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# UPDATE...

February 2018

## Guns on school property bill headed for defeat

A bill that would have allowed guns on school property and was opposed by school leaders across the state is no longer supported by its sponsor – effectively defeating the proposal for this year.

Rep. John Martin, D-Eagle Lake, asked the Education Committee on Feb 28 to defeat his bill, L.D. 1761, An Act Regarding the Prohibition on the Possession of a Firearm on School Property, saying the timing was wrong to pass such legislation. The vote against the bill was 11-1.

Superintendents and school board members effectively advocated for keeping the bright line currently in law that prohibits guns on school grounds. That debate became more poignant with the mass shooting in Florida on Feb. 14.

L.D. 1761 would have allowed a person to possess a firearm on school property in a motor vehicle as long as the person was dropping off or picking up a student and remained in the car, and the gun was not loaded and in a locked container or locked firearms rack.

The bill was opposed by the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association. They said the current prohibition of guns on school property maintains a bright line to discourage future encroachments on a law, which is not a panacea, but designed to protect children. Concerns were raised that school personnel had no way of determining whether or not a gun in car was loaded. *(continued on page 4)*

## Response to National School Walkout

School districts across the state are anticipating their response and local involvement in the “National School Walkout” scheduled for 10:00 a.m., on March 14, 2018, in response to the recent mass school shooting in Parkland, Florida.

Those responses will vary across the state, and Maine School Management Association has requested and shared with superintendents guidance from attorneys at Drummond Woodsum to help districts in their decision making. The memo addresses some of the more important practical and legal considerations posed by the Walkout. *(continued on page 4)*

## Three-way divide on administration funding



While a bill to restore system administration funding in the budget got a divided report out of the Education Committee on Feb. 24, a clear message in the debate over the legislation was school leadership matters in the success of students.

“This is about administration and school leadership and whether the state of Maine is going to recognize the importance of school leadership,” said Sen. Rebecca Millett, D-Cumberland, during the discussion on the bill, which continued over four work sessions.

Millett pointed out the funding covers not just the superintendent’s office but vital functions of the Central Office, including school spending audits and the operation of School Boards.

She and others also recognized the voluntary cooperation that already exists among districts is a result of leadership from the superintendents.

“I don’t think we have much of an argument that system administration is important,” said Rep. David McCrea, D-Fort Fairfield. “The better the administration is the better the school should run.”

At issue is language included in the biennial budget that penalizes districts that don’t join regional service centers officially known as School Management and Leadership Centers – entities created in the budget with little publicity and no debate. That penalty is a \$46 per student reduction in allocation *(continued on page 4)*

# School Leadership

## What's Your Mission?

**Make your mission statement work for you.**

**By Denise Schares**

School boards, administrative teams, and community members across the nation are working to develop district missions that reflect the overall purpose of the district. These mission statements are intended to describe what the district does, for whom it does it and the benefit the district provides to those it serves. They answer the question, “Why do we exist?” and tell the world who the district is and how it goes about the work of educating students.

The mission statement provides the criteria for evaluating decisions and can serve as a compass in difficult times. Ideally, student success is the heart of a school district's mission statement. It is most effectively used when posted in the board room and referred to as a routine part of board business in supporting the focus on student achievement.

When reviewing existing mission statements, common themes emerge as districts and schools strive to develop and implement mission statements that capture the critical work of their district and/or building. This article provides a comparison of the most frequently cited words in a mission statement by district size, location, and socioeconomic status in one Midwestern state. This work serves as a resource as districts work to draft, revise and, most importantly, implement their district mission statement.

### **A starting point**

School boards across the country strive to capture the essence of their work through a district mission statement. Not only do the statements represent collaborative work of a variety of stakeholders but they also can serve to guide the work and decision-making of district leaders.

As districts strive to develop clear, concise, and compelling mission statements, the review of existing mission statements can provide a starting point for the work. The examination of commonalities and differences in mission statements by district size, location and socioeconomic status can provide insight to the concepts that serve as essential elements of the work of the district.

The data examined was gathered during the 2014-15 school year in a rural Midwestern state for each of the 335 school districts in the state. Mission statements were accessed through the district websites. Demographic data was accessed from the Department of Education district statistics document.

Mission statements were analyzed for frequency of word use considering the districts by enrollment size, socioeconomic status, and geographic location determined by Area Education Agency regions. The length of the district mission statements ranged from three to 100 words and the examples evidence the variety of sentence structures utilized.

