

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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**MAINE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF TRUANCY, DROPOUT & ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION**

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT
TO THE JOINT EDUCATION COMMITTEE
OF THE 115TH LEGISLATURE**

JANUARY, 1992

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The Maine Department of Education ensures equal employment, equal educational opportunities, and affirmative action regardless of race, sex, color, national origin, religion, marital status, age, or handicap.

Questions or grievances relating to affirmative action may be directed to:

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(289-4482)

REPORT TO THE JOINT EDUCATION COMMITTEE
January 1992

I. LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

The Office of Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education, established by the 112th Legislature, became operational December 15, 1986. The statute also established a fifteen member advisory committee appointed by the Commissioner, "reflecting the range of individuals and public and private institutions which are involved or interested in the problem and its solution." The consultant serves as a liaison "among the Commissioner, department staff, advisory committee and school administrative units and private schools as it pertains to truants, dropouts, alternative and adult education..." The Legislature's interest in this concern is also expressed by the requirement that the Advisory Committee "report annually by February 1st to the Joint Standing Committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education."

II. ADVISORY COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES 1991

The Advisory Committee has made efforts to hold meetings in different regions of the state to allow guests from local Dropout Prevention Committees to attend and participate in the discussions of the committee. This practice has been somewhat successful and of value to the committee. Notices of meetings are mailed to chairpersons of the Dropout Prevention Committees in a region inviting their attendance and participation.

The committee meetings for 1991 were as follows:

February 6,	Augusta , Capital Area Vocational Technical Center
April 23:	Ellsworth, Ellsworth Vocational Center
September 25:	Hallowell, State Annex
November 6:	Norway, Oxford Hills Technical Center

The work of the committee is often assigned to subcommittees or work groups which meet between meetings on agendas which are assigned to them for further study and reporting. This has proven to be an effective process. Using the consultant and other resources to complete a task has resulted in more productive meetings of the full committee. Committee members have also been involved in presenting testimony to legislative committees on legislative bills of interest to their work as a committee. An example of the committees success was the passage of new legislation giving authority to a superintendent of schools to issue work permits to persons under age 16. These new provisions also allow the superintendent to revoke a work permit if the conditions under which the permit was issued are not maintained. This legislation,

sometimes referred to as "school is a student's first job", became the centerpiece for legislative additions and revisions to the Maine Child Labor laws. It is important to note that this legislation was jointly developed and supported by both the Departments of Education and Labor.

COMMISSIONER'S RECOGNITION AWARDS

At the recommendation of the Advisory Committee, awards were presented to six individuals in recognition of their significant contributions of service to children and youth at risk. These awards were made by the Commissioner at the Superintendents Conference in June, 1991. Nominations for these awards are submitted by local Dropout Prevention Committees. The nominations are reviewed by the Advisory Committee for Commissioner's approval. The recipients for 1991 were:

Robert Hodge, Superintendent of Schools, Biddeford (retired);

Evora Jordan, Elementary School Counselor, SAD #61;

Robert Liebow, Principal of Dexter Regional High School;

Sandra Porter, Manager of Reny's Department Store, Pittsfield;

David Ruobo, Police Detective, Westbrook;

Michael Wood, Teacher, Alternative Education Coordinator, Deer Isle.

ASSESSMENT OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS (AAEP)

Project AAEP, a collaborative effort of the Department and the College of the Atlantic, is an outcome of the committee's previous year's activities. The project got into full swing in June with an orientation session involving representatives from the seven rural alternative programs, the project staff and consultants at the College of the Atlantic. The Project is co-directed by Frank Antonucci from the Department and Etta Mooser of the College of the Atlantic. The project utilizes the services of a graduate student from COA and a contracted consultant who will work with each program in developing an assessment process and data retrieval system. Funds from the Office of Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education have been allocated to the project as needed. This project is a Field Test which is designed to:

- (a) assist the Department in developing a systematic assessment process for measuring the effectiveness of an alternative program,
- (b) provide insight into the relationship between state level policy and local decision making,
- (c) provide insight into what qualities contribute to the success of these programs , and
- (d) provide information on the profiles of students who are served by these alternative programs.

III. OFFICE OF TRUANCY, DROPOUT AND ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

DROPOUT DATA COLLECTION TRAINING ITV SESSIONS

During the 1991-92 school year, changes will be made in the procedures used for collecting and reporting dropout data. A revised report form will be disseminated to all public schools in the Spring of 1992. This new report form will meet the 1986 recommendations of the Council of Chief State School Officers and adhere to P.L. 100-297 which requires the U.S. Commissioner of Education Statistics to provide annual dropout statistics to the Congress.

