

Becky Fles, *President, MSAD 11*

James Grant, *President-Elect, Brunswick*

Maureen King, *Vice President, RSU 21*

Steven W. Bailey, *Executive Director, sbailey@msmaweb.com*

Victoria A. Wallack, *Director of Communications & Government Relations, vwallack@msmaweb.com*

UPDATE...

October 2017

Rules around diploma will be redone

The Department of Education announced earlier this month it was withdrawing the current proposed rule around proficiency-based diplomas and will be soliciting feedback from stakeholders, including school boards and superintendents, on how to proceed with a new proposal.

The rule, Chapter 134, Regulations for Awarding a High School Diploma, is supposed to help define how the proficiency-based diploma law, passed in 2016, will be implemented.

School superintendents and others in the education community raised concerns about the first proposed rule, questioning whether it would assure all students, including those with special needs, have a pathway to graduation. Other concerns were around the capacity of school districts and the department to do the work outlined in the proposal; sections of rule that go beyond statute; and, local control.

The DOE issued a statement saying after review of the oral and written comments on the first proposal, it would start a new rule-making process for a “substantively different Chapter 134” after it gets feedback from stakeholders in October and early November.

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Pre-School count due October 31

The Legislature has provided start-up funding in 2018-2019 for public school districts to begin or expand pre-school classrooms, and the Maine Department of Education requires information by Oct. 31, 2017, in order to estimate funding needs.

In order to be included in the state start-up pre-school funding count, districts must complete this survey:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PreKStart-upFunds>

Filling out the survey is only meant to capture the level of interest in accessing funding for new or expanded programs and does not guarantee funding. Expanded programs are those in districts that currently run approved public pre-schools and want to add another classroom(s).

For more information please contact Sue Reed at 624-6632, susan.d.reed@maine.gov or go to:

<https://mainedoenews.net/2017/08/28/public-preschool-funding-2018-19/>

MSMA Fall Conference Countdown

The countdown is on for the 44th Annual MSMA Fall Conference – the largest professional development forum for school leaders in the state, with 55 clinics scheduled over two days and the opportunity to meet with peers from across Maine to share ideas.

The conference will be held Thursday and Friday, Oct. 26 and 27, at the Augusta Civic Center, around the theme of “Public Schools – Learning for Life”.

The focus will be on education initiatives designed to engage all learners in all parts of the state. Titles include:

- Courageous Leadership to Transform Education
- Small School, Big Needs: A Panel Discussion About Online Learning
- Questions are the New Answers
- Improving K-3 Student Achievement
- Promoting the Guiding Principles: Project-based Learning and 21st Century Skills

Other clinic titles include: When Adults Get Along, the Kids do Better; Good News about Technology in Education; Legislative Advocacy for School Boards; Survival Skills for Superintendents as Public School Promoters; Understanding Your ED279; The Basics of School Board Policy, and much more.

The MSMA Insurance Trusts also are putting on workshops from Insurance 101 for Schools to the basics of Workers’ Compensation.

The top education lawyers in the state are offering 15 clinics including the always popular collective bargaining series, Legal Year in Review, special education law update, and an overview of the DOE’s proposed School Management and Leadership Centers.

The focus on engaging all students runs through this year’s keynotes.

David Schuler, the former president of the School Superintendents Association (AASA), opens the conference Thursday morning with an overview of Redefining Ready. It is a national initiative launched by AASA to introduce new, research-based standards to assess whether students are ready for college, career and life.



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Rules around diploma

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The stakeholders will include superintendents, principals, teachers, students, school board members, curriculum leaders, and parents. DOE is reaching out to the professional organizations representing those stakeholders, including the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association, to help in that effort.

The DOE then plans to take what it hears from those stakeholders, coupled with the written and oral testimony on the originally proposed rule, and write a new one. The DOE says the rule will remain routine technical, meaning the new rule, once finalized, will not need legislative approval.

A hearing on the first proposed rule was held in mid-August with written comments due by Sept. 8. That tight timeline on such a substantial proposal raised concerns, as did the fact the public hearing was held during the height of vacation season.

In its latest announcement the DOE said:

“The Maine DOE is working diligently to honor the integrity and vision for the high school diploma and transcript articulated in Maine education statute 20-A MRS §4722-A as well as the routine technical rulemaking pursuant to section §4722-A subsection 7. Maine DOE believes public input is critically important.”