Example mission statements include:

- Building tomorrow today
- Each and every K-12 student will be taught the essential concepts and skill sets identified in the Core Curriculum for life in the 21st century. Each K-12 educator will embed the essential concepts and skill sets in rigorous and relevant instruction informed by ongoing formative assessments. Each and every instructional leader will support and ensure an aligned system of curriculum, instruction and assessment focused on the Core Curriculum essential concepts and skill sets. The Department of Education, AEA, School District, parents, community, business leaders and students will work together to provide the necessary systems of support for each student's success.
- Preparing students to compete in an ever-changing world.
- Providing a learning environment for educational excellence and motivation to continue a lifetime of learning.
- Inspiring and challenging students through diverse opportunities.
- Empower individuals with skills and attitudes necessary to become contributing citizens and life-long learners.
- To develop 21st century learners and productive, responsible citizens
- Preparing each student to live as a productive, knowledgeable, confident, healthy, responsible citizen of the world.
- A caring educational organization that strives to meet the needs of every student, and provides an environment in which students and employees can achieve their maximum potential.
- Provide a quality education for all by considering cultures, learning styles, and individual abilities in a safe, nurturing environment.

*(continued on page 3)*

## Legislative Update



**L.D. 1666, An Act To Ensure the Successful Implementation of Proficiency-based Diplomas by Extending the Timeline for Phasing in Their Implementation**, is still under discussion. The legislative committees of MSBA and MSSA oppose the year delay proposed in the bill, but acknowledge districts are at different places when it comes to

implementing a proficiency-based diploma system. Negotiations are ongoing with the Department of Education to offer districts more flexibility in meeting the proficiency standards in current law.

**L.D. 1689, An Act To Repeal Certain Provisions Regarding the System Administration Allocation Affecting Maine School Districts in the 2018-2019 Biennial Budget**, came out of the Education Committee with a majority vote to pass as amended, but is expected to run into trouble when it comes before the full Legislature. The committee divided three ways on the proposal. (See story page 1.)

**L.D. 1761, An Act Regarding the Prohibition on the Possession of a Firearm on School Property**, was opposed by both School Boards and Superintendents. The bill's sponsor pulled his support, but one member of the Education Committee voted in favor. The bill is expected to fail, if it comes to a vote on the floor. (See story page 1.)

**L.D. 1710, An Act To Restore Maine's School-based Health Centers**, garnered a majority vote of support in the Health and Human Services Committee, but will be debated on the floor. It has not yet been reported out of committee, and the discussion there is over using available funds from the Fund for Healthy Maine to help pay for the restoration.

**L.D. 1843, An Act To Amend Career and Technical Education Statutes**, changes the way CTE centers and regions are funded by basing state aid on program components versus the current expenditure-driven model. It essentially gives CTE programs their own funding formula. The state, outside of this legislation, earmarked funding in the budget to cover those costs at 100 percent i.e. no local share. While this bill has not yet been heard, the ED 279s already distributed reflect the intended changes, which were proposed to support the expansion of CTE programs statewide. The bill also calls for CTE pilot projects in middle schools, funded with \$5 million in grant money.

**L.D. 40, An Act To Strengthen Requirements for Water Testing for Schools**, addresses testing for lead in water in schools. It was supported by both the School Boards and Superintendents with the caveat the rules had to be clear and doable and funding available for mitigation. The sponsor amended the original bill and now is calling for the water division in the Department of Health and Human Services to write the rules around testing, using the "3-Ts" protocol. The

bill is still in committee, as discussion continues around available funding for mitigation in the School Revolving Renovation Fund – a funding source cited in the bill.

**L.D. 1832, An Act To Implement Recommendations of the Right to Know Advisory Committee Concerning Remote Participation**, failed to get majority support from the Judiciary Committee, which makes defeat likely in the full Legislature. This bill would have allowed remote participation for elected boards, including school boards, under very specific circumstances, including adoption of a local board policy and the requirement of a physical quorum in non-emergency situations.

**L.D. 1509, An Act To Prohibit Retired State Employees and Teachers from Returning to Work While Collecting Retirement Benefits**, was defeated in committee. It was opposed by both School Boards and Superintendents. The bill would not have allowed retired teachers and superintendents to return to work except as substitutes or independent contractors. It received a unanimous ought not to pass from the Appropriations Committee without debate.

