

# MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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**LAWS**  
OF THE  
**STATE OF MAINE**

AS PASSED BY THE  
ONE HUNDRED AND ELEVENTH LEGISLATURE

**SECOND SPECIAL SESSION**

November 18, 1983

AND AT THE

**SECOND REGULAR SESSION**

January 4, 1984 to April 25, 1984

AND AT THE

**THIRD SPECIAL SESSION**

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# **EDUCATIONAL ADDRESS**

of

GOVERNOR JOSEPH E. BRENNAN

to the

THIRD SPECIAL SESSION

ONE HUNDRED AND ELEVENTH LEGISLATURE

September 4, 1984

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Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Members of the 111th Maine Legislature, and fellow citizens of Maine:

This week, more than 200,000 Maine children return to school.

Those of us who are parents know that our children head out the door carrying more than new book bags and sharp pencils.

For they also carry with them our hopes.

It has been that way for more than two centuries.

When our early settlers came here, they cleared the land, they struggled to find a way to sustain life, they built modest villages, and secured them against attack.

When survival was assured, they could turn their attention to other matters.

Education was one of the first.

As early as 1701, the settlers of York voted in town meeting to hire a schoolmaster.

In turn, other early settlements—Berwick in 1714, and Wells two years later, and the rest—also began to provide for the education of their children.

Their expectations were modest.

They wanted their children to learn how to read, and to write, and to do something they called “ciphering.”

Each generation of Maine people since then has increased its expectations of our schools.

And each generation has gone through the ritual we mark this week, each with its own set of hopes.

The hope that the new school year will be a time of challenge and growth, inspiration and achievement.

But we must wonder if our schools will present them with challenges that will truly prepare them for the years ahead.

Yes, we must wonder if the education they will receive is as good as we want it to be.

For a growing chorus of experts around the nation has raised grave doubts about the quality of education in the United States in the 1980's.

We have all heard of a national report on education bearing the title “A Nation at Risk.”

And we have all heard that often-quoted phrase from the report describing America's education system as “a rising tide of mediocrity.”

In fact, the Commission said that if a foreign power had somehow imposed today's educational standards on this nation, we would consider it an act of war.

We in State Government have read that report and others that have raised concerns.

And in response, last year I appointed a special Governor's Commission on the Status of Education in Maine.

It was certainly one of the most distinguished commissions ever established by a Maine governor.

But then, its mission was as important as any that has ever been given to a group of public-spirited Maine citizens.

For the quality of education means the future success and prosperity of the state.

And, indeed, the future health and security of the nation.

I posed challenging questions to the Commission.

How do we improve the quality of learning in Maine schools?

How do we assure quality teaching in Maine schools?

How do we pay for the kind of education we believe our children deserve?

And how do we get the public involved?

The members of the Commission visited schools at every level in every corner of Maine.

They spoke to teachers, principals, superintendents, parents, and students.

They held public hearings.

And after they put out their final report, they went back to hold more hearings on the recommendations they had made.

Tonight, I want to thank the 17 members of the Commission for the dedication they showed over the past year.

I want to thank its very distinguished Chairman, President Thomas Hedley Reynolds of Bates College, for a job well done.

And I want to thank one of your own, the Vice-chair of the Commission, House Majority Leader Elizabeth Mitchell.

And their colleagues:

Former Mayor Linda Abromson of Portland

State Planning Director Richard Barringer

Education Commissioner Robert Boose

Senator Nancy Randall Clark of Freeport

Dolores Colburg of Machias

Marlene Day of Saco

Senator Kenneth Hayes of Veazie

Robert Masterton of Cape Elizabeth

University of Maine Chancellor Patrick McCarthy

P. Andrews Nixon of Brunswick

Sister Mary Norberta of Bangor

Deputy Commissioner of Education Richard Redmond

Elizabeth Russell of Mt. Desert

Marcella Violette of Van Buren

And Justice Sidney Wernick of Portland.

