

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

The following document is provided by the
LAW AND LEGISLATIVE DIGITAL LIBRARY
at the Maine State Law and Legislative Reference Library
<http://legislature.maine.gov/lawlib>



Reproduced from electronic originals
(may include minor formatting differences from printed original)

IMPLEMENTING
STANDARDS-BASED
EDUCATION IN MAINE:

PROGRESS, CHALLENGES,
AND IMPLICATIONS

A White Paper

Center for Research and Evaluation
College of Education and Human Development
The University of Maine

February 2006

IMPLEMENTING STANDARDS-BASED EDUCATION IN MAINE: PROGRESS, CHALLENGES, AND IMPLICATIONS

A White Paper

February 2006

Walter J. Harris
Janet C. Fairman
Center for Research and Evaluation
College of Education and Human Development
The University of Maine
5766 Shibles Hall, Orono, ME 04469-5766
207/581-2493 • FAX 207/581-9510

*This paper represents the views of the authors and does not reflect the position of
The University of Maine or any division within.*

Introduction

The *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) and Maine state legislation require school districts to implement a system of learning standards and assessments for the purpose of strengthening accountability in public education. In Maine, the System of *Learning Results*, signed into law in 1997, represents statewide learning standards; establishes the Maine Education Assessment (MEA) as an assessment of students' achievement of the *Learning Results* in grades 4, 8, and 11; and describes a process of combining state and local assessments. Maine statute, to comply with federal requirements, requires local assessment systems (LASs) to be developed and implemented in every school district in addition to the MEAs and the administration of statewide, grade-level equivalent tests in grades 3, 5, and 7. NCLB, state learning standards, and assessments are critical components of state and federal education policy which, taken together, reflect the national shift toward standards-based education (SBE) and stronger accountability measures.

SBE had its origins in the mid to late 1980s with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), which was highly critical of U.S. education and called for major changes. Subsequently, President George H. W. Bush and governors from all 50 states met in 1989 and adopted national education goals for the year 2000. One of these goals was to identify national standards in English, mathematics, science, history, and geography. In 1994, President Clinton signed into law, *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, which extended the call for national standards to foreign languages, the arts, economics, civics, and government.

The executive branches of federal and state government were not the only proponents of a shift in education policy toward SBE. During this period (late 1980s - early

1990s) educators were also working on these ideas and responding to the predominantly critical national reports on education. National professional organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Science Teachers Association were actively developing and communicating standards for teachers and students which provided a foundation for states to begin their work on specifying standards. The work of these organizations helped to build educators' support for and understanding of SBE. Finally, in 2002, President George W. Bush signed NCLB which requires that states create systems of learning standards aligned with assessments for grades 3-8 and specific sanctions for schools in which all students do not make annual yearly progress.

Survey and interview data collected in five studies which are described below indicate that Maine educators and policymakers have generally endorsed the System of *Learning Results*. However, these data also indicate that significant controversy exists over how this system is defined and implemented. Controversial issues that have surfaced in these studies include the specificity of the *Learning Results*: how, when, and how often students' progress is to be assessed and how soon high school graduation will be contingent on achievement of the *Learning Results*. The data also indicate controversy about whether all students, including those with special education disabilities, those in alternative education programs, programs for English language learners, and those in career and technical education programs, should be held to the same expectations. These studies also suggest that many educators believe that the move toward SBE as embodied in Maine's System of *Learning Results*, has asked them to accomplish too much in too short a time period.

Focal Questions

Between 2002 and 2006, the Maine Department of Education (MDOE) funded five statewide studies to monitor the progress that school administrative units (SAUs) were making in the design and implementation of the *Learning Results* and comprehensive LASs. These studies were conducted by the Center for Research and Evaluation (CRE) and the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI) at the University of Maine and are briefly described as part of the Reference section of this paper. Below, data from these studies—surveys and interviews

with Maine teachers and administrators—are used to address four questions related to the implementation of the System of *Learning Results* and LASs in Maine schools:

- To what degree do Maine educators support implementation of the System of *Learning Results* including LASs?
- What progress has been made in implementing the System of *Learning Results*?

