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# UPDATE...

February 2017

## School leaders say budget doesn't support students

Close to 30 school board members and superintendents made the trip to Augusta on Friday to tell a joint session of the Education and Appropriations Committees to vote against the governor's proposed budget because of its sweeping changes to the funding formula and its elimination of any state subsidy for system administration.

Bangor Superintendent Betsy Webb, who presented on behalf of the Maine School Superintendents Association, summed up the sentiment for many.



Budget hearing draws capacity crowd

"We oppose the governor's budget not because we dislike all it contains, but because it does not represent a coherent or adequately funded plan for educating Maine's students," said Webb, who is MSSA president-elect. "In fact, it seeks to unravel the plan we now have and shifts costs onto local property taxpayers while pretending to keep the local mill rate flat."

MSBA President Becky Fles, chair of the MSAD 11 School Board, said the elimination of system administration, that includes superintendents, business offices, human resources, central office staff and support for School Boards, would make it virtually impossible for board members to do their jobs. EPS currently allocates \$40 million to system administration, and it is a state and locally shared cost.

"The board's role is legislative; the superintendent serves as

*(continued on page 4)*

## Legislators talk about hitting the 55 percent goal



Rep. Hubbell and Sen. Langley

Education Chairman Sen. Brian Langley and Rep. Brian Hubbell, a former education committee member who now serves on the Appropriations Committee, told the MSBA Board of Directors on February 18 that they are committed to honoring voters' wishes to get state aid to 55 percent.

Both legislators agreed the public sent a message with ballot Question 2 that they want the state to fund what was promised by another ballot question passed in 2004. It required 55 percent state funding for education costs defined by the Essential Programs and Services funding formula.

The question now, Langley said, is "how do we meet the intent of the (Question 2) law while mitigating the income tax increase."

Question 2, as proposed, would add an additional 3 percent tax on Maine taxable income in excess of \$200,000, effectively making the rate on that additional income 10.15 percent. It would give Maine the highest rate in the country on that level of income and the second highest rate overall.

The additional money raised from that tax, estimated at \$157 million, is supposed to be used to bring the state share of education to 55 percent.

Opponents of the tax hike in Question 2 said it would make it more difficult to recruit higher paid professionals like doctors; hurt small business owners who run their business income

*(continued on page 2)*

## Plan to meet federal ESSA law open for comment

The Department of Education has released its draft plan on how the state and school districts will implement the new federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which is being described as more supportive and less prescriptive than the old No Child Left Behind.

The federal law is giving states and districts more say in how they will improve achievement for all students and make sure quality teachers are in all schools regardless of location. It is far less heavy handed than the old NCLB, which labeled schools as failing if they did not meet proficiency goals in English and math.

Maine DOE's overall goal in the plan is by 2030, 90 percent of Maine's students will graduate college and career ready.

Maine's draft ESSA application, known as Maine's State Education Plan, is open for public comment **through March 30**. The DOE will consider feedback before submitting a final plan to the U.S. DOE in April.

An executive summary of the plan and the plan itself can be found at: <http://www.maine.gov/doe/essa/>.

The proposal builds on a state plan developed by then Commissioner Stephen Bowen, entitled "Education Evolving: Maine's Plan for Putting Learners First". It focused on five core areas: Effective and Learner Centered Instruction; Great Teachers and Leaders; Multiple Pathways for Learner Achievement; Comprehensive School and Community Supports; and, Coordinated and Effective State Support.

The ESSA plan also sites significant legislation passed to support students and teachers, including the teacher evaluation and professional development bill passed in 2012 and the proficiency-based diploma bill passed last year.

The DOE, as part of the federal requirement to get input on the ESSA plan, put out a survey completed by 476 people who were asked what they wanted in the proposal. Some key suggestions were:

- Keep it simple and focus on a few key measures
- Prioritize growth over achievement but include both
- Compare schools to a standard, not each other
- Recognize both the top performing and lowest performing schools
- Support lowest performing schools the most

Under the plan there will be three tiers in which schools will be placed, but all must develop improvement plans, using and improving the Comprehensive Plan requirement already in state statute. The tiers include:

**Tier 1:** Schools meeting expectations; supported by DOE content area specialists and regional representatives;

**Tier 2:** Schools below state expectations in specific, targeted areas, including student subgroups; supported by DOE School Improvement Coach;

**Tier 3:** Schools below expectations across multiple required accountability indicators; supported with comprehensive directed school support and DOE School Improvement Coach.

Federal Title I and other federal monies support improvement under the plan, but the goal is to have that support help non-Title I schools as well.