And tonight I want to share with you a list of recommendations I am placing before the Legislature.

First, I think we can take some pride in what the Commission found.

Their report said, and I quote, "Overall, Maine's educational system is doing the job we have asked it to do, and is generally doing it well."

But, the Commission continued, "We have determined, however, that the standards we have set for our educational system are not high enough if we are to meet the challenges and opportunities of Maine's changing economy and society."

I wish to report to you that, almost without exception, I endorse the recommendations of the Commission.

Working closely with the Maine Department of Educational and Cultural Services and the State Planning Office, I have shaped the Commission's recommendations into a set of legislative priorities.

I want to thank the members of the legislative leadership and the many individual members of the House and Senate of both parties who took the time to comment on these proposals, and to share with me their thoughts on Maine's educational needs and goals.

Tonight, I am proud to submit my education program, a program that I believe will significantly improve the quality of teaching and learning in Maine into the twenty-first century.

Tonight, I want to talk about what we will expect of our students, our schools, and our teachers, and how they will benefit from the reforms I am proposing.

## STUDENTS

I will begin with students.

We will expect them to work harder, to learn more, and to meet higher standards.

So I am recommending that we increase the requirements for graduation.

I want a Maine high school diploma to be something more than a certificate of attendance.

We are going to require more work in science and math, and more exposure to social studies, history, and the fine arts.

We are going to expect each student to have a basic familiarity with computers.

In short, if we are going to ask more of our schools and our teachers, we must expect more of our students.

If they can compete, Maine can also compete.

But if we are going to ask more of our students, they will also get more from their schools.

And that will begin at the earliest moment in their education.

And so my program includes recommendations to devote greater attention to the preschool years and the early grades.

I am recommending a state appropriation of \$1.7 million to assist the Head Start Program.

Head Start helps disadvantaged youngsters, the ones who are most likely to fall behind in school.

About 1500 Maine children now participate in Head Start.

Unfortunately, they represent only a small fraction of all the children in Maine who are eligible.

With the appropriation I am recommending, we can bring more preschoolers into Head Start.

And that means more of our children will be at the starting line on the first day of school.

In addition, I am proposing an expansion of early childhood programs, including making kindergarten mandatory for those few school districts that do not yet have it available.

I believe money spent at this early stage can often be more effective, over a longer period of time, than money spent on programs at the higher grade levels.

Another important recommendation will help students when they have completed their secondary education.

My bill is proposing the creation of a Blaine House Scholars Program.

This program would make financial aid available to outstanding Maine high school graduates who wish to continue their education.

And those who choose to teach school in Maine after they graduate, would find part of their debt to the State reduced for every year they teach.

A portion of the funding would be available for teachers who wish to continue their education in subjects where more teachers are needed.

## SCHOOLS

Our public schools serve a special role in our society.

It is their function to train our children for the future.

We can no longer be satisfied with the standards of the past.

Therefore, I am recommending a series of new standards for school approval, which must be met before a school can receive state funds.

There will be required courses and required course offerings, and disciplinary codes.

But most important of all, these standards will include a written school improvement plan which will clearly define school goals and measure progress toward those goals.

When members of the Commission visited the Auburn Middle School, they were very impressed by what they found.

The school, under the leadership of Principal Joseph Capelluti, has adopted a clear plan for itself.

Teachers work together as a team.

Rules of discipline are well-known and consistent.

There are clearly defined learning goals.

A major national magazine found much the same standards when it visited Katahdin High School up in the town of Sherman Station.

The magazine headlined its description of Katahdin High, and I quote: "mutual caring and respect."

Katahdin High and Auburn Middle are among nine Maine schools that have been honored in the past two years by the United States Department of Education as outstanding examples of what schools can be.

These schools demonstrate that good education flourishes in an atmosphere where the rules are clear, the goals are high, and the people are a community.

We also believe our schools must be more accountable to their students and to the parents, and to the community as a whole.