### What's Your Mission?

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- Committed to creating a student-centered environment where individual needs are addressed, cooperation and teamwork are valued, competent professionals lead, community partnerships flourish, a commitment to excellence prevails, and lifelong learning continues.
- Working in partnership with each family and the community, it is the mission of the district to educate responsible, lifelong learners so that each student possesses the skills, knowledge, creativity, sense of self-worth and values necessary to thrive in and contribute to a diverse and changing world.
- Empowering students to be life-long learners and caring, responsible citizens
- Our mission is to enable us to reach our greatest potential intellectually, socially, emotionally and physically, thus becoming unique, life-long learners.
- Learning and Success for All
- Through Our Collective Efforts, We Are Committed to Teaching and Learning for All.
- To assist every student in acquiring skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to become effective students, responsible citizens, productive workers, and lifelong learners in a global society.
- Creating healthy, educated, ethical and productive citizens.

—Adapted from *American School Board Journal* (a publication of NSBA), February, 2018.

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**Guns on school property bill**

(continued from page 1)

MSBA and MSSA members across the state contacted their local House and Senate members asking to keep current law that prohibits guns – unloaded or loaded – off school grounds.

In a letter to the Education Committee, Rep. Martin explained why he was asking the Education Committee to defeat his bill.

“This is not the time to further discuss this legislation,” said Rep. Martin, who also made it clear he would bring the bill back in a future legislative session.

“It became clear to me immediately prior to the (public hearing in January) that a discussion of local gun practices as addressed in this bill was becoming a discussion about allowing guns in school,” Martin wrote. “I have never supported guns in schools except as allowed by law and I am unclear how arming teachers would work.”

**Response to National School Walkout**

(continued from page 1)

The memo reads in part:

The organizers of the Walkout say the purpose is “to demand Congress pass legislation to keep us safe from gun violence at our schools, on our streets and in our homes and places of worship.” The fact that the Walkout supports a political goal will, from a legal standpoint, be an important factor affecting how schools respond.

School leaders may respond to the anticipated Walkout in a range of different ways, based on their school policies, the desires of students and staff, and the culture of their communities. As a way of framing the issue, we have identified three general approaches that school leaders may be considering:

- 1) Disapproval of the disruption to the normal school day, with enforcement of school rules regarding attendance of both students and employees;
- 2) Holding a recess at the scheduled time to allow students and staff to express their views concerning school violence, whether by Walkout or other peaceful means;
- 3) School endorsement and support of the Walkout.

These are not the only choices schools have, but they should help school administrators to begin to formulate a response in their districts.

To read the full memo, click [here](#).

**Three-way divide**

(continued from page 1)

for system administration in 2018-2019 and a \$94 reduction in 2019-2020.

The bill, L.D. 1689, An Act To Repeal Certain Provisions Regarding the System Administration Allocation Affecting Maine School Districts in the 2018-2019 Biennial Budget, would restore that funding, but it’s future is at best uncertain.

The committee vote produced three separate recommendations.

The majority voted to eliminate the penalty for those that form regional centers and also those that are deemed “highly efficient” in their operations and already participating in voluntary, regional cooperation.

“A lot of work on cooperating and sharing among districts has been going on for quite a while,” said Sen. Millett. “I don’t think that has been given its due and is frankly disrespectful of the good efforts that have been made voluntarily.”

Rep. Theresa Pierce, D-Falmouth, agreed.

“I want to give credit to people who already are doing the work and not make them report or jump through other hoops, and then help those district that aren’t as efficient,” Pierce said.

Sen. Joyce Maker, R-Washington, voted to eliminate the penalties for those that form centers or already are cooperating in any valid fashion, whether they have been deemed highly efficient or not. The final five members voted outright against L.D. 1689.

Committee Chairman Sen. Brian Langley, R-Hancock, said given the significant increase in education funding in the biennial budget and its substantial support for economically disadvantaged students and special education, it was fair to carve out some money to support regionalization efforts. He said ultimately local taxpayers could decide to increase system administration.

Rep. Phyllis Ginzler, R-Bridgton, also was in support of system administration becoming a local decision, while at the same time recognizing the “yeomen’s work” being done in terms of voluntary cooperation among schools.

“I’m not unsympathetic to those districts who have worked very hard to save their taxpayers money,” she said, but, “We can’t go backwards; we have to go forward.” And that means incentivizing regional cooperation and “separating out system administration as a local function.”



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

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