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"Better Schools for Maine Students"

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MSSA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
RONALD T. BARKER
(207) 622-3473
49 COMMUNITY DRIVE
AUGUSTA 04330

MAINE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION

Position Paper on School Consolidation, Regionalization, and Collaboration

Historically, Maine has provided opportunities for the consolidation of school units into regional districts. This effort, which began with the Sinclair Act in the late 1950's, provided financial incentives to encourage such consolidation. The rationale for this consolidation policy was to provide more equitable educational opportunities for students delivered in a more efficient manner. Maine also has a history of providing educational programs, professional development, multi-district purchasing, and the sharing of technological resources on a regional basis.

The reasons for consolidation, regionalization, and collaboration need to be reviewed thoroughly, and the process must include a detailed study of the impact on individual communities, affected students, cost efficiencies, elimination of duplicate services, and other relevant factors. In the process of consolidating programs or services, it is critically important to align both consolidated programs and services with the governance structure. In every case, the first step in a consolidation effort must be to clearly define the purpose(s) of such consolidation. The study must examine the number of governance boards, board members, and other decision-making bodies necessary to govern the new unit. The lines of authority and decision-making responsibilities of each governance board must be examined and delineated in detail.

The Maine School Superintendents Association is keenly aware of the importance of both elementary and secondary schools to Maine's communities and believes every effort should be made to maintain them if at all practical. The consolidation supported by the Association involves providing administrative and support services on a regional basis or through cooperative agreements between and among neighboring school systems. We further believe that Maine schools must work together and utilize technology to provide a broad range of curriculum offerings for students while maintaining efficient, cost effective operations. To accomplish these goals, school systems should be organized into school administrative units that provide for the most efficient and effective administrative organization and result in a decrease in the number of decision-making bodies.

The Maine School Superintendents Association believes that the following elements are critical to the success of any efforts to promote consolidation, regionalization, and collaboration:

- Any new collaboratives or consolidated school administrative units should address how such a unit would improve student achievement.
- Efforts to support/create consolidation, regionalization, and collaboration initiatives should be considered carefully and thoughtfully, and undertaken as part of a comprehensive plan created by a broadly based state level Commission, and tested/piloted prior to final adoption. Membership must include local school board members, municipal officials, superintendents, and other educators. It should also include representatives from the Maine Department of Education and the Maine Legislature, as well as business and civic leaders.
- The Commission described above should be charged with developing prototypical governance structures that could be used by regional collaboratives.
- The Commission should identify law and rule changes that currently inhibit and those that would facilitate the formation and governance of any jointly agreed upon collaborative arrangements.
- Any plan for a new collaborative or consolidated school administrative unit should address how the governance structure would provide for an efficient decision-making process.
- The Governor and Legislature must provide additional resources to adequately fund the “Efficient Delivery of Local and Regional Services Fund” to promote voluntary collaboratives and attain efficiencies of operations.
- The Governor and Legislature should seriously consider instituting statewide and/or regional collective bargaining for employees of school administrative units.
- The Governor and Legislature should create disincentives for communities acting to withdraw from CSD’s or SAD’s.
- Throughout this process, flexibility and creativity must be encouraged. Rather than creating strict rules to govern such efforts, the methods for achieving the goals should be open ended, with decisions ultimately determined at the local level.
- The Governor and Legislature should direct similar efforts towards state, municipal, and county governments.

The Maine School Superintendents Association supports thoughtful, well-planned changes in governance structures and delivery of educational services that best serve Maine’s students, residents, and local taxpayers. The Association supports consolidation, regionalization, and collaboration efforts that are encouraged through significant incentives. However, it is opposed to strict mandates that force school unit mergers. Further, the Association believes that Maine students, school systems, local taxpayers, and communities can benefit from these cooperative efforts, if given sufficient resources and time.

Adopted by the MSSA Membership at the Winter Convocation January 12, 2007