- What boosters and barriers have helped and hindered progress in implementing the System of *Learning Results*?
- What has been the impact of implementing the System of *Learning Results* including LASs on teachers' workloads, professional development, and curriculum and instruction?

In the section below, each question is presented and followed by a summary response. Supporting data drawn from multiple studies are then described. The paper will

conclude with a synthesis of data from all sources and a discussion of some of the major challenges and implications suggested by the data.

Caution is urged in the interpretation of survey and interview data on which this paper is based. Both survey and interview data rely on individuals' perceptions, their willingness and ability to convey those perceptions, and the quality of the tools and strategies used to acquire individuals' perceptions as data. In the studies on which this paper is based, multiple sources of data were used to support each conclusion; however, no measures were taken to validate individuals' responses.

Question 1: To what degree do Maine educators support the implementation of the System of *Learning Results* including LASs?

Although there are many substantive challenges yet to be resolved, Maine educators continue to support the concepts of learning standards, assessment of students' progress, and accountability, which constitute the *Learning Results* and development and implementation of LASs.

Support for the *Learning Results* was apparent in a study conducted by MEPRI in 2003 for the Task Force to Review the Status of Implementation of the System of *Learning Results*. When asked in a statewide survey if the *Learning Results* were the biggest priority in their school/district, 82% of superintendents, 70% of principals, and 73% of teachers agreed with this statement. In addition, 80% of administrators and 74% of school board chairs agreed with a statement that "overall, the *Learning Results* will have a positive impact on student learning in this school/district." The Task Force concluded "...that SAUs throughout the state are strongly committed to implementing the System of *Learning Results* and believe that doing so will benefit their students" (MEPRI, 2003, p. 55).

An integral component of the System of *Learning Results* is a comprehensive LAS. An LAS is a system for assessing students' achievement in each grade span (K – 4, 5 – 8, and 9 – 12) and in every content area to determine whether or not they have met the standards described in the *Learning Results*. Educators' support for developing and implementing LASs can be considered an indicator of their overall support for the System of *Learning Results* and was the subject of a study conducted by MEPRI in 2005.

This study included a comprehensive survey of all Maine school districts (83% response rate) and extensive interviews with superintendents, principals, curriculum coordinators, teachers, and other leadership personnel in a representative sample of 14 districts. Analysis of these

qualitative data revealed that superintendents were supportive of the development of LASs and the increased emphasis on accountability. Of the 13 superintendents interviewed for this study, 11 superintendents made comments that indicated strong support for LASs and accountability, while one superintendent indicated a more moderate level of support. Twelve superintendents commented that they were concerned about the impact of LAS work on district resources and instructional time. Superintendents varied in the degree to which they actively sought external funding or reallocated budgetary and time priorities to support LAS work in their districts. Superintendents also expressed a need for consistent policy direction from the state. Policy changes and changing deadlines at the state level were perceived by these respondents to be having a negative effect on teacher morale and the momentum of educational reform efforts in their SAUs (MEPRI, 2005).

Data collected by interviewing principals indicate that principals support the development of LASs and clearly believe that this emphasis on accountability would precipitate needed changes in curriculum and instruction. Many principals were instrumental in rearranging school schedules to allow teachers to work on LAS tasks. Principals and teachers commented during interviews that work on the LAS was a valuable professional development experience for teachers. Consistent concerns expressed by many principals were the impacts on teachers' and administrators' time, teacher morale, impacts on students, and their schools' readiness to communicate assessment results to parents (MEPRI, 2005). These qualitative re-

sults are consistent with earlier data from a statewide sample of principals in which 77% agreed that the *Learning Results* have had a positive impact on classroom instruction, and 82% agreed that there would be a positive impact on student learning (MEPRI, 2003).

Data reflecting teachers' support for the *Learning Results* and LASs are mixed. In 2003, 48% of a representative sample of Maine teachers agreed that the *Learning Results* have had a positive impact on classroom instruction, yet 81% indicated that finding time to develop LASs was difficult (MEPRI, 2003). Interviews with teachers in 2005 confirmed that many teachers agree that setting standards and holding students and teachers accountable is a positive direction which has also sharpened the focus of both curriculum and instruction. However, finding time to score common assessments, analyze data, and report results left many teachers wondering if the goals for assessment were feasible tasks given their already full workloads (MEPRI, 2005).

