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UPDATE...

January 2017



Legislature to review 145 K-12 bills

Members of the newly elected Legislature have submitted 1900 bill titles including nearly 145 dealing with K-12 education.

Aside from the biennial budget, which has significant implications on districts (see related stories), there are:

- At least five bills dealing with implementation of Question 2, including one to delay, one to repeal and two to amend, including finding other ways to fund it.
- 16 bills to amend school funding, including school construction funds and changes to EPS
- Repeal of Common Core
- Adoption of Next Generation Science Standards
- Required water testing in schools connected to public drinking water systems. This would affect an estimated 500 school buildings.
- Update of Teacher Certification Rule, Chapter 115.

Four bills also have been submitted based on MSBA resolutions adopted at the Delegate Assembly in October. Those include:

- An Act to Improve the Student Transfer Process, sponsored by **Rep. Paul Stearns, R-Guilford**

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Go to page 3 for a list of members of the Education and Appropriations Committees and their emails.

Budget cuts funding, changes EPS formula

Details of the governor's proposed biennial budget as it affects public education are beginning to emerge, with 48 changes to the Essential Programs and Services funding formula that include eliminating state funding for system administration and support for School Boards.

That support includes administrative support at board meetings and in preparation of the budget, as well as central office staff support, legal fees for contract negotiations and for school board legal liability.

The Education Committee is getting its second briefing on the proposal this Thursday, February 2, starting at 2:30 p.m., in Room 202 of the Cross Office building. Click on the link below to listen at that time:

<http://legislature.maine.gov/Audio/#202>

The Appropriations Committee will begin holding public hearings on the biennial budget in early February with hearings on the K-12 portion of the proposal possibly the week of Feb. 13. When schedules are officially set, MSMA will send out bulletins.

While on paper the budget cuts General Purpose Aid by \$9.5 million from current year levels, there are much greater impacts imbedded in the proposal because more funding is targeted and pulled out from general distribution.

At the same time, the cost of education as determined by the state is rising. Two big cost drivers are special education costs, which are going up \$17 million statewide, and the increase in normal teacher retirement costs. Those costs, which were shifted onto school districts in 2013, are going from \$38 million in the current year to \$45 million in 2017-2018.

The budget also makes 48 changes to EPS – policy proposals that many feel do not belong in a budget and should be discussed separately.

Chief among them is the elimination of any funding for system administration that includes central office functions and support staff, superintendents and assistant superintendents, the business office and support for School Boards.

“There was a conscious decision not to include that (system administration) this year,” Acting Deputy Commissioner Suzan Beaudoin told the Education Committee last week. “We’re going
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Little member input in Blue Ribbon Commission initial report

A draft report from the governor's Blue Ribbon Commission that Acting DOE Commissioner Robert Hasson said he wrote was rejected, in part, by commission members, who recommended changes in tone and better vetting of the facts.

While members were invited to send in lists of what they would like to see in a report, there was no meeting where they voted on what should or should not be included.

There also was concern about the report's introduction, which commission member, Oxford Hills Supt. Rick Colpitts said, "read more like an indictment" of Maine's public schools than an overview of the commission's work. It was replaced by an amended introduction written by Rep. Brian Hubbell, D-Bar Harbor.

At its last meeting on Jan. 23, the commission did go line-by-line, changing some phrases and completely eliminating others.

In one instance a recommendation was in the report that all acknowledged had never been discussed.

The recommendation called for expanding the number and availability of charter schools.

"Not once did we talk about charters," said Sen. Justin Alford, D-Cumberland, who was termed out of office this year. "I don't think this should be included in the document. This is coming out of left field."

State Board member and Charter Commissioner Jana Lapoint, who also serves on the Blue Ribbon Commission, agreed there had been no discussion of charters. The recommendation was taken out of the report.

In other areas, commission members asked the language be made less strident since no votes had been taken to back up positions.

In one example, the recommendation that the state "Implement a statewide or regional teacher contracts with higher base pay levels to recruit and retain more effective teachers across the state," was changed to "explore the implementation of a study."

In another area, the word "create" was changed to "incentivize" in the recommendation to "Create cooperative regional service centers with initial base funding."

The commission plans to meet again to go over a revised report. The date has not been set.

