

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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This team would conduct a thorough study of the school including an analysis of the allocation of resources. The team would then recommend a plan to improve the use of resources as a means to enhance student achievement. A school would be given sufficient time to implement a plan and measure the results. If, however, the performance level did not show adequate improvement over time, the final phase would call for an increased level of state involvement and decreased levels of local autonomy. State involvement could be in various areas including budget management, resource allocation, school administration, curriculum, etc.

Whatever the design of an accountability system, the EP&S Report notes that the standards must be clear, fairly and adequately measured, and there must be resources sufficient to permit achievement of the *Learning Results*. Basic decisions would continue to be made locally, and state intervention would be limited to instances where there is a clear indication that the standards are not being met or that equity of learning opportunity is not being provided.

Unanswered Questions

The EP&S Committee was asked to develop recommendations for the adequate and equitable funding required for **all** students to meet the *Learning Results* standards. Outside that mandate and beyond the time and expertise of the Committee are the difficult questions of how to apportion the cost of education between the state and local districts. Of equal importance but also beyond the Committee's agenda, is the question of what type of tax policy Maine needs if it is to provide the resources required for learning. These two questions are clearly crucial and they will need to be addressed as a part of any effort to improve the learning level of Maine youth.

Summing Up

An estimate of the cost of fully implementing the recommendations of the EP&S Report calls for an increase of at least \$131.5 million as compared to the \$1.3 billion spent by both the state and local districts in the base year 1996-97. In deference to reality, the report acknowledges that such an increase needs to be phased in over a period of time so that no school district is required to quickly make a major budget

adjustment. The impact of proposed changes on communities needs to be examined, and a variety of transition plans should be reviewed.

One approach would be to limit to a modest amount the extent of change in state subsidy by any given district in a single year. Another would be to cut or eliminate increases in state subsidy to districts with high per-pupil spending as a step toward equalization of resources. In any event, what is called for is a careful and comprehensive study of transition plans to be performed by a diverse group of citizens with knowledge of the implications of the school funding formulas.

The Bottom Line

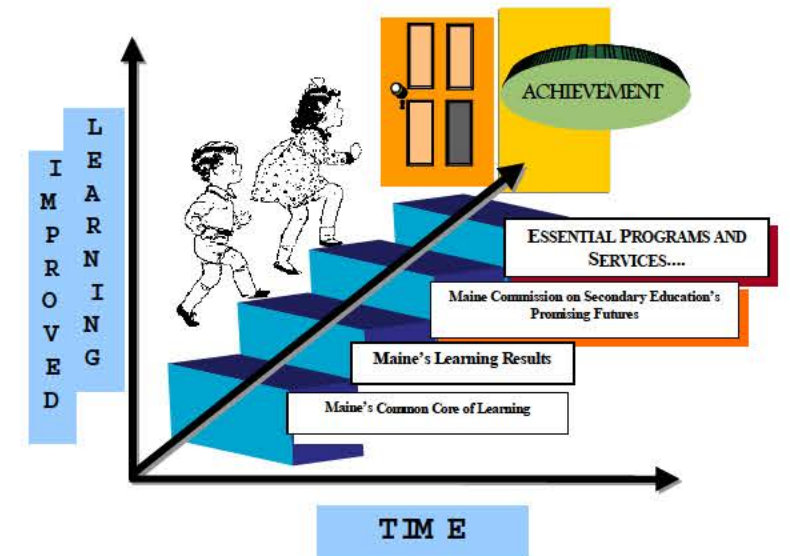
Mindful of the challenge inherent in any new approach to education funding, the Maine State Board of Education is convinced that the critical requirement now, for all who are concerned with education, is to embrace the new, rational concept of funding, a concept which relates funding to our education needs and goals, the achievement of the *Learning Results* standards for **all** Maine's students.

Not only conviction but political courage will be required to change our approach to school funding and to provide the resources to achieve our educational goals. The education summit, the Governor's concern for education and the presence of education at the top of the Legislative agenda are important and encouraging. As the report of the EP&S Committee notes, the people of Maine and those who govern them must realize there is no painless way to achieve the high standards and student equity to which Maine committed itself when it adopted the *Learning Results*. These standards cannot be achieved by wishing for them. If we do not put the needed resources for children and our schools behind our efforts to improve education, we will have short-changed our children and all who are dedicated to a better education for them.