“It is clear from the oral and written comments submitted on proposed rule Chapter 134 that there is commitment in Maine to provide opportunity for all students to learn as much as they can the entire time the students are eligible to attend our public schools. It is also clear that the diploma has great social meaning and currency in our society. Clearly evident in the comments is that equity sits at the heart of the debate regarding what constitutes sufficient evidence for proficiency. We have provided links below to both the oral and written comments received by the September 8th deadline.” (Click on the paragraph below.)

Recorded public hearing and the written comments received by September 8, 2017 for proposed rule Chapter 134 submitted by September 8, 2017.

For more information on proposed rule Chapter 134 and the **diploma based on proficiency**, contact Maine Department of Education Proficiency-Based Education Specialist, Diana Doiron at diana.doiron@maine.gov.

MSMA Fall Conference countdown

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Former State Economist and Thomas College President Laurie Lachance will be the lunch speaker on Friday and talk about the power of education to transform lives, communities and the economy of Maine.

To facilitate idea sharing, the annual meetings of superintendents and school boards, by region, have been scheduled for early afternoon on Thursday. See the schedule in the bottom right corner of this page.

Registration for Fall Conference should be done through the superintendent’s office. Online registration is closed, but it’s not too late. Registration can still be done by calling the MSMA office, 622-3473.

Question 4 would stabilize retirement system investments

The Maine Public Employees Retirement System asked for the legislation that created Question 4 on the November 7 ballot. If passed, it would help smooth out the ups and downs in pension investments by increasing the length of time investment losses must be recovered. Currently that is 10 years and this initiative would lengthen that to 20.

This proposal, which would amend the Maine Constitution, received bipartisan super-majorities in both the House and Senate.

Proponents say that spreading out any possible investment losses of the retirement system over 20 years instead of 10 will help reduce the impact of such losses on the state budget. They go on to say the 20-year payback period proposed in Question 4 will ensure a sound retirement plan for current and retired state workers and teachers, in a manner that also would ensure the state can meet its obligation for public service. (Source: Bangor Daily News, OpEd by Representatives Tom Winsor, R-Norway, and Rep. Aaron Frey, D-Bangor, both members of the Appropriations Committee.)

MEPers Executive Director Sandy Matheson is quoted in that OpEd as saying: “The current 10-year provision has served the plan well, but in actuality is lower than the currently recognized actual standards of 15 to 20 years.”

Question 4 on the ballot reads:

“Do you favor amending the Constitution of Maine to reduce volatility in state pension funding requirements caused by the financial markets by increasing the length of time over which experience losses are amortized from 10 years to 20 years, in line with pension standards?”

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. 26, starting at 1:15 p.m. and running until 2:00 p.m. 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
Penquis (2)	Kennebec/Penobscot Room
Washington (3)	Arnold Room
Hancock (4)	Capital Room
Mid-Coast (5)	Pine Tree Room
Western Maine (6)	Howard Room
Cumberland (7)	Augusta Room
Kennebec (8)	Washington/York Room
York (9)	Fort Western Room

Special Education Task Force work begins

A task force looking at the cost drivers and innovative approaches involved in providing special education services held its first meeting on Thursday, Oct. 19.

The group includes a wide range of people involved in the delivery of services and their task is to address the rising cost of special education while maintaining high-quality services. Senator Brian Langley, R-Hancock, and Rep. Richard Farnsworth, D-Portland, are serving as co-chairs. Both legislators are on the Education Committee, with Langley as its Senate chair.

The task force grew out of a resolution passed by the MSBA Delegate Assembly in 2016 that noted a 46 percent increase in the cost of special education over the last 10 years.

“As school leaders, we need to be a part of the solution by recommending changes in state and federal law that assure student needs are still being met while controlling costs,” the rationale for the resolution read.

The first meeting was scheduled to include three briefings:

Dr. Amy Johnson, director of the Maine Education Policy Research Institute at USM, will present the “MEPRI Report: Analysis of the Essential Programs and Services Special Education Cost Component” written in 2016. Click [here](#) to read.

DOE Special Services Director Jan Breton and Dr. David Silvernail of USM will brief the task force on work being done by a department working group also looking at special education.

RSU 21 Supt. Dr. Katie Hawes, serving Kennebunk and Kennebunkport, will give an overview of cost drivers and innovative approaches, based on her experience in school districts, including time spent as a special education director.

The task force is charged with submitting a report at the end of this year with recommendations, including suggested legislation.