The expectation that all students will meet the *Learning Results* as determined by LASs was a concern voiced by teachers and administrators. A summary of data collected by MEPRI for the Task Force to Study the Implementation of the System of *Learning Results* in 2003 concluded that, "Most respondents expressed doubt that all students will be able to achieve the *Learning Results*. About half of the administrators and almost two thirds of the teachers disagreed that the *Learning Results* are a realistic goal for all students in their school or SAUs" (MEPRI, 2003, p. 63). This concern was echoed in interview and survey data collected in 2005 that revealed doubt that achieve-

ment of the *Learning Results* was possible for all students in special education programs, alternative education programs, career and technical education programs, and those in programs for students with limited English proficiency. Disabilities and barriers in learning styles, language, and cultural differences were identified as factors that might warrant different expectations for some students. In addition, each of these programs functions with specific educational goals and related assessments relevant to their students' characteristics, but these goals and measures of achievement often do not match the more generic structure of the *Learning Results* and related assessments. Some educators indicated that it was simply not fair to expect that all students would meet the *Learning Results*. Further, the educators responsible for these programs expressed frustration at not being included in curriculum and assessment planning related to the *Learning Results* and therefore not able to represent the diversity of their students (MEPRI, 2005).

In summary, data from interviews and surveys collected between 2003 and 2006 indicate that both teachers and administrators support the SBE concepts of learning standards, assessment, and accountability as represented in Maine's System of *Learning Results*. There are serious concerns about SAUs' ability to implement the System of *Learning Results* including LASs with the time and human resources currently available. Concerns also exist about the application of these concepts to the more diverse student groups served in special education, career and technical education, and alternative education programs, and programs for students with limited English proficiency.

Question 2: What progress has been made in implementing the System of Learning Results?

Progress has been slow but steady in establishing and refining the basic concepts and practices of the System of *Learning Results* (i.e., learning standards, assessment, and accountability). The complexity of the task and the lack of time, funds, and human capacity has slowed but not stopped progress toward full implementation.

Implementing the System of *Learning Results* in all Maine schools has progressed but more slowly than policymakers had envisioned when the *Learning Results* became statute in 1997. In the summer of 2000, the commissioner of education held a series of regional planning retreats and solicited and received written questions from 50 SAUs. Among the most frequently asked questions were: How will districts be held accountable for student achievement? What are the steps or indicators of *Learning Results* implementation? and What does the state and local assessment system look like? (MDOE, 2000). Recent survey and interview data indicate that the answers

to these questions are now well known across the state due to published guidelines and workshops provided by the MDOE. Progress is evident, but the complexity of the task and a lack of time, funding, and human capacity have slowed the progress toward full implementation. As a result, the MDOE has adjusted the scope of the task, suggested more efficient strategies to accomplish parts of the task, and moved some deadlines into the future. However, the goal of fully implementing the System of *Learning Results* has not changed.

A comparison of survey data collected in 2004 with data collected in 2005 indicates consistent progress with the multiple tasks of aligning curriculum and instruction with the *Learning Results* and developing LASs in the content areas of English language arts and mathematics. Between 92% and 97% of SAUs indicated that the task of aligning English language arts and mathematics curriculum with the *Learning Results* was either partially complete or complete in the spring of 2005. Over 50% of SAUs indicated the same levels of completion on the tasks of selecting performance indicators, administering common assessments, and scoring assessments with rubrics (MEPRI, 2005).

Use of LAS data to systematically examine curriculum and instruction is not common in most SAUs. Eighty-three percent of SAUs responding to a survey in 2005 indicated that LAS data are being used informally in teachers' discussions about curriculum and instruction. Sixty percent reported that data are being used to identify individual students' needs for remediation. Fifty-nine percent indicated that data are being used to revise curriculum. Fewer SAUs indicated that data are being used in more formal ways or to inform the community about student progress (MEPRI, 2005). Clearly, SAUs are generating data to assess students' achievement of the *Learning Results*; however, the systematic use of these data is not a frequent occurrence.

