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UPDATE...

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CDS move needs more work

A bill that would have transferred services for 3-5-year-olds from the state-run Child Development Services to public schools is on hold after the Education Committee learned the current system is running a deficit and all eligible children are not being served.

During a contentious meeting on March 29, the committee heard from the department that 20 to 25 percent of the eligible birth to 5-year-olds were not being served, and the program was short \$3 million.

A bill currently before the committee, L.D. 1870, An Act to Reorganize the Provision of Services for Children with Disabilities from Birth to 5 Years of Age, would disband CDS and move services for 3-to-5-year-olds into schools and put services for infants and toddlers under 3 under the DOE's office of special education.

There would be a two-year transition under the bill, but committee members said given the existing problems two years would not be enough.

"This is going to hurt the locals. This is going to hurt the kids," said Sen. Joyce Maker, R., Washington. "Unless they have a better plan than what we've heard, this is not going to work."

The lack of a plan and the lack of data – a situation made worse when a task force working on the CDS transition was ordered by the DOE to stop meeting in December – added to concerns in the field that the department was simply trying to shift cost and responsibilities to school districts without adequate support.

The \$3 million shortfall in this year's CDS budget and a history of shortfalls going back more than a decade also raised questions about whether school districts could pay for the staff they need to serve all students eligible for the service.

After polling the committee about whether the two-year transition should move forward, Committee Chair Sen. Brian Langley, R-Hancock, said he would like to convene a new task force to look at what it would take in terms of time, money, and staffing to put CDS-like services into public schools.

The Maine School Superintendents Association and Maine School Boards Association raised these issues in testimony.

"There already is a history of cost overruns in the CDS system. We fully expect that transferring CDS-like services to public

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2016 Education Committee diploma vote.

Diploma law changes under review

Changes to the proficiency-based diploma law passed by the Legislature in 2016 and affecting this year's freshmen are still a work in progress, with several competing proposals potentially heading for committee review.

Under the law passed two years ago, the graduating class of 2021 will have to show proficiency in the so-called core four -- English, Math, Science and Social Studies. The remaining standards of Art, Foreign Language, Health and Physical Education and the softer skills encompassed under Career and Education Development would be added through 2025 when full proficiency is supposed to be met.

The timeline is: Class of 2021 – core 4; Class of 2022 – core 4 plus 1; Class of 2023 – core 4 plus 2; Class of 2024 – core 4 plus 3; Class of 2025 – all 8.

The law also outlines requirements for Career and Technical Education students to show proficiency and recognizes that successful completion of the CTE program itself is evidence of meeting the standards, particularly in the area of technology and science.

Concerns about school capacity to meet those deadlines, particularly in areas like foreign language where staff is hard to find, and making sure students with special needs have the opportunity to earn a diploma, resulted in proposals to change the law.

The first bill introduced this session called for a year extension to

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CDS move

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schools will result in greater enrollments because schools are close to home, more visible and have history with families. While we will be efficient managers of the funds we receive and see regional opportunities for the delivery of services, this bill cannot be used to cost-shift onto local property tax payers. If it is, the system will fail, and the losers will be our neediest children.

“The state must make it a priority to create a funding plan that supports adequate staffing and anticipates increased enrollments. Transportation also is a major cost driver in the current CDS operation, and there has been little meaningful discussion around how that will be addressed. It is of particular concern in rural parts of the state.

“Shortage of staff – speech and language pathologists being a prime example; the availability of special purpose child-care centers, some of which are currently run by CDS; and available space for new programs in public schools have yet to be addressed.”

Diploma law changes

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meet the target dates. That bill was tabled in the Education Committee when it was amended to repeal the diploma law all together. The committee now is anticipating new proposals, including one that keeps proficiency targets in place but removes the mandate. Another from the governor’s office reportedly would require proficiency in English and math in order for a student to graduate.

No hearings on the new bills were scheduled as of this writing.

The legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association testified neither for nor against the original bill and called for a year delay. In that testimony they said:

“Our concern is the date has been pushed forward before, and if we do it again some will assume the requirement will eventually go away. And, that would be a disservice to the children we serve because we recognize that student-centered learning works.

“At the same time there is no question districts are at different places in their implementation of proficiency-based learning, and flexibility around meeting the goals and dates in law is needed. We believe that flexibility can be written into the rule defining the proficiency-based diploma process. That rule is Chapter 134, Regulations for Awarding a High School Diploma, and it is currently going through revision.

“A priority is to make sure students with special needs and others who struggle with learning have a pathway that allows them to receive a high school diploma. We also have concerns about course availability in all the required content areas. The World Languages content area is a good example.