Task Force members include:

- Chairs Sen. Langley and Rep. Farnsworth
- RSU 12 School Board Member Jerry Nault, MSBA
- RSU 16 Supt. Rick Colpitts, MSSA
- South Portland Special Education Director Katherine Cox, MADSEC
- Lynn Maddocks of Dedham, advocate for students with special needs
- RSU 87 Special Education Director Lesley Snyder, MADSEC
- Special Education teacher, Jill Watson, of Maranacook Community School, MEA
- MSAD 11 Business Manager Andrea Disch
- Attwood Primary School Principal Jennifer McGee, MPA
- Parent, Carrie Woodcock, Maine Parent Foundation

MSMA is covering the task force meetings and will post updates on its work.



RSU 12 School Board Member Jerry Nault and South Portland Special Education Director Katherine Cox at the task force meeting.



From the left, RSU 16 Superintendent Rick Colpitts, special education teacher, Jill Watson, and MSAD 11 Business Manager Andrea Disch during RSU 21 Superintendent Katie Hawes' presentation.

Report on Special Education

Special education programming is an area that is governed by a complex interplay of federal and state policies, as well as state and local practices and beliefs. Multiple stakeholders are involved in making choices about the types of services that will be provided to each individual student. These decision-makers have varying perspectives, and are influenced by historical practices in a district as well as by existing resources and available capacities. With each district's widely varying student needs and expectations, a “prototypical” setting is elusive. This creates challenges for developing a special education funding model. Thus to provide further context the beginning section of this report provides background on selected federal and state policies that dictate some of the parameters of special education funding. Next, data and analysis of Maine's special education spending are presented. Then the sections that follow give consideration to potential policy options for improving the special education funding component in the EPS model.

Click [here](#) to read the full report prepared by the Maine Education Policy Research Institute at the University of Southern Maine.

School Leadership

Stubborn facts about choice

By Thomas J. Gentzel

Public schools are an institution but they are not monolithic. They come in various shapes and sizes, and offer a range of services to all children who attend, whether in person or online. “Well, of course they do,” you’re likely to say if you are a local school board member, superintendent, administrator, or teacher. Those who are responsible for leading and operating the public education system know all of that. If only the public did, too.

The debate over school choice may vary over time or from place to place, but a recurring argument for tuition voucher, tax credit, and other similar proposals has been that students and parents need access to more options. “One size does not fit all” proponents will argue. They’re right, of course, which is why public schools are not one size, and frankly haven’t been for years.

Today’s public schools offer programs and services designed to address the needs of individual students, to help them pursue their interests, and to provide the assistance essential for their success. Those who would divert public funds to private schools conveniently overlook this impressive track record, choosing instead to create an image of students trapped in uniform, tradition-bound schools.

Ignoring reality does not make it go away. To quote John Adams, who said, as a young lawyer, arguing a case in court: “Facts are stubborn things.”

NSBA’s Center for Public Education (CPE) recently examined options in public schools. As Patte Barth, the director of CPE, notes in her column in this month’s American School Board Journal, the facts about existing public school choice are compelling. The system governed by school boards and funded by taxpayers provides the opportunity for many students to select courses and even the school they will attend, to participate in a wide range of academic and extracurricular programs, and to benefit from numerous support services such as after-school tutoring, to cite just one example.

Moreover, the CPE report makes a powerful point about how much more frequently all of this happens in the public versus the private sector. In many cases, such as in Advanced Placement and Gifted/Honors programs, it’s not even close. Even public schools with the fewest choices, and those with the highest poverty, generally offer more options to students than private schools do. Add to all of this the efforts in many school districts to personalize instruction, to incorporate deeper learning into classroom teaching, and to ensure that students graduate with the skills needed to be successful in postsecondary education and in their careers, and you have a picture of the incredible breadth and scope of public education in America today.

These developments are producing impressive outcomes. Public schools have accomplished something that might have been considered virtually impossible years ago: educating students to higher levels, with more rigorous standards, while at the same time graduating far more of them than ever before. Much work remains to be done, but the reality is that public education is achieving outstanding results. These “stubborn facts” deserve more attention, especially considering the concerted, well-orchestrated effort being made to redirect funds from public to private schools in the name of “choice.”

Through our Stand Up 4 Public Schools campaign, NSBA is shining a bright light on these achievements and on the programs, options, and opportunities provided by public schools across the country. We are doing so using the words of students and educators themselves. We encourage you to share your district’s successes. Please submit them at www.standup4publicschools.org. We have a great story; it’s time for all of us to tell it.

Thomas J. Gentzel (tgentzel@nsba.org) is executive director and CEO of NSBA. Follow Gentzel on Twitter @Tom_NSBA



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, Steven Bailey. sbailey@msmaweb.com