Maine has participated as one of thirty (30) states in the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) field test. This activity has given us a valuable head start in our goal to compile an annual number of dropouts in Maine. Dropout data from each school unit will be collected for each grade 7-12, by gender and by ethnicity, for a twelve month (annual) cycle.

Three ITV training sessions were conducted on the University of Maine Interactive Television Network on October 4, 11 and November 8. The use of the ITV system allowed for a highly interactive exchange of information and dialogue with participants at each of the seven University sites. The number of attendees totaled 219 school personnel, representing 54.5% of the public school administrative units serving grades 7-12. The participating units serve 55% of the students in these grades, statewide. A follow-up presentation of the video tape of the training will be made available in the Spring to those school units who were not able to participate in the Fall training. Funding for these activities was provided under a federal task order with the Department.

EDUCATION ACCESS FOR HOMELESS CHILDREN

Maine has continued to receive Stewart B. McKinney funds from the United States Department of Education for carrying out our approved State Plan for Assuring Access to Education For Homeless Children and Youth. A demonstration project in Portland Schools was initiated in September with a grant from the Department. McKinney federal funds to states are expected to increase in the next year. These new funds will provide grants to schools in accordance with federal guidelines. These grants must be directed at providing new or expanded services to meet the needs of identified homeless students and other related activities for which the applicant has demonstrated a need. A summary report of the number of homeless school age children in Maine reveals an increase of 41% from 1989. (See Appendix D.) Technical services available from the Department have been increased to help build and sustain collaborative efforts of schools and agency providers in Portland, Lewiston and Bangor.

RESOURCES AND PUBLICATIONS

Dropout Prevention Planning Guide (3rd Edition, 1990)

A 62 page guide for school planning teams (Dropout Prevention Committees) designed to assist in the identification of students at risk and planning strategies and programs to meet their needs. The Guide includes all current statutes and regulations for alternative education, dropout prevention and habitual truancy.

Directory of Alternative Education Programs in Maine (revised monthly)

A brief listing of public and private alternative programs, by town and school unit for easy reference, listing staff and grade level of students served, and contact persons.

Resource Packets

Information packages, including articles relating to school dropouts and other related issues. Focus on business - school collaboration, alternative education, parent involvement in schools, and other issues as requested.

Maine Dropout Prevention Newsletter

A quarterly publication issued four times during the school year. The Newsletter is mailed to all Superintendents and Dropout Prevention Chairpersons. Additional mailings are made to individuals and other agencies in the Maine.

Policy and Procedures Manual for Improving School Attendance

A 15 page manual providing guidance to school officials for developing strategies and policies to assure regular attendance of students in school.

Video Tapes, Bibliographies, Audio Tapes, Reports

Many materials, print and media, are available to persons doing research on the issues of dropouts, and students at risk. A visit or a call to the Office is recommended to initiate a search.

WORKSHOPS, SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

The Dropout Game

A simulated experiential activity designed to build support for whole school activities to identify students at risk. The program requires attendance of all school personnel (teachers, aides, counselors, administrators, etc.). The Dropout Game has proven to be a powerful, effective workshop for developing a common base of knowledge and understanding of the forces and factors affecting students at risk.

Time required: 2 hours.

Dropout Data and Collection

An overview of the nature of the dropout problem in the nation and in Maine. How is data collected? What use is the data in defining local needs? How can the data collection be used in selling a plan of action to a school board?

Time required: 1 hour.

Alternative Programs in Maine

A description of what is an alternative program. What makes a program successful? How to get started? Where to seek funding?

Time required: 1 1/2 hours.

Children At Risk

A workshop for school personnel designed to promote understanding of the factors which place students at risk and to outline planning strategies for developing programs and services to meet student needs.

Time required: 2 hours.

All workshops are offered without cost to public and private schools.

IV. WHAT REMAINS TO BE DONE? WHAT ARE THE MAJOR ISSUES?

(1) Dropout Prevention

Maine's long range plans for prevention of school dropouts and meeting the needs of students at risk of school failure must involve policymakers at all levels of government, the legislature, the state agencies and local boards. Parents, business persons, school officials and community leaders must participate in the planning and implementation of locally developed strategies and programs to meet specific common goals.

Current education statutes, supported and clarified by Department rules, provide the parameters within which school officials must frame their strategies and plans. The Dropout Prevention Committee, somewhat akin to the Commissioner's Advisory Committee, is empowered under statute to develop plans for meeting the needs of students at risk, K-12. Local commitment to and shared belief in our youth and children can provide the driving force for committee actions. We have seen a steadily growing commitment to dropout prevention in our state in all regions. A majority of school units have active Dropout Prevention Committees. Many of these committees meet on a regular monthly basis. Most seem to meet irregularly, but more than once annually, as required under the statutes. The accountability of their individual actions resides with the local school boards and governments.