The tiered designations will be determined by multiple indicators. They include:

**Academic Achievement:** measured by proficiency rates on annual state assessments in grades 3-8 and grade 11.

**Academic Progress:** measured by the same state assessments, used to determine growth.

**Graduation Rate:** expressed in the percent of students who graduate on time in four years and in extended periods covering 5 and 6 years.

**Progress in Achieving English Language Proficiency for English Language Learners**

**School Quality or Students Success:** measured by regular school attendance.

Attendance is what's known as a non-academic indicator and over time the intention is to adopt the national "Redefining Ready!: College and Career Ready Standards" that were advocated for by the Maine School Superintendents Association through a resolution unanimously adopted by the MSSA and supported by superintendents on the ESSA advisory board. The delay was called for because work is still being done on how to measure those standards.

### Legislators talk

(continued from page 1)

through their personal income tax; and, give Maine an anti-business image nationwide, which would make it hard to attract new business to the state. Economists also were concerned because income tax collections are volatile and come down rapidly in a bad economy.

Langley voiced those concerns about the income tax surcharge during the Question 2 campaign, but said the "message was clear" from voters that they want to find a way to increase public education funding.

Hubbell, D-Bar Harbor, acknowledged the controversy over the income tax rate hike proposed, but said it was "heartening" that voters said they want the Legislature to fund 55 percent.

"We have hard discussions ahead about how to pay for that," Hubbell said, but, "it is a really important moment for the Legislature," because once the funding mechanism is determined, there will be money to implement education policy initiatives that most agree are imperatives.

Proposals include not only getting rid of the income tax surcharge in Question 2, but lowering the overall income tax rate and relying more on the sales tax. In his budget, Gov. LePage wants a lower, flat income tax rate for all and is proposing broadening the sales tax to more goods and services and raising the hotel and lodging tax.

## Maine Schools in Focus: Addressing Educational Inequality—The Power of Public Preschools

Enrolling three- and four-year-olds in public preschool programs has received increasing support over the past decade and a half. The number of children in state-funded programs nationally has grown from 14 percent in 2002 to 29 percent (Reardon et al., 2016). Research reports are now emerging that track the long-term effects of preschool learning. The early start that educationally disadvantaged children get in preschool appears to offset the long-standing patterns of educational inequality that have plagued our schools—a pattern where poorer children enter kindergarten one year behind their wealthier peers and often fall further behind as their schooling continues.



According to Sean Reardon at Stanford and his co-researchers, children entered kindergarten in 2010 with stronger academic and school readiness skills than was the case in the late 1990s. Public preschools contributed to this effect, one that also reduced the “inequality gap” between low-income and high-income students and between non-white and white students (Reardon et al., 2016). It’s important to keep in mind that many high-income children have had, and continue to have, access to private preschools. Our investment in public preschools appears to offset some of the “early lead” enjoyed by these more privileged children.

No longitudinal data are available for Maine’s children, but we have clearly begun to invest in public preschools. In 2009, 24 percent of Maine school districts offered voluntary preschool enrollment; in 2013, 63 percent did. Public preschool enrollment has grown each year since 2006; by 2013, 34 percent of the state’s 4-year-olds attended public preschool programs operating a minimum of 10 hours per week (NIEER, 2015). Our funding formula now provides for additional “weighted subsidy” to districts offering preschool.

Maine, nevertheless, ranks 33rd in state spending for public preschools (well below our overall standing in per pupil expenditures, K-12). Maine and eight other states spent less than \$2,500 per preschool student in 2012-13 compared to a national average of \$4,629 (NIEER, 2015). The distribution of public preschools in Maine appears to indicate that wealthier suburbs and very small rural districts are less likely to have programs and that many RSUs and SADs seem more likely to have them (MDOE; 2015 resident enrollment tables).

Researchers, however, caution that simply providing preschool programs does not, by itself, yield the benefits found in some studies. The [National Institute for Early Education Research](#) identifies 10 “quality indicators” of effective programs. Maine, statewide, meets five of these standards. But beyond the programs themselves, Reardon and his associates suggest that parental participation and “changes in children’s homes” have helped to narrow educational inequalities.

They point to more widespread acknowledgement of the importance of early learning, literacy, and brain research and to wider availability of materials from pediatricians’ offices and regional health initiatives (Reardon et al., 2016).

While some districts with substantial populations of such children have already invested, others have yet to do so. Mounting a new program for four-year-olds certainly requires budgetary, personnel, and facilities planning (such as repurposing the available classroom space in many elementary schools). But most importantly, it means reaching out to families, educating them about the benefits, and welcoming them and their small children into school.

