

# MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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Maine Department of Education  
Office of Truancy, Dropout, and Alternative Education

ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT  
TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE  
ON  
EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS  
OF THE 118TH LEGISLATURE

January 1998

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# ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

## January 1998

### I. LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

The Office of Truancy, Dropout, and Alternative Education was established by the 112th Legislature in 1986. The legislation also established a fifteen-member Advisory Committee, "reflecting the range of individuals and public and private institutions which are involved or interested in the problem and its solution." The consultant is to serve "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 these areas is 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" (20-MRSA, Section 5151 and 5152). In 1993, the 116th Legislature reaffirmed their commitment to the Advisory Committee by not repealing the committee as proposed under Legislative Document No. 1089, Repealing Advisory Boards on Education Matters.

### II. ADVISORY COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES 1997

Committee meetings were held as follows in 1997:

April 18, 1997	Belfast
June 19, 1997	Augusta
October 9 & 10, 1997	Topsham
December 19, 1997	Lewiston

The Advisory Committee participated in a facilitated two-day retreat at the Sky-Hy Retreat and Conference Center in Topsham on October 9 & 10, 1997. The Committee developed a plan of activities to be carried out in the 1998. A major goal of the committee is to propose legislation to revise the habitual truancy laws. A survey of twenty two statutes from from other states was conducted in 1997. The findings from this survey revealed similar concerns about ineffectiveness of current state statutes. The committee plans to propose legislation to the Joint Education Committee to provide a more effective and immediate resolution to unresolved truancy.

#### *Commissioner's Recognition Awards 1997*

The Commissioner's Recognition Awards, originally established in 1989, recognize five individuals who have made significant contributions of service to children and youth at risk in their schools or communities. Nominations for these awards are submitted by local Dropout Prevention Committees and are reviewed by a subcommittee of the Advisory Committee. The nominations are referred to the Commissioner for approval. The award were presented at a Blaine House Reception on June 19, to the following persons:

*Daniel Campbell, Student Assistance Team Counselor, Edward Little High School, Auburn*

*Paul Cochran, Student Services Coordinator, Waldo Regional Vocational Center, Belfast.*

*Richard H. French, Alternative Education Teacher, MSAD # 52, Rive Valley, Turner*

*Deborah A. Holmes, Special Education Teacher, MSAD # 18, Bucksport Schools*

*Don Mendell, Social Worker/ Counselor, MSAD # 48, Newport*

*John Nichols, Business Owner, Nichols Motors, Wiscasset*

## **Star Dropout Schools 1996**

The following high schools have attained four years of successive dropout rate declines, from above the state average in 1992-93 (2.74%) to below the state average in 1995-96 (2.95%).

Bucksport High School (Hancock County): 6.42% to 2.86%

Lubec High School (Washington County): 12.5% to 1.77%

Nokomis High School (Penobscot County): 4.27% to 2.76%

## **WHAT PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE?**

### **Dropout Prevention**

Maine high school dropout rates in the recent five school years (1991-92 to 1995-96) have averaged at 3%. Unfortunately the dropout rates for sub populations, such as migrant students, Native Americans and Hispanics are considerably higher than the state average.

Our continued efforts must be directed to assuring that all students will have the opportunity to receive a free and appropriate education leading to a high school completion credential and successful transition to further education and employment in a highly technologic society. The cornerstone of Maine's effort to reduce high school dropout rates is the local dropout prevention committee required by Maine statute. The DPC is responsible for developing a school improvement plan for identifying students at risk, K-12. The improvement plan must be updated annually and presented to the local school board with recommendations for positive action. Many dropout prevention committees meet regularly during the school year and connect their work to other committees, such as the student assistance team. Dropout Prevention Committees are not required to submit annual reports to the Department of Education since their accountability is to the local school boards.

## **Increasing Graduation Rates**

Maine's goal to reach a 90% graduation rate for the Class of 2000 is important to every young person who is currently enrolled in high school who will need to enter the work force where the likelihood of continued training or education will be required for most workers. The consequences for dropping out of school are well documented by national research. The 1991 unemployment rate for persons with less than four years of high school was 14.8%, compared to 7% for those with four years of high school and 3% for those with four or more years of college. While employed youth become a net gain to a community, unemployed youth become a net loss. The effects of dropping out often handicap the next generation of children since the education level of the parent is a predictor of the economic status of the family. Data from Maine's 1997 Kids Count shows that 18.0% of Maine's children were at or below the federal poverty line in 1991-95. Research shows that a mother's educational level is an important predictor of the future success of her children. Our goal to assure that all students attain a high school completion credential must be supported by increased efforts to provide adequate funding for adult education programs which historically have provided alternative routes to many adults to gain a high school completion credential.