(2) Habitual Truancy

The Advisory Committee recognizes the need to provide effective remedies for resolving habitual truancy, while at the same time accepting the reality that habitual truancy cases are virtually unenforceable through the court. Habitual truant numbers have decreased 15% in the last year. It appears that school officials have become more assertive and successful in resolving truancy through informal procedures. The appointment of qualified attendance coordinators in schools and establishment of linkages with out of school resources seems to have been brought about by the Department's increased efforts to reduce truancy through positive intervention. In addition, revisions to the child labor laws giving authority to superintendents to withhold and/or revoke work permits based on a student's status in school provides a critical new approach to dealing with truants. The superintendent or her/his designee working with the student, the potential employer, the parent and other school staff can develop an alternative education plan which appropriately uses the work site as a component of the education experience for the student. Reluctant students (and dropouts) under this process can be redirected positively to remain (rejoin) school. Under Maine's Child Labor Laws employers who seek to employ habitual truants must have permission from the superintendent or face a fine. Again, the potential for positive contacts between potential employers and school officials regarding youth under age 17 has been increased by a simple change in statute. More importantly, the collaborative efforts of community persons with schools for all youth will bring about expanded cooperation and support at the local level.

(3) Alternative Education

Alternative education programs must be viewed as local educational responses to resolve identified local needs. Alternative education programs at the middle grades and at the high school are integral components of the overall strategies to meet the needs of students at risk of school failure. Several new alternative programs have been initiated in the last calendar year. (Fryeburg, Rumford, Belfast, Livermore Falls, Mars Hill, Mechanic Falls, Rangeley)

Funding alternative programs is a critical issue in our state. Private, not-for-profit foundations, local grant sources and federal providers tend to view Maine's low dropout rates (as compared to urban areas in larger states) as an indicator that we have less need. To some extent this is true, but as a rural state we have all of the same symptoms which place our children and youth at risk, but do not have the large numbers of dropouts to compete for traditional grants. Thus, Maine's efforts have been concentrated on creating new Maine resources to help our children and youth.

The Department has worked cooperatively with the Alternative Education Association of Maine to provide support for alternative educators by participating in regional workshops and other activities of mutual interest. One such activity is the Annual Alternative Educator's Academy which was to be held in the Spring of 1991 at Unity College. Unfortunately, the Academy was cancelled due to budget constraints.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

MAINE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION Office of Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education

COMMISSIONER'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE PLATFORM STATEMENTS

- Preschool programs should be made available for all children ages 3 to 5.
- An orderly and safe school environment should be created by setting high standards for discipline and personal respect for teachers and students.
- Parent-school linkages should be strengthened.
- Elementary counselors, school social workers and attendance coordinators should be employed in all schools.
- Literacy programs and parenting education courses should be made available in each school district.
- Vocational education should be made available to all 9th and 10th grade students.
- Summer youth employment programs should be developed for "high risk" students supported by private sector and state sources.
- Recovery programs for school dropouts should be implemented by special grants on a regional basis in collaboration with the private sector and other community agencies.
- School truancy should be reduced by positive early intervention strategies in each school.
- Teacher education and staff development programs should include courses in learning styles, child development, competency based curricula and assessment measurement instruments.
- State planning grants (including incentive grants) should be tied to school improvement plans.
- A statewide public awareness program should be developed to focus attention on dropout prevention, the importance of high school completion and the availability of retraining/recovery programs for adults.
- Local-regional-state coalitions (partnerships) between the private sector, community agencies and schools should be established to assess community and state needs for developing and/or improving services for students at risk and their families.
- Success for Teen Parent programs for mothers (fathers) to remain in school should be established in all school units.
- Special long term funding to support schools in developing and implementing strategies for dropout prevention and recovery should be enacted by the legislature.