“We believe those can be addressed through the rule-making process and perhaps through waivers that allow more time in given subject areas for given districts and students. Such flexibility would recognize the move toward proficiency-based diplomas is a work in progress and that is as it should be. We will learn and adjust the process as we go and use the deadlines in statute to keep us on task.”

**Health Center bill
needs funding**

A bill that would restore funding to School-based Health Centers has received majority support in the Legislature and now needs approval by the Appropriations Committee for \$600,000 in funding.

L.D. 1710, An Act to Restore Maine’s School Based Health Centers, has been placed on what’s called the Appropriations Table, where bills with funding attached are placed before they finally can be enacted.

There are 15 school-based health centers that lost funding last July as part of a negotiated cut in the money they receive from the Fund for Healthy Maine.

Those affected include centers in Calais, Maranacook, Brewer, Portland, MSAD 75, Lewiston/Auburn, Bangor and Oxford Hills.

School-based Health Centers are financed in a variety of ways, using more than one funding source that includes partnerships with hospitals and health care systems and as part of the school budget. While it was suggested at the time of the cuts the money from the Fund for Healthy Maine could be found elsewhere, that is not always the case and is not a sustainable solution going forward.

L.D. 1710 would use \$600,000 from Healthy Maine to fund the centers in 2018-2019.

MSMA will alert members when the Appropriations Committee is likely to consider the bill. Please ask your local House and Senate members to let Appropriations Committee members know this is a priority.

Bond funds for schools

The Legislature is considering a number of proposals that would float bonds to increase funding for the School Revolving Renovation Fund and several that would address safety upgrades in the wake of the Parkland shootings.

The Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association have strongly supported increasing the revolving renovation fund, which can be used for health and safety projects, building repairs and upgrades of learning spaces. Right now there is only enough money in the fund to cover about half the projects being proposed.

L.D. 1331, An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Recapitalize the School Revolving Renovation Fund, would add \$20 million to the fund. L.D. 1858, An Act to Include Security Installations and Upgrades in Maine’s School Revolving Renovation Fund, would make school security upgrades part of the priority projects under the fund. A third bill, L.D. 1883, An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Strengthen School Security, proposes a bond for \$20 million and would create a separate revolving fund for security projects.

In its testimony, MSBA and MSSA suggested the Legislature look at the existing School Revolving Renovation Fund as the source for both traditional school upgrades and those related to school security – a proposal that only works if funding is increased.

The Appropriations Committee is expected to vote on what bonds to recommend in the coming weeks.

School Leadership

Elements of Successful Schools

Schools succeed when educators, parents, and communities collaborate

By Joetta Sack-Min

What are the essential elements of successful schools? It seems like a relatively simple question, but we know that K-12 education is a complex endeavor. And too often the dialogue about public education is being controlled by people who aren't necessarily education experts or even part of the education community.

With that in mind, the Learning First Alliance (LFA), a coalition of 12 major education organizations including NSBA, spent more than a year compiling research and best practices. The result is a compendium, "The Elements of Success: 10 Million Speak on Schools That Work."

The ongoing project is designed to help policymakers, school leaders, and the public understand why and how some schools succeed. This is the first time these organizations—representing parents, educators, and school board members—came together and found consensus on the topic.

The compendium identifies six critical elements that impact several important aspects of schooling. Most importantly, it determines that where schools are working, it is because educators, parents, and local communities have developed programs specific to meet their goals and challenges, rather than relying on a prescriptive state and federal role.

"We know what works; we know what makes effective schools," said NSBA Executive Director and CEO Thomas J. Gentzel at a panel discussion in January to release the compendium. "What's important about this compendium is that it is a way forward, and it includes best practices that can be applied to any school." According to the compendium, the six elements of success are:

FOCUS ON THE TOTAL CHILD

Successful schools support all students' needs, inside and outside the classroom, to help them become effective, empowered learners. They design and carry out programs that offer all students a rich educational experience, supporting their academic and social/emotional learning so they develop the skills needed to succeed in an ever-changing environment. These schools customize learning to individual students, taking advantage of advances in technology as they do so. They also provide opportunities for students to explore careers and nurture their talents and interests, including through partnerships with their communities.

COMMITMENT TO EQUITY AND ACCESS

Successful schools ensure all students have access to high-quality services and supports enabling them to set and reach high goals for learning. In these schools, equity does not mean equality; they recognize some students need additional resources to have the same opportunity for success as others. They ensure the needs of all student populations are met, including English language learners, students with disabilities, children of color, religious minorities, LGBTQ students, and others. Successful schools recognize such students are assets and diversity is a strength.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Successful schools effectively engage families and communities in support of students. In doing so, they identify barriers to such engagement and work to overcome them. Their efforts to build authentic connections to families are focused on a belief that every parent wants the best for their child and, when provided the right invitations and opportunities, they can help their child, and all children, be successful.

DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP

Successful schools define leadership broadly. Leadership is distributed—to principals, teachers, school counselors, community members, and others in the building—and decision-making is a shared endeavor. In these schools, leaders (regardless of job title) meet high standards of practice and are supported in their development. They understand that effective communication is a critical component of school success, and they build solid, trusting relationships with both school and community stakeholders.

STRONG, SUPPORTED TEACHING FORCE AND STAFF

Successful schools are staffed with educators—including teachers, principals, school counselors, technology specialists and others—who are well-educated, well-prepared and well-supported. These educators meet high standards of practice. They benefit from continuous learning and support along the professional continuum, including through high-quality preservice education, ongoing high-quality professional learning, meaningful evaluation tied to professional growth, and opportunities to take on leadership roles regardless of official title.

RELATIONSHIP-ORIENTED SCHOOL CLIMATE

Successful schools create a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility among staff and students and with families and

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Elements of successful schools

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communities. These schools are safe, welcoming, and respectful to all. They establish teaching and learning as core values. They support positive behavior and build healthy, supportive relationships and a sense of community both between and among students and staff. In them, students have frequent opportunities for participation, collaboration, service, and self-direction, all strengthening their connection to the school.

ATOMS OF A MOLECULE

The most critical factor is the interaction between the elements—they are not interchangeable.

“These elements are like the atoms that make up a molecule—it is the bonds between these elements that allow the successful school to form,” LFA Executive Director Richard M. Long says. A school cannot be successful if it has strong teachers and leadership but lacks family and community involvement or commitment to ensuring the needs of all students are met, for instance.

The compendium emphasizes that the solution for improvement isn’t the same for every school, because each school has a wide range of existing strengths and a unique set of needs. And each child in each school is different. Therefore, schools combine the elements necessary for success in very different ways.

“What’s contributed to the success of public education in America today is local leadership—leadership by teachers, administrators, school boards, and everyone who has an interest in the system,” Gentzel says, adding that the top-down, one-size-fits-all mandates from the state and federal governments have not worked.

NSBA’s Key Works of School Boards (www.nsba.org/services/school-board-leadership-services/key-work), which was featured in the compendium, outlines a framework for effective governance based on five key areas of best practice: vision, accountability, policy, community leadership, and board/superintendent relationships. The more effective the board, the better students perform.

Leadership evolves, Gentzel says. School boards, for one, had typically managed the four Bs: buildings, buses, budgets, and ballgames. “Over time, what we came to realize was that school boards must own responsibility for student achievement,” he says. And other groups that contributed to the compendium also have discussed ways to be effective and support one another in leadership roles, he adds.

Marla Ucelli-Kashyap, assistant to the president for educational issues at the American Federation of Teachers, notes the need for more venues and opportunities to nurture distributed leadership.

“Sometimes people see leadership as a zero-sum game,” she says. “The point is obviously not to take leadership away from the principal or the school board, but it is to have a collaborative culture that allows us to make a complex enterprise doable.”

TAKE BACK THE CONVERSATION

The compendium emphasizes that school improvement is a collaborative effort, and it advises those who are reading the document with intent to improve a local school to consider their circumstances. Rather than looking for specific programs to implement, school boards and school leaders can use the standards and indicators included to help gauge where a school is in relation to the elements, as well as find ideas that can strengthen a board’s work in each arena. It also discusses the importance of engagement and cooperation among school boards, administrators, teachers, specialists, parents, and other community members.

Some say the document will be useful in helping parents and others find entry points to getting involved and helping improve their local schools, with each interaction spurring new conversations about other elements. Gentzel suggests it be a topic of community conversations, but also a pathway to strengthen the LFA member associations and public education overall.

Further, the compendium shows a clear effort by the education community to share successes and knowledge to help improve public schools, and ultimately, student learning.

In looking to the future, Gentzel also calls on school boards and educators to note the successes that have been realized in public schools.

“Public education in America is doing a better job than ever before,” Gentzel says. “When you consider the changing face of America and all the challenges we have, poverty and other issues, yet we are educating more students to a higher level than ever. We have a lot to celebrate.”

Joetta Sack-Min (sackminj@learningfirst.org), communications consultant of the Learning First Alliance in Alexandria, Virginia, is a former associate editor of American School Board Journal. This article is in the April edition of ASBJ.



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

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