And accountability begins when our schools give every fourth grader from Eliot to Eastport the identical test.

It will measure their performance with every other fourth grader in their own school, and indeed every other fourth grader in the State.

And we'll repeat that same process in the eighth grade and the eleventh grade.

The test will measure how our students are doing, and, therefore, how our schools are doing.

These tests give us something we do not now have, a uniform means of evaluating Maine's educational system by the best yardstick I know, the achievement of our children.

And what that really comes down to is accountability.

With this knowledge, students and their parents can identify areas where more work is needed; schools will have more insight into the success of their curriculum; and educators will be able to identify and remedy weaknesses.

My legislative program recognizes that the quality of education is affected by many factors outside the classroom.

If our schools are to be more effective, we must be sure they are managed well.

The Commission expressed its strong opinion that today's requirements for school principals and superintendents are "insufficient for the demands of the future."

I am pleased to note that the State Board of Education has already decided to develop more rigorous requirements for principals and superintendents.

And I strongly support that effort.

But if we are going to ask our communities to place more demands on our schools, they will also get more in return.

For our program makes an historic new commitment to our cities and towns.

In the past, my Administration has been proud to maintain the State's share of the basic cost of local education at one of the highest levels in the Northeast.

But in the past, when a community was willing to make an effort beyond the state average per-pupil cost, a commitment to improve their standards of excellence, we have told them to go it alone, to pay for it themselves.

My legislative recommendation breaks with that tradition.

Now we will join with those communities as a partner, sharing the additional costs, as they strive for excellence in education.

And further, during the next two fiscal years, we will commit ourselves to returning to the local school systems an additional \$30 million by reforms in the school finance formula.

This will allow communities to have more money for educational purposes.

It won't add to the burdens of the local property taxpayer.

In fact, it will lessen the burden in many communities.

## **TEACHERS**

I firmly believe that the teacher is the most important part of a good education program.

And because they are so important to the process of education, we will ask more of our teachers.

In fact, the Legislature did just that earlier this year.

This Legislature enacted a bill I proposed to strengthen teacher certification, and to recognize our most outstanding teachers.



The law created new standards for certification.

It also created the beginnings of a career ladder in the teaching profession, which ultimately will elevate the best teachers in stature and pay.

I commend this Legislature for that action.

But I believe there is still more we can do to make sure that the people we send into the classrooms are the best.

Therefore, I am recommending an additional step in the teacher certification process.

I am proposing a requirement that all those who want to be teachers must achieve a minimum score on a statewide, standardized test.

We will test their ability to communicate with others, their general knowledge, and their understanding of classroom skills.

This requirement will, in time, set higher standards for new teachers.

And it will help local school officials better determine which candidates are best qualified to begin climbing our new career ladder.

The testing of teachers recognizes that teaching is a profession, and an important one, like medicine or the law.

So for the first time in the history of Maine, we're going to require them to pass a test to prove they are proficient.

Just like doctors and lawyers.

Yes, we will ask more of our teachers.

But they too will get more.

For I am recommending a program to encourage teachers to use their creativity to improve the classroom experience for our children.

My proposal would award grants to teachers who come up with innovative projects with the potential to improve the curriculum, the classroom, teacher training, and other goals.

In effect, this bill tells Maine teachers that we know they can generate exciting new ideas to improve education in our State.

For example, take Nancie Atwell over in Boothbay.

A few years ago, she began with the belief that elementary school children could reach much higher levels of writing skills, if they were encouraged to write more, and to read more.

By exposing her students to more reading, and expecting them to write more, she has helped many of them attain excellence.

Indeed, she has been recognized nationally for her success.

She created a writing program involving 18 teachers in Boothbay from kindergarden through the eighth grade.

Hers is the kind of creative approach to teaching we want to encourage through our incentive grant program.