For a copy of the full report please contact:
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Essential Programs and Services

A Rational Approach to Funding Maine Schools



Maine State Board of Education
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The adoption and implementation of the *Learning Results* is an important step toward improving the skills and knowledge of all Maine's K-12 students. One of the critical next steps is to identify the resources schools need in order for all students to achieve the Learning Results. The recommendations of the Essential Programs and Services Committee (EP&S) of the Maine State Board of Education accomplish this task. These recommendations define what resources will be required so each and every student can meet the standards set by the *Learning Results*. In addition, the recommendations will significantly improve the equity of learning opportunity for students across the state regardless of where they go to school. Currently, there is significant disparity in the resources for student learning depending on the student's residence. In the fiscal year 1996-97 the amount of state and local resources spent per student ranged from a low of \$3,218 to a high of \$15,662, an unconscionable difference.

A Funding Approach Based on Need

Presently, school funding is based on what was actually spent two years ago adjusted for one year's inflation, then reduced further by an adjustment to what the Legislature and the Administration feel is a total amount that is affordable. The current funding formula has little rationale to support it. The recommendations of the EP&S are based on the concept of providing what is needed to achieve the *Learning Results*.

Looking ahead toward the required implementation of the *Learning Results*, the Maine State Board of Education enthusiastically endorses and commends to the public and to policymakers alike, this new method of funding education. The Committee's work is a totally different concept of determining how much money is needed. This new approach is embodied in the work and report of the EP&S Committee. The work of the Committee was done in response to a request of the Legislature calling for a determination of those programs and services which are essential if Maine youth are to have equitable opportunities to achieve the *Learning Results*. It is an approach based, not on earlier costs, but on an analysis of what it takes to get the job done. "The job" is a first-class education for every student in preparation for life in a fast-changing world where Maine is now part of a global society.

What are Essential Programs and Services?

Essential programs, as that language is used in the EP&S Report, are the programs or content areas that Maine established in the *Learning Results*. They are career preparation, English language arts, health and physical education, mathematics, modern and classical languages, science and technology, social studies, and visual and performing arts. The services essential to support the required learning in these content areas are grouped into the following categories: school personnel (teachers, guidance counselors, education technicians, etc.); supplies and equipment (not including capital equipment); resources for specialized student populations (e.g., special needs students, students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), disadvantaged youth, etc.); specialized services (e.g., professional development, instructional leadership support, student assessment, etc.); and school level adjustments (for transportation, debt service, vocational education, etc.). The Committee determined the necessary cost for each of these services based on a variety of data sources.

If the State Determines Needs and Costs, What Happens to Local Control?

State funding based on EP&S recommendations with three exceptions does not translate into state determination of what services the local school needs to offer or how to offer them. For example, the EP&S approach indicates how many teachers the State is willing to support--it does not say how many the local school needs to employ. Likewise, additional funding for disadvantaged students does not specify how the money should be spent to help those students. In short, though the report recommends making some funds available to assist schools in coping with special circumstances, it does not propose new state requirements or strictures on how to spend those funds. ***The State Board believes that local school and district authorities are, by far, in the best position to know how to respond to the needs of their own students.***

There are three instances where funds would be made available in the form of targeted grants, but no new state-mandated programs are proposed. The three instances include funds for: technology (other than for hardware); enhanced programs for K-2 students; and local programs for assessing student progress.

Schools would be eligible for additional funding from the State upon approval of a plan for the use of the targeted monies. In all other instances, funding would ***not*** be directed to specific programs.

Sources for Determining What Resource Level is Essential

The Committee used a variety of data sources to inform it in making its resource recommendations. They were: (1) empirical information on Maine schools; (2) a study of high and low performing schools; (3) evidence from existing or proposed models; (4) national literature on school resources and performance; (5) a special survey of current practice in Maine schools; (6) expert testimony from people active in the field.

The Role of Accountability

In response to its Legislative mandate, the EP&S Committee looked at the issue of accountability at the school level and made recommendations. Although some states are leaning toward punitive or restrictive measures for schools or districts that fail to achieve stated goals, the State Board of Education concurs with the view of the EP&S Committee that such an approach is not only inconsistent with Maine's locally-based governance of education but is also counter productive. Because at this time, work is being done in the state on a more comprehensive accountability system and in order to be consistent with whatever recommendations come from that work, the EP&S Report makes only some general recommendations, while acknowledging the importance of an accountability system.

The report proposes a three-stage approach to accountability that would be initiated after a three-year period during which a school failed to show adequate progress in achieving the *Learning Results* for all students. The primary measure for progress would be the revised Maine Educational Assessments (MEA). The first phase would give schools an opportunity to offer additional evidence as to student achievement, based on a local assessment system, provided the local assessment has been validated. In Phase II, if there is no validation of local assessment or if student performance fails to improve an assistance team will be formed by the Department of Education.