Question 3: What boosters and barriers have helped and hindered progress in implementing the System of Learning Results?

Districts that have made the greatest progress are those that have strong leadership, are using existing committee structures to guide work on LASs, and are finding stipends and other creative ways to provide time for teachers to do the work. Time, money, and lack of administrative support were the consistent barriers to progress in other districts.

Data from the 2004 and 2005 surveys indicate that leadership and administrative support were key factors in implementing the System of *Learning Results* (MEPRI 2004, 2005). Districts that were more advanced in these tasks relied on teams or committees that had been previously formed for curriculum work. Having one person to coordinate activities such as a curriculum coordinator was viewed as helpful (MEPRI, 2005).

Administrative support included making the implementation of the *Learning Results* and LASs a priority, adding professional days, and reorganizing schedules to allow time for teachers to work collaboratively. Additional supports included teacher stipends, assistance from external

The 2005 study concluded that throughout the 2004- 2005 school year SAUs were refining their LASs after administering some assessment tasks and finding that their assessment instruments and schedules were in need of adjustment. Interview data confirmed that few SAUs were involved in refining the scoring process, reporting data, or using data to inform curriculum and instruction. Most of the work completed was in the content areas of English language arts and mathematics. The use of local assessments in the content areas of science and technology, social studies, and health and physical education were rated as partially complete or complete by more than half the SAUs responding to the survey with the largest percent in the 9 – 12 grade span.

In summary, most Maine school districts report that they have aligned their curriculum with the *Learning Results* and have designed and implemented LASs at least in the content areas of English language arts and mathematics. Initial attempts at using LASs resulted, for some school districts, in the need to refine and adjust the number and types of assessments, the scheduling of assessments, and the content and structure of the curriculum. Progress is evident in that LASs are generating data about students' achievement. Teachers are using these data informally in discussions about students and curriculum, but few SAUs have developed the capability of using these data to examine the need for systemic changes in curriculum and instruction.

organizations, and regional partnerships and collaborations.

MDOE responsiveness to questions, the *LAS Guide*, online curriculum and assessment resources, and professional development sponsored by MDOE were also frequently listed as supports (MEPRI, 2005).

Time and money were consistently listed as barriers to progress. Survey data indicate that both teachers and administrators perceived time to plan for needed changes, time to acquire knowledge and skills needed to help students achieve the *Learning Results*, and time to deliver instruction in all areas of the *Learning Results* to be barriers (MEPRI, 2003). In 2005, both survey and interview

data indicated that time to develop and score assessments and time to reflect on the meaning of assessment data were perceived as obstacles to progress. In interview data teachers confirmed that there was too much work for too few people to do and that there was little time to develop and score assessments or reflect on their meaning. Some indicated that they had insufficient knowledge about how to develop assessments and analyze assessment data (MEPRI, 2005).

Data systems to manage assessment data and generate reports were frequently listed by teachers as both a booster and a barrier. The lack of data systems to manage data frustrated many teachers and administrators. Some districts were waiting for the MEDMS system to be fully functional while others had purchased software packages for this purpose (MEPRI, 2005).

Question 4: What has been the impact of implementing the System of Learning Results including LASs on teachers' workloads, curriculum and instruction, and professional development?

Work associated with creating the System of *Learning Results* and comprehensive LASs has generated stress and frustration among Maine's teachers and, at the same time, has provided highly valued professional development experiences, sharpened the focus on curriculum and instruction, and significantly defined the concepts and practices of assessing student achievement.

A statewide survey of Maine teachers conducted in 2004 (MEPRI, 2004) identified four factors that teachers perceive to have increased their workloads and levels of stress during the past 3 years:

- curriculum alignment with the *Learning Results*,
- compliance with the NCLB,
- getting students to expected levels of performance, and
- various aspects of student assessment.

The same survey indicated that many teachers are working more than 46 hours a week on school-related tasks or at least 16 hours more than the 35 hours per week they are required to be in school. The data indicate that 44% of the teachers responding would not choose teaching as a profession if they could start over again. The data also indicate that the implementation of *Learning Results* including LASs is perceived by teachers to have had a significant impact on their workload.