Legislature to review 145 K-12 bills

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- An Act to Remove Barriers to School Unit Collaboration, Cooperation and Innovation sponsored by **Rep. Brian Hubbell, D-Bar Harbor**
- An Act to Create More Transparency in the Setting of Normal Teacher Retirement Costs, sponsored by **Sen. Roger Katz, R-Kennebec**
- An Act to Identify Special Education Cost Drivers and Innovative Approaches to Services, sponsored by **Rep. Tori Kornfield, D-Bangor**

The Department of Education also has submitted the following bills:

- An Act To Amend the Education Statutes
- An Act To Enable Approval of Public Charter Schools
- An Act To Revise Certification Statutes
- An Act To Define "Surrogate" for Student Residency Purposes
- An Act To Amend the Process for a Single Municipality To Withdraw from a Regional School Unit
- An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Recapitalize the School Revolving Renovation Fund
- An Act To Promote Regional School Facilities
- An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Capitalize a Career and Technical Revolving Equipment and Renovation Fund
- An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Facilitate Innovative Approaches to Regional School Facilities
- An Act To Support the Regionalization of Education Services and Costs
- An Act To Enable a Statewide Teacher Contract

Budget cuts funding

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in a different direction and providing incentive money to create regional collaborations."

The budget proposes taking \$5.5 million each year in GPA that would have been distributed to districts and using it to fund regional education service agencies that school districts can contract with for services.

Nationally the model is called BOCES or Boards of Cooperative Education Services, which was created in the 1950s in New York State. There is mixed reaction in that state on whether the model saved money over time or simply added a layer of bureaucracy between the state and its school districts.

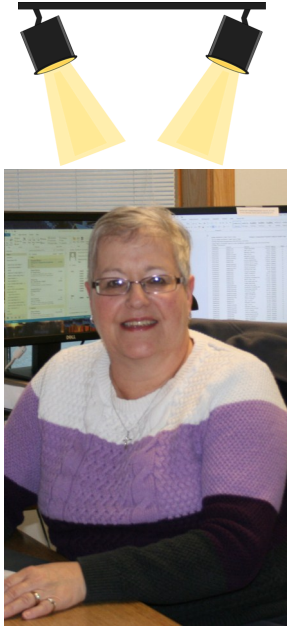
The budget also proposes another \$5 million each year be made available to fund grants for more grassroots' efforts to reduce costs and regionalize services.

Also in the budget is a proposal to stop subtracting Title I funds from district allocations. That will be offset by an increase in student-teacher ratios except at the elementary school level. It is not clear as of this writing how much that will cost or how much funding will be moved around as a result.

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Employee Spotlight

Meet B.J. Bullock

B.J. Bullock is a customer service representative in the Workers' Compensation Department where she reviews all medical bills for payment and prepares required reports as part of a very experienced work team.

She started at MSMA 16 years ago as an administrative assistant. Prior to that she worked in the property and casualty insurance field.

She said her favorite thing about the job is the teamwork and friendship developed in the Workers' Compensation Department.

"We have an unwritten rule – we're all in this together," she said. "We each have been at MSMA for 10 years or more, so our members have had a familiar voice on the phone."

Married for 37 years, her husband and she both grew up in Gardiner. They have two married sons and three grandchildren. They cherish the time spent with family and have the grandchildren overnight regularly. At their camp up north, they boat, kayak, play games and just relax in the summer. During winter, B.J. and her husband snowshoe and enjoy watching the New England Patriots.

2017-2018 Legislative Committees

Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

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School Leadership

School board members are stewards of the principles of public education

By George A. Goens

In most of our lifetimes, public schools were seen as the bedrock of our nation and a source of pride for our communities. They were places to realize the American dream, where the playing field could be leveled and children could pursue their aspirations and have a life better than their parents.

The idea, which is uniquely American in many respects, was that it didn't matter where you came from or who your parents were. Neither did your race, ethnicity or socio-economic status. What mattered was hard work and perseverance to learn and hone abilities and contribute to the future.

Free public schools nourished the concept that what you know matters more than who you know. Common people coupled with an education, talent, and drive could counter social status and elitist contacts based on wealth or position. Only in America is there a fanfare for the Common Man, instead of fanfares for some inherited royalty or elitist privilege. Public education celebrated the possibilities in the "common" diverse citizenry.

Stewardship

Local school board members are stewards of the principles of public education. Stewardship rests on responsibility, a sense of the future, and a commitment to the common good. As citizens holding elective office, board members have a responsibility to take long term care of the public schools and protect the community's investment and the interests of children. They should leave the schools in better condition than they were prior to their holding office. Making difficult and unpopular decisions today so the schools are better tomorrow is the role of a steward.