Likewise, we will award incentive grants to schools which want to try out new ideas to meet school or district goals, such as, reducing the dropout rate, improving attendance, bringing in school volunteers, helping students with special needs, or raising standards of academic achievement.

In effect, this measure is a vote of confidence in our teachers and our schools.

It says to them: we believe there are many Nancie Atwells throughout the State, and we want to encourage them.

Now let's talk about teachers' salaries.

The first state education law, enacted in 1821, spelled out, among other matters, the responsibilities of local school committees.

The first duty on the list was to "examine schoolmasters and schoolmistresses proposing to teach school."

And later in the same bill, the Legislature ordered that teachers must be U.S. citizens of good moral character—and qualified for the job.

Those early school committees may have had a small talent pool from which to choose their schoolmasters.

Today, we have a different problem.

Our problem is not one of finding people who can read and write and do arithmetic.

Our problem is attracting the best to be teachers.

As a former teacher in a Maine high school, I know that teaching is a complex and demanding profession.

We expect a great deal of our teachers.

And we expect them to do it for very little money.

I recall vividly a story told to me a year or so ago by Dick Redmond, our Deputy Commissioner of Education.

Dick had lunch one day with a group of Maine's very brightest high school seniors, the Presidential Scholars.

In the course of conversation, he asked if any of them were interested in going into teaching as a career.

Not one of them expressed any interest.

Then he asked if they'd consider teaching if the pay were better.

And suddenly several were interested.

That's the problem: we entrust our teachers with one of the highest responsibilities in all of society, but we don't pay them accordingly.

The average starting pay for a new teacher in our state is the grand total of about \$11,000 a year.

That's just above the federal government's poverty level for a family of four.

And in a few of our communities, a starting teaching job actually pays below the poverty line for a family of four.

In fact, a new teacher who's married with two children would be eligible for food stamps in every Maine community.

Maine ranks 48th in the nation in average teacher pay.

With the salaries we pay our teachers, it is truly a wonder that we are able to attract as many capable and dedicated teachers as we do.

And all of us know many outstanding individuals teaching our children.

We must do something significant to retain the excellent teachers in our system, and to attract new, highly qualified teachers.

Therefore, I am proposing a state program of Teacher Recognition Grants.

This means that the state—and not the local community—will pay teachers an additional \$2,000 a year, as a stipend to recognize the importance of their job, and to help our cities and towns compete with industry for talented people.

The Commission also recognized that teachers are often called upon to do work only marginally related to teaching, chores like monitoring study halls, supervising lunch, and patrolling the playground.

Over in S.A.D. 58, which serves Kingfield and some neighboring towns, they've come up with a creative solution.

Vici Robinson runs a volunteer program that has grown to involve some 170 people.

More than half work directly with the students.

I have directed Commissioner Boose to develop a program to encourage more volunteers to come into our schools and help out.

Programs like these would enable teachers to make better use of their time.

And they would get more members of the community involved with their schools.

The major emphasis of my program falls in the elementary and secondary years.

But we have not ignored the needs of those students who wish to further their education.

Maine people have long recognized the value of higher education.

At the end of the Revolutionary War, at a time when the population of Portland was only two thousand people, the residents of Cumberland County launched a campaign to establish a college in Brunswick.

By the time Maine became a State in 1820, both Bowdoin and Colby Colleges had already opened their doors.

Today, these and other fine private institutions have been joined by a large network of vocational-technical institutes and the University of Maine system.

The quality of education at these public institutions is critical to Maine's future.

How well we train students for careers in technical fields will directly translate into Maine's ability to attract industrial development.

Research by my Administration into the future of Maine's economy demonstrates all too clearly how the Maine economy is changing, and how much our educational system must adapt to meet the demands of this change.

From the skills needed by new high tech industries locating in our state to the needs of Maine's paper industry, Maine needs an educated, highly trained work force, with a solid grounding in basic skills.

If our Vocational-Technical Institutes or our University system are to meet the needs of our industrial base, they must have the facilities and the resources to train our students.