Changes in state assessment policy and lack of clear state leadership were frequently listed as barriers. Interview data indicate that these factors contributed to teacher skepticism and resistance in some districts. The late arrival of the *LAS Guide*, an MDOE publication, and the requirements of the NCLB that competed for teachers' time were also considered to be barriers (MEPRI, 2005).

In summary, strong leadership within SAUs, using existing committee structures to develop LASs, finding creative ways to provide time to teachers within the school day, data systems, and using existing professional development resources were the most frequently noted boosters. Time to do the work, lack of data management systems, and changing state policies and deadlines were the most frequent barriers to progress.

Lack of time as a barrier in implementing the System of *Learning Results* has been a persistent challenge in Maine. Time to do the work of implementing the *Learning Results* was identified as a challenge in survey and interview data in 2005 (MEPRI, 2005), in survey data in 2004 (MEPRI, 2004), and previously in 2003 (CRE, 2003). In the 2003 survey data, the most frequently listed obstacles to implementing the System of *Learning Results* were:

- time to plan for needed changes in curriculum and assessment,
- time for teachers to deliver instruction in all content areas required by the *Learning Results*, and
- time for teachers to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to support student achievement of the *Learning Results*.

Survey and interview data indicate that some school districts have developed strategies to provide teachers with more time such as hiring substitutes, creating early release days for students, using time scheduled for profes-

sional development, and paying teachers for extra days. Although these strategies provided more time for teachers to work on tasks related to the *Learning Results* and LASs, some teachers, parents, and administrators expressed concern for the loss of instructional time that results from early release days, the lack of continuity of instruction that is inherent when substitute teachers replace regular classroom teachers, and the cost of paying for extra days of teachers' time (MEPRI, 2005).

SAU representatives were asked to list the positive and negative impacts of LAS implementation in the spring of 2004. One hundred and eighty-seven SAUs responded with 334 positive impacts and 359 negative impacts. Positive impacts listed most frequently included the following: a better understanding of assessment among educators, increased/improved communication about teaching and learning, increased/improved teacher collaboration, more focused/aligned curriculum with the *Learning*

Results, and better coherency/consistency in curriculum and goals within SAUs and across the state.

Negative impacts cited most frequently included the following: assessments not fully embedded or integrated with instruction; too much focus on or too many assessments; teacher stress, anxiety or frustration/lower teacher morale; less time for some curricular or instruction units; teachers out of the classroom more; and less time for other topics of professional development (MEPRI, 2005).

In summary, the implementation of the *Learning Results* including LASs is perceived by teachers to have had a significantly negative impact on their workloads. SAU representatives, who were asked to list both positive and negative impacts, confirmed that the implementation of LASs created stress and frustration for teachers and indicated that there are both positive and negative impacts on professional development, curriculum and instruction.

Challenges and Implications

This section outlines the major challenges to implementing the System of *Learning Results* that educators have identified in interviews and surveys. As each challenge is described, the implications for state education policymakers are discussed.

The significant challenges that educators identified include the need to:

Increase the Level of Public Understanding of and Support for Standards-Based Education

Maine educators have indicated in interviews and surveys that parents and the wider community are not fully aware of and do not fully understand the state learning standards and assessment requirements. Principals and teachers indicated in interviews that they would like more support from the state in their effort to inform the public about state requirements, and more broadly, to build public support for standards-based education. Principals and teachers reported that parents of school-aged youth typically expect student report cards to look as they did in past decades. Educators' request for more assistance in increasing public understanding of and support for the

System of *Learning Results* may imply a need for a statewide public information campaign that clearly explains the benefits of standards-based education as well as the specific goals and requirements for students in meeting the *Learning Results*. Some principals specifically indicated they would like models and materials for communicating with parents and the community about standards, assessments, and report cards.

Interviews and surveys also indicate that certain educational groups feel "out of the loop" on information about state assessment requirements. These groups include educators in programs for special education, alternative education, career and technical education, and limited English proficiency students. Educators in these special programs indicated they do not have sufficient information to know what the requirements are and how to implement them. Some of these educators specifically requested models for developing and implementing local assessments with students in these special programs. These findings imply a need for better communication from the state, more effort to focus the communications and guidance for educators in special programs, and supports for implementation such as models and professional development. More broadly, the findings imply a need for the state to involve educators from special programs in determining the requirements for their students.

