

# MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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**Date:** January 3, 2020

**Source of Report:** Resolve, Chapter 25, LD 576

**Topic:** Resolve, Directing the Department of Education to Study and Develop an Online Learning Platform for Students and Educators

### Context

The process of integrating technology into traditional school structures constantly changes and evolves. The Education and Cultural Affairs Committee of the 129<sup>th</sup> Legislature required the Department of Education to study the implementation of an online learning platform for students and educators. In order to provide background and context for those volunteering to be involved in the workgroup, the following material was provided in advance of the workgroup convening:

The vision of the Maine Department of Education recognizes *“the people of Maine are lifelong learners served by an innovative, equitable, and learner-centered public education system that supports students – early childhood throughout adulthood – in achieving healthy, successful and fulfilling lives that allow them to shape the future.”* Maine Department of Education is committed to supporting and promoting an equitable, high-quality public education for **every** Maine student regardless of geographical region, demographic, or socio-economic status within the state. The exploration of feasibility, development and implementation of a statewide online platform aligns and supports this vision to ensure every student can succeed.

### Actions

The Department convened a workgroup of interested stakeholders to discuss elements related to the study and development of an online learning platform for students and educators. Stakeholders engaged in the workgroup included:

Name	Role	District/Agency
Robin Colby	High School Educator	RSU 18
Julie Kimball	Principal	RSU 54
Janette Kirk	Chief of Learning Systems	Maine Department of Education
Karen Kusiak	Legislative Liaison	Maine Department of Education
Peter Lewis	Systems Group Manager	Maine Office of Information Technology
Tim O’Connor	Director of Special Education	RSU 57
Heidi Orlando	Director of Applications	Maine Office of Information Technology
Cassandra Perkins	OIT Account Manager	Maine Office of Information Technology

Walter Wallace	Principal	Maine Connections Academy
Rachel Upton	Program Coordinator	Region 2 Career & Technical Education Center
Robert Zabierek	Academic Instructor	Region 2 Career & Technical Education Center

The workgroup focused primarily on the following questions and developed responses to them:

1. What would it take to implement an online platform?  
*Implementing an online platform state-wide will require a coordinated assessment of the need for such a platform throughout the state, especially for student use. Infrastructure needs – including broadband availability - must be assessed state-wide and human resources must be sufficient for constructing, implementing, maintaining, and sustaining the project; content and services provided by the platform must be available equitably throughout the state. Training at all levels of service delivery and use will be necessary. Content for instruction and professional development will need to be developed or adapted for the online format.*
2. Is this feasible for Maine?  
*A State-run online learning platform could be feasible; however, this feasibility is dependent upon the focus of the platform - educator vs student - and the availability of enough resources.*
3. What are the potential associated costs?  
*Potential costs include, but are not limited to, employment of necessary human capital for the construction, implementation, and sustainability of the platform; professional development and learning for participants; implementation of necessary broadband access to all regions of the state; perceived need for an online platform; sustainability of funding; and reliability of broadband to all regions of the state.*
4. What are potential barriers to the implementation of an online platform?  
*Potential barriers include but are not limited to employment of necessary human capital for the construction, gaps in access to technology and school support staff state-wide, implementation and sustainability of the platform; professional development and learning for participants; implementation of necessary broadband access to all regions of the state; perceived need for an online platform; sustainability of funding; and reliability of broadband to all regions of the state.*
5. Is there a current need for an online platform?  
*The stakeholder group believes there may be benefits to providing an online platform for educators and is less certain that a platform for students is needed.*

Further anticipated needs, purposes for an online platform, and the following ideas were shared:

- Educators - professional learning/development & would help with scalability, sharing of PD opportunities
- Certification/training requirements - transferred between districts
- Combination with digital content library for resources housed in a single location for educators
- Development of a personal learning plan to meet the needs of ESSA integrated within the platform/portal
- Virtual meeting attendance, tech updates, advisory meetings, etc.
- Delivery of instruction: co-teaching
- Educational content for students that have IEPs that may be suspended

- Department of Corrections - educational opportunities, certification leading to transition
- Utilization of the platform to provide educational learning on snow days

### **Findings**

Stakeholders identified several online platforms currently serving students across the state. These range from credential bearing platforms such as OSHA training for CTE students to Google Classroom. The implementation of current known online platforms center around student learning and achievement. While there are several online platforms used to facilitate and monitor university courses, stakeholders felt that an online platform to provide professional learning for educators would be beneficial. As a result of identifying platforms, the stakeholders ascertained that based upon current knowledge, there may not be a need for a student-centered online platform, rather, an educator centered online platform may be beneficial.

The workgroup discussed necessary resource requirements:

Acronyms used:

- SAAS – Software as a service
- SOM – State of Maine
- COTS – Commercial off the shelf
- IHE – Institutes of Higher Education

### **Recommendations**

Key considerations presented from the group:

Specific recommendations related to an online platform for students:

- A review of needs within Maine school districts would be beneficial to ascertain what is already in place and potential needs and trends.
- Explore the utilization of contracting with an existing commodity rather than building the system from the ground up.
  - The cost of building an online platform from the ground up could potentially be a barrier to implementation and is not cost effective.
- Exploration of already existing platforms that may be utilized with necessary configurations.
- Exploration of accessibility to an online platform for homeschoolers
  - This could provide homeschooled students access to certified educators.

Specific recommendations related to an online platform for educators:

- A review of needs within Maine school districts would be beneficial to ascertain what is already in place and potential needs and trends.
- Further discussion to determine the primary focus of such a platform in order to identify content
  - Required training for educators
  - Virtual attendance & On Demand e.g. Go to Meeting
  - Certification trainings that are more universal in nature e.g. bloodborne pathogens
  - Accessibility to professional learning

In order to determine true feasibility of such a platform, a review of statewide needs would be beneficial to ascertain:

- Need for an online platform within the state

- Are there currently areas within the state that are utilizing an online platform that is student and/or educator focused?
  - Trends related to school district needs
    - Are there regions within the state experiencing the same challenges that can be examined or addressed regionally or locally?
- Exploration of other New England (NE) states to see what they are currently implementing for professional learning for educators. What are other New England states currently implementing regarding the availability of online platforms? Would it be beneficial and feasible for Maine to collaborate with other NE states?
- Exploration of industry evolution (e.g. healthcare field) in combining/integrating existing systems across districts and state agencies - expedite reporting and communication across agencies, organizations etc.
- Exploration of FirstNet national initiative to assist in the provision of high-speed statewide access to broadband
  - The FirstNet mission is to deploy, operate, maintain, and improve the first high-speed, nationwide wireless broadband network dedicated to public safety.
- Exploration of the availability of a single platform to house all current smaller platforms in order to provide access with a single point of entry/log on.

## References

### ***State Online Learning Management Systems***

New York : <https://nyslearn.ny.gov/about.html>

Massachusetts: <https://www.mass.gov/pace-learning-management-system>

Ohio: <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Teaching/Professional-Development/Learning-Management-System-LMS>

Wyoming: <https://edu.wyoming.gov/in-the-classroom/technology/statewide-learning-management-system-lms/>

Washington: <https://des.wa.gov/services/training-and-development/about-learning-management-system>

Connecticut: <https://academy.ctdlc.org/>

New Jersey: <https://www.state.nj.us/csc/employees/training/elearning/>

[Use of Learning Management Systems in the United States](#)

[Learning Technology at NC State University](#)

[Washington State University](#)

**Contact:** Janette Kirk, Chief of Learning Systems, [janette.kirk@maine.gov](mailto:janette.kirk@maine.gov) .