APPENDIX B

**MAINE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education**

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP
(20A-MRSA, Section 5152)**

July 1, 1990 - June 30, 1992

<u>Statute</u>	<u>Representative Cohort</u>	<u>Member</u>	<u>Geographic</u>
A	Teachers	Shelley Dutile	Lewiston
B	Elementary Principals	William Brigham	Bath
C	Secondary Principals	Terrance Despres	Ashland
D	Guidance Counselors	Peter Howard	Bridgeton
E	Adult Education Teacher	Patsey Smith	Dexter
F	Superintendent	Roger Spugnardi	Biddeford
G	Private School Administrator in Alternative Education	Emanuel Pariser	Camden
H	Human Services	Susan Dustin	State
I	Mental Health and Mental Retardation	Nancy Warburton	State
J	Corrections	Ann Therrien	State
K	Labor	Vacancy	State
L	Local DPC	Edward White	Jonesboro
M	Business	William Snow	Cumberland Foreside
N	Other	Etta Mooser	Bar Harbor
N	Other	Carleton Sanford	Damariscotta

State Board: William Lawrence

Consultant: Frank J. Antonucci, Jr.
289-5110

Secretary: Suzanne T. Preston

APPENDIX C

MAINE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education

HABITUAL TRUANT TABLES

TABLE 1

HABITUAL TRUANTS

<u>School Year</u>	<u>Identified Student Age</u>			<u>Identified but Unresolved</u>		
	<u>7-13</u>	<u>14-16</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>7-13</u>	<u>14-16</u>	<u>Total</u>
1981-82	115	694	809	27	196	223
1982-83	107	560	667	33	163	196
1983-84	139	659	798	33	112	145
1984-85	128	704	832	27	205	232
1985-86	97	818	915	16	248	264
1986-87	128	920	1,048	52	351	403
1987-88	132	977	1,109	57	477	534
1988-89	150	925	1,075	76	308	384
	<u>7-14</u>	<u>15-16</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>7-14</u>	<u>15-16</u>	<u>Total</u>
1989-90*	283	837	1,120	111	282	392
1990-91	230	722	952	73	175	248

TABLE 2

HABITUAL TRUANT CASES REFERRED TO DISTRICT ATTORNEY

<u>School Year</u>	<u>Student Age</u>		
	<u>7-13</u>	<u>14-16</u>	<u>Total</u>
1981-82	3	8	11
1982-83	13	12	25
1983-84	11	15	26
1984-85	7	18	25
1985-86	5	15	20
1986-87	12	4	16
1987-88	8	5	13
1988-89	5	14	19
	<u>7-14</u>	<u>15-16</u>	<u>Total</u>
1989-90*	11	5	16
1990-91	6	4	10

* Age categories changed to reflect new statutory provisions effective October 1, 1989.

APPENDIX D

MAINE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education

HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN MAINE

<u>1989</u>	<u>1991</u>
3,400	4,824

(Method: reports from shelter providers, key person surveys)

<u>Location</u>	<u>1989</u>	<u>1991</u>
Greater Portland Area	600-700	1,100-1,250
Lewiston-Auburn	250-350	400-475
Bangor	190-250	290-340
Skowhegan	120-170	280-310

1991

<u>Shelters for Youth</u>	<u>Shelters for Homeless Families</u>	<u>Family Crisis Services</u>
1,210	515	444

Characteristics

Street kids; migrating rural kids; runaways; kids farmed out to relatives, friends;
kids staying with friends; double/tripled apartment renters; families in shelters

APPENDIX E

MAINE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education

TABLE I. MAINE HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATES

1986 - 1990

School Year	<u>1986-87</u>	<u>1987-88</u>	<u>1988-89</u>	<u>1989-90</u>	<u>1990-91</u>
Pupils 9-12	70,609	69,251	66,937	64,526	63,371
Number of Dropouts	2,703	2,781	2,518	2,180	1,875
Percent	3.8%	4.0%	3.8%	3.4%	3.0%

A dropout rate reflects the percentage of enrolled students who leave school without transferring, excluding deaths, and including expulsions during the school year.

TABLE II. MAINE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES

Graduating Class of

School Year	<u>1986</u>	<u>1987</u>	<u>1988</u>	<u>1989</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>1991</u>
Number of Students	13,006	13,692	13,808	14,226	13,306	12,764
Percent	74.9%	78.8%	77.7%	79.3%	79.6%	81.2%

A graduation rate reflects the number of graduates compared to the number of 9th graders in each class four years earlier. Maine calculations are not adjusted for migration or deaths in the cohort group. The rates in this table reflect only diploma recipients from public high schools.

TABLE III. MAINE SCHOOL COMPLETION RATES

Completion Class of

School Year	<u>1986</u>	<u>1987</u>	<u>1988</u>	<u>1989</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>1991</u>
Number of Completers	13,958	14,726	15,096	15,471	N/A	N/A
Percent	80.3%	84.8%	84.9%	86.2%	N/A	N/A

A high school completion rate reflects the number of persons completing either a traditional diploma or a GED (up to age 20) compared to the number of 9th graders in each class four years earlier. Maine calculations are not adjusted for migration or deaths in this cohort group. GED completers are assigned to a previous completion class by age.