

QUESTIONS CONCERNING LSRS PLAN

A. Financial Questions

1. When is the Department of Education going to release the data which has been used to project \$250 million dollars in savings in the first 3 years?
2. Why are the Department of Education's savings projections so much higher than those projected by the State Board Task Force, the Brookings Report, or the Maine Center on Public Spending?
3. In any private sector merger, there are increased costs in the short-term as the merging companies try to integrate personnel systems, create new IT systems, devise new purchasing systems and blend collective bargaining units. Isn't that what's probably going to happen here and won't there actually be higher short-term costs?
4. If mega-school systems are created like Portland with 20,000 students, Sanford with 18,000 students and Lewiston and Bangor with 15,000 students, isn't it going to be necessary to appoint more mid-level managers to run the systems? Has the Department factored these new mid-level positions in calculating the projected cost savings?
5. When collective bargaining units are merged, aren't personnel costs going to go up because each employee group will want the best provisions from the various contracts – the highest salary, the best health plan, the best vacation clause and so on. How much has been included in the cost savings projections for these higher personnel costs?
6. What provisions have been made for local cost sharing formulas for additional local funds above the EPS allocation in the various regions? How will the cost sharing formulas be decided on? Who is going to approve them? Will they be based on valuation, on the number of pupils, or on some combination?
7. The proposed legislation says that the Regions will take over all needed school property and school funds from existing school units, but that the Regions do not have to assume existing local indebtedness. If the SADs and CSDs go out of existence on July 1, 2008, who is going to pay off their local school debt? Were these local debt service costs considered by the Department in projecting the cost savings?

8. The City of _____ has issued \$_____ in local only bonds to improve its schools. Is it true that Region _____ will take over the school buildings but won't have to take over this local debt?
9. SAD #___ has \$_____ in local only debt, but the legislation says that the region is not required to assume the outstanding indebtedness of a school administrative unit in its region. IF SAD #___ goes out of existence on July 1, 2008, who is going to pay off its bonds?
10. What provision has been made for central office employees other than Superintendents who have multi-year contracts? Have their costs in future years been factored into the projected savings?
11. What provisions have been made for the lease-purchase obligations of existing school units? Will these lease-purchase agreements be assigned to the Regions and, if so, have their costs been figured into the estimated cost savings? If not, won't the resulting defaults do irreparable damage to the State's credit rating?
12. If a school unit is below its EPS spending target so that the State provides more money to bring the unit up to the EPS level, how can the State then require that that money can't be spent for education? Won't that requirement destroy the integrity of the EPS system?
13. When all the SADs and CSDs terminate on July 1, 2008, who will be responsible for their contractual obligations and liabilities? Shouldn't that have been worked out as part of the LSRS plan?
14. Right now the CDS system for children birth-5 is paid for by the State. If CDS becomes the responsibility of the Regions, does that mean that the costs will be taken out of General Purpose Aid to Schools and that 45% will be shifted to the property tax? If so, how is that consistent with the goal of providing property tax relief to Maine citizens?

B. Governance Questions

1. Traditionally in Maine, local voters have always had the chance to vote on whether to form a larger district such as an SAD. Why does the LSRS plan exclude the voters from the approval process?
2. As a taxpayer and voter, why won't I get to vote on whether my local school system should be abolished and replaced by a larger region?

3. The regions are based on existing vocational regions. What analysis did you do to determine that those regions would work for the new school regions?
4. Career and technical schools are now governed by cooperative boards and advisory committees, which will be eliminated under the LSRS plan. What is going to happen to career and technical education?
5. For example in Region 18 – Lewiston will have 100,000 people in it and the Portland Region will have 120,000 people in it. What voice will small towns like Wales, Minot, Durham, Leeds and Pownal have in these mega-Districts if they only have a 2% or 3% of the voting power? What control will these small towns have over what happens to their schools?
6. The LSRS' plan says that no schools will be closed, but isn't it true that if the Region Board votes to close a local school and the town votes to keep it open, the town will have to pay the added cost of keeping the school open?
7. Won't the larger cities in a Region have most of the voting power on the mega-boards? How can we expect them to be responsive to the concerns of the small towns in their Region?
8. There are no provisions in the proposed legislation for legally establishing voting districts in the Regions. How will voting districts be established in time for school board elections in October of 2007? Since most towns do not hold elections in October, has anyone calculated the cost of all these special elections?
9. Some of these mega-boards will have jurisdiction over 4 or 5 high schools. How will they establish curriculum policies for all these schools in the first two years?
10. The Dexter Region, for example, has 40 towns. If there are no more than 15 directors per region, won't that mean the end of local control of public education?
11. If the schools are run by remote mega-regions, won't that weaken public support for education?
12. The Lewiston Region will have more than 100,000 people in it. How can you expect a district that size to adopt its budget at a town meeting style budget meeting? If 5% of the people attend, you would have 5,000 people at the budget meeting. Where would you hold the meeting?