Stewards add value to the community, rather than diminish it. Board members interested in their own self-interest of getting re-elected can compromise stewardship for expediency or their own popularity. Only in looking back do we realize which public officials, from presidents to school board members, have been good stewards.

Inquiry is the foundation for stewardship. The board must ask questions and inquire into the principles behind proposals, the research base to support them, the reasons for and the costs of initiatives, and the expected results and accountability procedures to ensure proper implementation and outcomes. Sometimes educational and political decisions overlap and local boards must be able to rise above local, state, or national politics to do what is best for children in their local community.

Stewardship requires courage to face special interests, the economically connected, the politically powerful, and the criticism of pundits and the press. Some board members and superintendents are cowardly lions in the face of economic, social and political pressures. Doing what is expedient takes less courage than doing what is right. Decisions and pressure are a part of public life, but those decisions should look to the future and support core values and the common good.

Running schools is not easy or always efficient. Democratic governance never is. But it is better than elites or corporations deciding the future of our children and the education they receive. Marketing is not synonymous with results and reformers are not always interested in the common good. Locally elected school boards epitomize what the founders believed. Democracy, while not perfect, is preferable to self-interest and the control of corporations or special interests.

Public schools are an indispensable foundation of our democratic society. Keeping public schools democratic, rather than agents of corporations or partisan politics, is absolutely essential.

Important debates

What boards debate about and how they do it is an indicator of whether they are in touch with the essence of the school's purpose and soul. The focus of the debate defines their efficacy as a group. Discussing the issues in the form of dialogue generates understanding and better comprehension of the basic assumptions behind different options and the thinking and values behind them. Dialogue is an essential component of stewardship.

Dialogue allows people to see divergent points of view and respectfully consider options. Listening actively and clarifying for understanding are important. Dialogue is more than a discussion. It involves reflecting together, understanding the content and intent of messages and ideas, inquiring into the assumptions behind concepts and proposals, suspending judgment and ultimately creating shared meaning.

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School board members are stewards

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Determining a collective vision for the public schools requires open and respectful dialogue. Obviously one standard is that “the best interests of the children” be the determining factor. Obviously, resources are not unlimited, local or political issues affect decisions, and when a decision is made, everyone will not be happy.

Board members must ask thoughtful questions and do due diligence as part of their responsibilities to the citizenry. They must find common ground and positive connections in the school community by establishing clear values and principles under which the school district operates.

Whether a school community is true to itself is a matter of integrity. To be a good steward of public education, board members have to ensure the honor of the school district by making its actions, words, and programs congruent with its core values and principles. All this presupposes the board and the community have a dialogue about the schools and the ideas under which they function. Dialogue on principles is positive and can instigate growth.

The common good through strong schools should be the board of education’s primary focus. Citizenship emphasizes responsibilities and obligations. Service, responsibility, duty, and honor almost sound like anachronistic ideas from the past. But they are the mainstays of the common good and the sense of community that are necessary for society to work. The values, ideals, and principles under which schools operate are the core that gives people a sense of identity and purpose.

Communities are value-based; politics are power-based; and the private sector is profit-based. The public has become cynical about government, which is a dangerous trend, particularly as the younger generation hears repeatedly that government does not work and that it cannot be trusted. It does not work if special interests are served and the interests of the people are ignored.

The old adage -- wisdom is knowing what you don't know -- applies to board members. Wise ones know what they need to learn. School districts are complex places fiscally, educationally, organizationally and culturally. Board members need to understand the large and subtle issues of school districts before taking action. New members must take time to sort out what they know and don't know. Grasping technical and policy questions takes time and work. There is a significant difference between opinion and knowledge, and information and understanding. Knowledge and understanding are prerequisites for responsible decision-making.

Good public servants understand what is controllable and what is not. Otherwise, policies and planning can be compromised. Stewardship and accountability are the foundations of public officials and not necessarily at the forefront with privatization.

The heart of stewardship is valuing what a school is and what it can mean to children. Board members must protect the soul of the school from the dark entrapments that can destroy schools and turn them into mere institutions, complete with standard operating procedures and no heart.

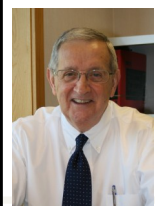
To do that, communities must elect people with deep passion for children and the courage to stand on the point and advocate for them. There is no greater public service than to improve the condition of children. To do so, school board members must be committed to the ideals and values of public education.

See more at: <https://www.nsba.org/newsroom/american-school-board-journal/asbj-february-2017/school-boards-stewards#sthash.ememE3XP.dpuf>

-NSBA.org, February 2017

George A. Goens

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

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