Provide Clear and Consistent Goals for Standards-Based Education

Maine educators at all levels have decried the lack of clarity and the shifting goals and guidelines in state education policy on standards, assessments, and graduation requirements. Educators have asked for more clear guidelines. The MDOE has expressed a commitment to continue its effort to revise the *LAS Guide* and related MDOE documents. The MDOE is also engaged in a review of the *Learning Results* and the MEA. Educators have also asked for implementation models—for the broad task of finding time and capacity to develop and implement local assessments, as well as for more specific tasks, such as developing policies on replacement assessments and remediation for students failing to meet standards on local assessments. The MDOE has provided some models for policies, but additional models for policies and assessment implementation may be needed. Educators' concern that the goals are unclear may also imply a need for more focused professional development across the state.

The problem of inconsistency in state education policies is not easily corrected, but should be a priority addressed jointly by all state education policymakers. Taking time to periodically evaluate progress and needs is a rational action that can help focus resources where they are needed to build capacity for full implementation. On the other hand, requiring educators to engage in great efforts to implement a system and then communicating doubt about the goals and components of the system severely undermines the morale of educators as well as their trust in the authority of state education leaders and the state education agency.

Develop A More Practical Roadmap for Assessing Student Achievement of the *Learning Results*

Maine educators have indicated that they agree with the need for accountability and good quality assessments, but they question the feasibility of designing, implementing, and scoring LASs in the complex way that has been specified by the MDOE. Educators believe they can and are developing good quality assessments to measure students' progress toward meeting the *Learning Results*, but they do not feel it is practical or wise to devote so much of the school year to assessing students. Educators broadly indicated in interviews that they would like to see

the method of assessing students' progress on the *Learning Results* simplified, including fewer assessments and less emphasis on double scoring of assessments. The process of double scoring assessments has had some benefits for teacher learning and curriculum improvement, and might be maintained for newly created assessments that are being piloted for the first time. However, educators indicated in the interviews that teachers generally do not have time to double score every local assessment that is administered.

The vision of having LASs that are valid and reliable measures of students' achievement of the *Learning Results* across the entire state may need to be re-examined. Local assessments might be valid for the local curriculum, but might not precisely measure the skills and knowledge that are articulated in the *Learning Results*. Teachers might reach acceptable levels of interrater reliability in scoring assessments but not levels that are as high as the state would like. Even with clearly stated rubrics, scoring is still based on subjective judgment. Given variations in the rigor of local assessments across districts and in the timing of different units of instruction, the expectation that students in the same grade spans across districts will meet the same learning standards is questionable. This is not to suggest that statewide validity and reliability across all LASs is not a possibility, but instead to indicate that many educators have doubts about making this vision a reality.

Provide Adequate Funding to Create Time for Work on the *Learning Results* and to Support the Development of Human Capacity

Recent studies of SAU progress in developing and implementing LASs revealed that certain strategies helped some SAUs make more substantial progress than other SAUs. Administrative leadership in mobilizing funding to support work on LASs and for teacher learning was viewed as critical. Some SAUs used grant funds, reallocated budgets, or collaborated with educational organizations to provide time and training for teachers to develop their understanding of the standards and assessment requirements and to create and score assessments. Principals altered schedules to provide common planning time for teacher teams. Some SAUs were able to hire substitute teachers, while other SAUs were less able to afford this strategy.

Adequate funding is needed to ensure that all SAUs have sufficient time to do the complex work of developing aligned curricula and assessments and to make use of the

assessment results to inform curriculum and instructional decisions. Many SAUs did not have time to administer all planned local assessments and to properly score all assessments administered during the 2004-2005 school year. Most SAUs had no time to compile and analyze assessment results by the end of the year. Maine educators indicated a need for professional days at the beginning and end of the school year to reflect on assessment results and use them to improve curriculum and instruction.

