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| <p style="text-align:center">Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs 126th Legislature</p> |
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**Government Evaluation Act Review of
the Maine Department of Education
March 2014**

The Government Evaluation Act

The Government Evaluation Act (“Act”) provides for a system of periodic review of the efficacy and performance of state government agencies (3 MRSA §951 et seq). The keystone of the Act is the agency’s program evaluation report that consists of a number of components required by the statute. Essentially, the report is an agency self-assessment, which the committee of jurisdiction uses as a starting point for its evaluation of the agency’s effectiveness, efficiency and performance.

Review Process

Pursuant to the requirements of the Act, the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs (“Committee”) notified the Department of Education (“DOE”) on May 1, 2013 of its intent to review the agency during the 126th Legislature’s Second Regular Session. At the request of the DOE, the Committee unanimously agreed to establish a modified review process since the most recent review of the DOE under the Act was conducted during the 2007-2008 biennium by the 123rd Legislature. The Committee agreed that the following information must be included in the modified program evaluation report:

1. The mission, vision and core functions of the DOE, including (but not limited to) the Department’s organizational chart, an overview of the DOE budget and the programs administered by the DOE;
2. A brief snapshot of the status of public education in Maine and a narrative describing what the Department leadership anticipates to be the opportunities and challenges ahead; or, in other words, the emerging issues that the DOE envisions for public education in Maine in the near-term to long-term future;
3. An update on the status of the various elements of the DOE’s strategic plan, including the goals and objectives, the resources needed, the timeline and benchmarks established to implement the plan, what has been achieved to date, potential changes to the strategic plan as the Department moves forward to implement the strategic plan, any necessary legislative initiatives that the DOE may propose in the upcoming session related to implementation of the strategic plan and potential changes to the Department’s organization or structure as proscribed by the strategic plan in anticipation of the emerging issues cited in item 2; and
4. A summary of DOE rules and any relevant federal regulations.

The DOE submitted its modified program evaluation report in November of 2013. The Committee held three meetings to conduct the review under the Act: January 16, 2014; March 10, 2014 and March 18, 2014.

Findings and Recommendation

The Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs has reviewed the modified program evaluation report submitted by the Department of Education and finds that it is operating within its statutory authority. We appreciate that the DOE has submitted an informative report that addressed the specific Committee requests included in the modified program evaluation report.

On March 10, 2014, Commissioner James E. Rier, Jr. and DOE officials provided additional information on the following policy issues requested by the Committee during the January 16, 2014 briefing on the DOE program evaluation report:

- ❖ DOE Operating Budget: Further details on the DOE operating budget;
- ❖ DOE Leadership Team: Further information on the job descriptions of the DOE Leadership Team members;
- ❖ Elementary and Secondary Education Act (“ESEA”) waiver: Elements of the 2-year ESEA waiver that the Maine DOE received from the U. S. Department of Education, including the flexibility provided to Maine schools related to the school improvement provisions of the ESEA, (also known as No Child Left Behind (“NCLB”));
- ❖ Professional Development: Effective use of federal and state funding for professional development provided to educators; and data on high-need school administrative units involved in the federal Improving Teacher Quality State Grants, including the State Agency for Higher Education (Title II, Part A) and the Math Science Partnerships (Title II, Part B) grants;
- ❖ Statewide Longitudinal Data System (“SLDS”): Security issues related to the privacy of student and educator data included in the SLDS, the Maine Education Data Management System (“MEDMS”) and the Data Warehouse;
- ❖ Health Team, Physical Activity and Nutrition Program: Information on school health programs, including grant funds from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention;
- ❖ National Board Certified Teachers: Data on the number of National Board Certified Teachers teaching in Maine school administrative units;
- ❖ Dropout Prevention Committee: Data on implementation and effectiveness of school administrative units’ Dropout Prevention Committees and initiatives; and
- ❖ General Educational Development (“GED”) tests: Transition from the GED tests to the High School Equivalency Test (“HiSET”) and their effect on Maine students.

During its March 18, 2014 meeting, the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs unanimously voted on a motion that the Committee finds that the Department of Education is operating within its statutory authority. The Committee also unanimously voted

to recommend that the Department of Education address and submit a follow-up report to the Committee on the following issues:

- ❖ DOE Vacancies and Leadership Team: The Committee requests that the DOE: (1) fill the Deputy Commissioner and the Legislative Liaison position vacancies in the Leadership Team as soon as possible; and (2) fill the vacancy in the Higher Education position and hire a Team Leader for the Health Team, Physical Activity and Nutrition Program; and that DOE includes these 2 positions in the DOE Leadership Team;
- ❖ Truancy and Dropout Prevention: The Committee requests that the DOE provide updates on the effectiveness of school administrative units' Dropout Prevention Committees and initiatives related to preventing truancy and dropouts; and
- ❖ School Funding Status Updates: The Committee requests that the DOE provide information on the status of the following school funding issues: (1) Medicaid funding for Maine schools; (2) restoration of funds for health education programs and initiatives to prevent childhood obesity; and (3) recent changes to teacher retirement costs, including the normal costs for teacher retirement.

As the legislative committee of jurisdiction, we wish to express our gratitude to the Commissioner of Education, the Department's Leadership Team and all DOE personnel for their dedication and commitment to collaborating with Maine educators, school officials and learning communities to support the delivery of quality education programs and services for all Maine students.

The Education and Cultural Affairs Committee has concluded that the Department of Education is operating in accordance with its statutory authority and is fulfilling its statutory mandates. The Committee recommends that the DOE be scheduled for its next Government Evaluation Act review in 8 years pursuant to the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 3, section 959, subsection 1.