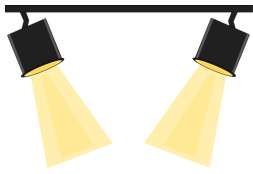
Our state contributes 43 percent of what we spend per preschool child. Nationally, states’ contributions average 87 percent of what is spent per child (Barnett et al, 2014). Education officials, the governor, and the legislature must wrestle with the difficult choice of greater state funding for preschool vs. many other worthy programs and services. The potential long-term benefits of public preschool, however, deserve very serious attention in this debate.

This is an opportune time for local schools and school boards to plan early learning programs, particularly for students whose backgrounds might disadvantage them. The [Maine Department of Education](#) offers helpful guidance in this respect, as does the [Maine Association for the Education of Young Children](#). A key to making these opportunities address long-standing inequalities throughout the PreK-12 experience will be the engagement of parents early and often.

Sources: Barnett, W., M. Carolan, J. Squires, and K. Brown (2014). *The state of preschool 2013: First Look*. National Center for Educational Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. ([nces.ed.gov](#)); NIEER (2015). *The state of public preschool 2014*. National Institute for Early Education Research ([nieer.org](#)); Maine Department of Education ([maine.gov/doe/dataresources/warehouse.html](#)); Reardon, S., J. Waldfogel, and D. Bassok (2016). [“The good news about educational inequality.”](#) *New York Times Sunday Review* (August 8, 2016).

*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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## Employee Spotlight Meet Cindy Roy



Receptionist Cindy Roy is MSMA's newest employee.

She is the friendly voice on the phone when people call and the one who greets visitors at the front desk. She also helps staff with special projects and handles and delivers the mail to the right people.

Prior to joining MSMA, she worked at the Finance Authority of Maine for 27 years where she was

in charge of FAME's major events, trade shows, advertisements, publications, and database.

The thing that Cindy likes most about her job is the people. "Everyone here is very helpful, knowledgeable, friendly and kind. It means a lot to work for an organization that truly cares and is dedicated to its mission," she said.

In her spare time, Cindy likes to cook, do outdoor activities, socialize with friends, and spend time with her daughter Ariel, son-in-law Kevin, and granddaughter Charlotte who reside in Arundel. Cindy and her cat Tinkerbelle live in the Augusta area.

### School leaders say (continued from page 1)



Becky Fles

educational leader and the school unit's chief administrator," Fles said. "Simply stated, we can't operate schools without them nor would you want us to."

The proposed budget, L.D. 390, cuts current state aid by \$9.5 million and redirects another \$5.5 million each year of the biennium away from school district operations.

It also would amend or delete 48 sections of the current Essential Programs and Services formula. In addition to the elimination of system administration, the proposal gets rid of the declining enrollment adjustment, which affects communities that have lost workers and their families and communities that are aging.



Betsy Webb

The proposal also eliminates what most agree was the bad practice of subtracting federal Title I funds from state allocations, but is doing so in a year when GPA is down and student-teacher ratios are going up to pay for the Title I changes. That has shifted considerable money around.

Parents also testified against changes to special education funding and budget cuts in general that would eliminate services to the students who need them the most.

While the DOE declined repeated requests to release a statewide spreadsheet prior to Friday's hearing, the Maine Education Association has put together a comparison that shows more than half the districts are losing money.

## Blue Ribbon Commission Report

The Commission to Reform Public Education Funding and Improve Student Performance in Maine, better known as the Blue Ribbon Commission, has released a report describing the initiatives it would like to explore further this year.

The commission, created by legislation last session, met throughout 2016 and is empowered to meet throughout this year to review its initial recommendations, explore their feasibility and costs, and ultimately propose what changes should be made to achieve their objectives.

Their goal is to improve student achievement and eliminate the income achievement gap between economically disadvantaged and advantaged students through a system of education reforms and cost efficiencies.

The objectives the Blue Ribbon Commission recommends to achieve this goal are as follows:

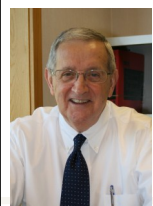
**Objective 1: Improve classroom instruction at all grade levels.**

**Objective 2: All students graduate high school proficient and on time through expanded access to high quality educational opportunities.**

**Objective 3: All children are kindergarten ready and proficient readers by the end of 3rd grade.**

**Objective 4: Greater efficiency is achieved in the use of resources.**

To see the full report go to: <http://www.maine.gov/doe/blue-ribbon/>



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

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