Therefore, I am proposing two bond issues.

The first will provide new buildings or expansion of existing buildings at each of the VTI's.

It will help make them more responsive to the changing educational needs of our technical students.

And I am proposing a bond issue for the University system.

It will provide for the construction of three building additions to expand the science and health care programs offered at Orono and Portland.

And it will provide for expanded computer facilities at all the campuses.

This means that our University students will have access to the most up-to-date computer technology available to us, whichever campus they attend.

I am sending up this University bond issue with a strong recommendation.

For the people of Maine have not passed a bond issue providing for new construction at the University in fifteen long years.

Tonight, I have outlined a vigorous program.

When it is implemented, it will move our school system into the twenty-first century.

When it is implemented, we will have a school system which is capable of giving our children the educational tools they need to function successfully in the society of the future.

But you may be wondering how much is this going to cost, and how are we going to pay for it?

Over the next three years, the price tag will be \$95 million.

It has been suggested that we increase the sales tax from five to six cents.

But I have ruled that out.

It has been suggested that we increase the personal income tax or the corporate tax.

But I have ruled that out.

Let me say right now, if the Legislature agrees, we can finance this package without the need for a major tax increase.

The cost next year, the first full year of this program, will be nearly \$40 million.

By trimming the budget, using our anticipated surplus, and the benefits of federal tax conformity, we can raise \$25 million of that cost.

To make up the difference, when the federal cigarette tax is decreased by eight cents next year, we will redirect those revenues into the state treasury.

That will raise another \$9 million.

We'll eliminate the sales tax exemption on alcohol purchased in package stores for another \$2.5 million.

We'll fund the balance by a modest increase in the real estate transfer tax, and elimination of the sales tax exemption on cable television services.

With these measures in place, we will be able to fund this program in future years within the existing revenue structure.

I believe the benefits of this educational package far exceed the costs.

And I believe the people of Maine will be able to measure those benefits in the years to come.

They will be reflected in children who are better prepared even as they enter our school system.

They will be reflected in the progress they make in the early grades.

In the snapshots of their achievements that will be measured by the testing they take in the fourth, eighth, and eleventh grades.

In the higher standards they will have achieved in order to graduate.

In their ability to assume those technical jobs that now go all too often to people educated outside Maine.

In the contributions they make to our future prosperity.

And in our ability to compete in the world economy.

At the outset, I spoke of Maine's first settlers, and the way they assumed responsibility for teaching the children of their tiny communities.

They set a pattern.

Education then was purely a local matter.

But over the years, the state came to see that it too had a legitimate interest in the education of its children.

Today's educational system is the product of more than two centuries of trial and error, and the dedication of thousands of teachers and administrators.

The successes of Maine's educational system did not happen overnight.

Neither did its shortcomings.

And we cannot promise that the program I am submitting tonight is a miracle cure.

This Administration and this Legislature cannot solve in three or four days of work, problems that developed over many generations.

But we can lay the foundation of progress.

We can make our schools better.

We can create higher standards for our teachers.

We can raise our goals for our students.

Those are the challenges I place before this Legislature.

Tonight, I want to offer one last challenge.

This one is to the people of Maine.

We can write laws, create rules, and set mandates.

But ultimately, the quality of education in your city or town depends on you.

It depends on your involvement.

On whether you make sure that your schools are meeting the standards.

On whether you care enough to get involved in the decision-making of your school committee.

On whether you're willing to join with the principals and teachers and find out what you can do to make the school a better place to be.

To all of you, legislator and citizen alike, let me leave you with an idea set down more than two thousand years ago, by Aristotle.

Aristotle wrote:

"No one will doubt that the legislator should direct his attention above all to the education of youth, or that the neglect of education does harm to states."

Together, let our actions of the first week of a new school year mark the beginning of a new era of education in Maine.

An era of excellence.

Thank you, and Good Night.