spends time with her close-knit family and friends, and enjoys cooking and doing things outdoors, including gardening and snowshoeing.

and to focus teaching strategies accordingly.

- We collect data including test scores, grades, attendance, demographics, information on special needs, graduation and remediation rates, and disciplinary actions. This data is used to determine eligibility for services and to personalize lesson plans for learning, leading to higher student achievement.
- Information on an individual student's grades, coursework, behavior, attendance, or scores on teacher-made assessments is not shared with anyone beyond the school, parents, and caregivers.
- Student data is carefully safeguarded through school and district policies and procedures, as well as federal and state privacy laws that are specifically designed to protect student data.

As I've said before, having the right messengers communicating about data is just as important as the messages themselves. For teachers, that means wherever possible relying on other teachers to talk directly with their colleagues about the value of using data, the ways they use data effectively, and where appropriate, the district's data use and privacy policies and protocols. One idea is to develop a cadre of teachers who can play the role of "ambassador" to their colleagues at new teacher orientations and trainings, and to provide testimonials about the value of data for your publications.

In the case of parents, teachers can be the most effective messengers on how data is being used for the benefit of students in the classroom and school because the vast majority of parents trust and respect their on-the-ground opinions the most when it comes to the growth and welfare of their children.

A caveat, though: When it comes to information about data privacy and security, parents and caregivers generally don't want to hear from teachers—instead, they prefer hearing directly from the most credible authorities on that issue, which include school board members and administrators.

Making these often-complex uses and issues around data understandable to teachers can be a challenge, and that much more so for parents and other external stakeholders. For free videos, infographics, and other excellent resources that you can show and share, visit the nonprofit Data Quality Campaign's website at www.dataqualitycampaign.org. (Full disclosure: DQC has been an occasional client of my company for several years.)

Daniel Kaufman (dan.kaufman@finnpartners.com (link sends email)) is a senior partner at Widmeyer Communications, a Finn Partners company. He served on the Prince George's County, Maryland, school board from 2013 to 2015. His article appears in the February issue of the American School Board Journal.

Public Advocacy: Data Messages

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Some statements about data that consequently work for parents include:

- All parents want their children to be successful in school and life. But many parents don't have access to timely and quality information to help them understand the implications of the courses their children take, and how they will affect their future ability to succeed in college and careers.
- This information allows us to work with each parent to determine student needs more quickly and more deeply



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

IN HONOR OF MAINE SCHOOL BOARDS

WHEREAS, it shall be the mission of Maine's school districts to provide all students with the best possible education; and

Whereas, school boards are charged with the all-important responsibility of being accountable for the education of Maine children in order to prepare them for a rewarding and productive future; and

Whereas, boards articulate a vision and direction for their school systems, set high academic standards and approve the hiring of qualified staff most capable of making that vision a reality; and

Whereas, local boards chart the educational goals and direction for their communities as they work with administrators, teachers, parents and local residents while serving as advocates for public education; and

Whereas, the school board sets policies and procedures to govern all aspects of school district operation and adopt budgets that provide the resources necessary to meet the needs of all students; and

Whereas, all of these responsibilities and more are done by volunteer board members, who put in countless hours in meetings and in the community advocating for their schools, representing the interests of children, parents and all citizens of the district, and preserving the valued tradition of local control over K-12 public education; now therefore be it:

Resolved that in honor of their service, the Maine Legislature declares its appreciation to members of all local boards of education in the state; and be it further

Resolved that the Maine Legislature declares the month of January, 2016, as School Board Member Recognition Month and encourages local school districts and community leaders to appropriately recognize dedicated school board members across the state.

This resolution was adopted by the Legislature on Jan. 21.