Provide Adequate Funding and Models for Data Management Systems

The data indicate that SAUs were challenged to find time, funding, and staffing to develop data management systems. Most SAUs have purchased software from private vendors and are working to make these systems fit their needs. Maine educators have emphasized the need for funding and models for data management systems that will accommodate the different LASs, allow for more detailed data analysis of student progress in meeting the *Learning Results* at the level of performance indicators, and provide a means to report data results to teachers and parents. Administrators indicated in interviews that funding is also needed for staffing to maintain the data system, train teachers to enter assessment scores, and to conduct more sophisticated data analysis that disaggregates data for different groups of students.

Provide Funding, Time, and Technical Assistance to Ensure That All Students Have Opportunities to Learn the Knowledge and Skills Needed to Achieve the *Learning Results*

Specifying standards or goals for student learning and creating assessments to measure achievement of those goals are only two components of standards-based education. A third component is what happens in between—opportunities for students to learn the concepts and skills that will be assessed. Although recent studies have solicited educators' reports of progress in aligning curriculum and assessments with the *Learning Results*, adequate data are not available to objectively determine the quality of curricula and assessments and their actual alignment with the *Learning Results*.

Maine educators in some SAUs indicated in interviews that they have not had a common curriculum for some years, and that curricula and instructional practices are highly inconsistent across classrooms. The work around

developing and scoring local assessments has provided an impetus for creating common expectations and understandings around curricula. However, many districts do not have sufficient funding to provide time and experienced facilitators for professional development focused on content and pedagogical knowledge. While much of the recent work has focused on improving curricula in the areas of reading and mathematics, other content areas have been largely neglected over the past several decades due to lack of funding and time.

In order to determine current opportunities to learn at the level of individual SAUs, the curricula, assessments, and instructional practices need to be examined in more depth. Many SAUs are still developing and revising curricula in certain content areas. Once these curricula are established, they need to be communicated clearly with all educators responsible for implementing them, and educators need professional development to support effective implementation of curricula and effective classroom practices.

Reconcile the General Goals of the *Learning Results* and the Goals for Students in Special Education, Alternative Education, Career and Technical Education Programs, and for Students with Limited English Proficiency.

It is critical to evaluate opportunities to learn for specific groups of students, as well as for students who are not identified for special services but who are not achieving at grade level. SAUs are beginning to develop remediation programs in the form of in-school tutoring, after-school tutoring, and summer programs for students with special needs. Yet funding for these programs is insufficient to meet the needs of the large number of students who are expected to need remediation to meet standards. Full funding for educational support programs is needed at all grade levels and for all content areas to ensure that students truly have the opportunity to learn specified concepts and skills. In addition, there is a need to reconcile the goals of these programs with the more general goals of the *Learning Results*. Interviews with education personnel who staff alternative education programs indicate that the educational goals of their students are not well represented in the *Learning Results* and that the concept of common grade-level assessments, if implemented, would increase their dropout rates. Educators who staff and direct career and technical education programs indicate that national trade standards are more appropriate for their students than are the *Learning Results*.

Summary of Conclusions and Challenges

Five studies of the development and implementation of Maine's System of *Learning Results* and LASs were reviewed for common themes that are supported by data from interviews and surveys. All surveys were conducted by MEPRI or CRE between 2003 and 2005. This review found supporting data for the following conclusions:

- Although there are many substantive challenges yet to be resolved, there is strong support among Maine educators for the concepts of learning standards, assessment of students' progress, and accountability, which constitute the *Learning Results* and development and implementation of LASs.
- Progress has been slow but steady in establishing and refining the basic concepts and practices of the System of *Learning Results* (i.e., learning standards, assessment, and accountability). The complexity of the task and the lack of time, funds, and human capacity has slowed but not stopped progress toward full implementation.
- Districts that have made the greatest progress are those that have strong leadership, are using existing committee structures to guide work on LASs, and are finding stipends and other creative ways to provide time for teachers to do the work. Time, money, and lack of administrative support were the consistent barriers to progress in other districts.
- Work associated with creating the System of *Learning Results* and comprehensive LASs has generated stress and frustration among Maine's teachers and, at the same time, has provided highly valued professional development experiences, sharpened the focus on curriculum and instruction, and significantly defined the concepts and practices of assessing student achievement.