13. Municipalities usually give up their town meetings when they get above 5,000 or 10,000 people because that system becomes unmanageable. How can a town meeting style budget meeting be used for a region with 100,000 people?
14. If each school board member has to represent thousands of people, how will they be able to stay in touch with their constituents?
15. The Maine Legislature has 151 people in the House of Representatives which is one less than the number of school superintendents. Has any consideration been given to reducing the Legislature to 26 representatives in order to save costs?
16. Under the budget validation referendum procedure, if the budget is disapproved at the referendum, the Region will have to start over again and have another meeting and another referendum. Won't that be very expensive and have those costs been factored into your budget projections?

C. Process Questions

1. Is it true that the LSRS plan was developed in less than three weeks? Does that help to explain why there seem to be so many problems and unanswered questions about it?
2. In other states and in Canada, consolidation proposals have been the subject of extensive public deliberation over a significant period of time before they were implemented. Why is the LSRS plan being proposed on such a short timeline with so little opportunity for public input and why wasn't school consolidation raised as an issue during the recent campaign for Governor?

D. Personnel Questions

1. Under the LSRS plan approximately 500 central office school employees will be laid off on July 1, 2008. If they worked for a private company they would get 1 week of severance pay for each year of service under Maine's Plant Closing law. Shouldn't the LSRS plan provide reasonable severance pay for the people who are laid off? If it doesn't, how can the State treat people in that way?
2. Under the LSRS plan, about 125 school superintendents will have their positions eliminated, but if they have multi-year contracts those contracts

- will be assigned to the Regions. Have those continuing contract obligations been factored in to the projected cost savings?
3. In addition to their educational leadership responsibilities, school superintendents must also deal with personnel matters such as hiring teachers, removal and non-renewal, investigating complaints, and grievances. After consolidation, won't there be just as many hiring decisions, renewals and non-renewals, investigations and grievances, and, if so, who is going to handle them?
 4. Special education administrators now spend much of their time running pupil evaluation team meetings, preparing individual student plans and providing other services to students and parents. After consolidation, won't there be just as many special ed students, PETs and IEPs, and, if so, who is going to perform those administrative services?
 5. How many teaching positions will have to be eliminated to bring the State's school systems into line with the existing student/teacher ratios being used in EPS?
 6. When the State changes the EPS student/teacher ratio to 17:1, how many more teaching positions will have to be eliminated to bring the number of teachers into line with this ratio?
 7. How many teacher positions would have to be eliminated in the Lewiston region to bring the region into alignment with the current EPS ratio? How many more teaching positions will have to be eliminated to bring the Lewiston region into line with the new 17:1 EPS ratio?
 8. Under the LSRS plan, every school will get an allocation for a full-time principal. If they were all hired, how many new positions would that be and what will be the added cost?
 9. The LSRS plan includes children with disabilities from birth to age 6 in the public school systems. This will include the termination of all contracts and employees within the State's CDS system and the employment of staff to administer and provide these services in the regions. These would be new expenses for the regions that are not currently included with the budgets of existing school units. How will these new costs be paid for? Will they be taken from General Purpose Aid to schools? Will they be partially covered by the 45% local share of education costs?

10. Currently several school systems pay for retired teachers health insurance. How will a school's obligation to pay health insurance for its retirees be handled under the Governor's plan?
11. What will happen to the collective bargaining contracts in those regions where there are bargaining agents other than Maine Education Association such as the Teamsters, AFSCME, and the American Federation of Teachers? How will that be worked out?