The challenges identified by educators and the implications for policymakers in Maine as the state, in concert with the nation, moves toward standards-based education and full implementation of the *Learning Results* include the need to:

- Increase the level of public understanding of and support for standards-based education;
- Provide clear and consistent goals for standards-based education;
- Develop a more practical roadmap for assessing student achievement of the *Learning Results*;
- Provide adequate funding to create time for work on the *Learning Results* and to support the development of human capacity;
- Provide adequate funding and models for data management systems;
- Provide funding, time, and technical assistance to ensure that all students have opportunities to learn the knowledge and skills needed to achieve the *Learning Results*; and
- Reconcile the general goals of the *Learning Results* and the goals for students in special education, alternative education, career and technical education programs, and for students with limited English proficiency.

References

Center for Research and Evaluation. (2003). *Local assessment systems: Implementation and development in Maine schools*. Orono, ME: University of Maine, Author.

In June 2003, participants in workshops on the topic of assessment conducted by the MDOE were surveyed to determine the status of LAS implementation in their SAUs. One survey was completed by the representative(s) of each SAU in attendance. Surveys were mailed to nonparticipating districts. A total of 124 SAUs returned surveys representing a return rate of 88%.

Center for Research and Evaluation. (2004). *The development and implementation of local assessment systems: Statewide progress report for all Maine schools June 2004*. Orono, ME: University of Maine, Author.

In June 2004, a survey was mailed to all SAUs to determine the status of LAS development and implementation. Surveys were mailed to each of 175 superintendents and 11 private school headmasters with the request that the survey be completed by the person most knowledgeable about the status of the LAS. A total of 125 surveys were returned representing a return rate of 67%.

Goals 2000: Educate America Act. (1994, March 31). Pub. Law 103-227 (108 Stat. 125)

Maine Department of Education. (2000, July 7). Information Letter No. 2. Policy Code: IG. Augusta, ME: Author.

Maine Department of Education. (2003). *LAS guide: Principles and criteria for the adoption of local assessment systems*. Augusta, ME: Author.

Maine Education Policy Research Institute. (2003). *Report of the Task Force to Review the Status of Implementation of the System of Learning Results*. Orono, ME: Author.

A survey was devised by the Task Force to comply with the legislative charge to assess *Learning Results* implementation in each SAU. Surveys were mailed to all superintendents, principals, and school board chairs in Maine. Sixty percent of all of Maine's teachers were also surveyed with proportionate representation from each superintendent region. Return rates were 60% from superintendents and principals, 30% from school board chairs, and 26% for teachers in K – 8 and 9 – 12 schools. The teacher sample obtained for this survey represented 16% of the total teacher population in the state.

Maine Education Policy Research Institute. (2004). *Teacher workload and stressors: Perceived changes in teachers' responsibilities, time allocation, and levels of stress in Maine public schools*. Orono, ME: Author.

The Commissioner's Task Force on Teacher Workload and staff of MEPRI developed a survey of Maine teachers to better understand perceived changes in teachers' workloads and how the job responsibilities and time allocation of teachers at various grade levels may have changed in recent years. The survey was mailed to a random sample of 60% of all teachers in each of the nine superintendent regions. A total of 3,261 surveys (33%) were returned.

Maine Education Policy Research Institute. (2005). *The development and implementation of local assessment systems Maine schools: A progress report*. Orono, ME: Author.

In May 2005, a survey was mailed to all SAUs to determine the status of development and implementation of LASs. One survey was mailed to each SAU with the request that it be completed by the person most knowledgeable of LAS progress. The overall return rate was 83%. Concurrently, interviews were conducted in 14 representative SAUs with superintendents, principals, curriculum coordinators, and teachers who were involved in leading LAS development and implementation, and with teachers who were not involved. Interviews were also conducted with representatives of special education, career and technical education, alternative education programs, and programs for students with limited English proficiency. Documents and policies were also collected and informed the overall study.

National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A nation at risk*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. Law No. 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425 (2002). Available online at <http://www.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA02/>