## **Habitual Truancy**

The Advisory Committee since its inception has consistently supported efforts to reduce truancy through prevention strategies in the early grades. Resolving habitual truancy requires the cooperation of local agencies, local district attorneys, and the court system. While local schools are expected to refer unresolved habitual truancy to district attorneys, reports from the schools show that a large percentage of habitual truant cases remain unresolved.

Referrals to District Court by District Attorneys are few in number. Maine law requires each

school unit to appoint an attendance coordinator, who shall also be a member of the local Dropout Prevention Committee. Intervention strategies must include working with the parent and in-school teams such as Student Assistance Team as well as community agencies and businesses. A state law regarding work permits which was recommended by the Advisory Committee in 1991 has given school superintendents the authority to withhold and/or revoke a work permit for an habitual truant under age 16. Cooperation from local employers who wish to help students succeed in school and at work has increased significantly since the passage of this law. School and work, and school to work programs show great promise in preparing youth for future employment and in holding students in school. The school attendance coordinator, who can provide the connection between the school and the community, plays a vital role in resolving the complex social issues facing students at risk and their families. Increased support from other Departments such as DHS and DOL is needed to reinforce efforts to resolve truancy at the local level. A recent report from the US Department of Education and the US Department of Justice supports the need to address truancy as a means to prevent day time crimes committed by youth. Truancy can be the first step for a youth to engage in delinquent behavior. However, if the principle of restorative justice is applied to address the truant behavior in accompaniment with appropriate services, then the incidents of truancy should be reduced without the need for Court intervention.

### **Alternative Education**

Alternative programs in Maine have been established in at least seventy (70) Maine school units. Many of these programs have long histories. New programs were established during the 1996--97 school year, despite reduced school budgets. Lack of state funding for developing alternative programs remains a chronic issue. The Advisory Committee has

recommended that the state provide funds for developing alternative programs in schools to meet the needs of students who are at risk of school failure. Such funding should be targeted to assist program development at the local level with specific objectives based on identified needs. Planning and implementation of grant requests must be supported by a plan of action generated by the local Dropout Prevention Committee. The Department of Education's commitment to support alternative programs would recognize these grants as an investment in our youth, which will pay future dividends in less social costs for rehabilitation and treatment for students who leave school too soon.

The Advisory Committee has provided support to the Alternative Education Association of Maine (AEA) in its efforts to provide workshops and dialogues for alternative educators. The committee has invited the AEA president to its regular meetings. The Advisory Committee has provided valuable assistance and support to the AEA. The AEA is a regionally focused organization.

### **Homeless Education**

Maine has continued to receive federal funding under the Stewart B. Mc Kinney Act. The Department must use these funds for administration and providing grants to LEA's for developing programs and services for homeless students to assure their access to school.

Federal funding to the Department for implementing projects in LEA's is awarded by a grant application notice from the Office of Homeless Education. The Advisory Committee has been active in developing and reviewing Maine's required State plan for meeting the provisions of federal and state law for homeless students. Our State Plan is connected to the IASA Coordinated plan to assure that all students may achieve Maine's Learning Results.

Ongoing support to assist shelter teachers in disseminating information to school officials regarding the needs of students in the shelter schools has been extended by informational mailings to school principals and superintendents.



# APPENDIX

MAINE DEPARTMENT of EDUCATION,  
 TRUANCY, DROPOUT AND ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION  
 ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP  
 (20-A MRSA, Section 5152)

July 1, 1996 - June 30, 1998

STATUTE	REPRESENTATIVE COHORT	MEMBER	GEOGRAPHIC
A	Teachers	Nancy Cook	York
B	Elementary Principals	Dick Marchi	Damariscotta
C	Secondary Principals	William B. Grant	Danforth
D	Guidance Counselors	Shelley Reed	Greene
E	Adult Education Teacher	Marti Thornton	Hallowell
F	Superintendent	Roger Spugnardi	Waldoboro
G	Private School	Emanuel Pariser	Camden
H	Human Services	Susan Dustin	State
I	Mental Health & Mental Retardation	Rhama Schofield	State
J	Corrections	Ann Therrien	State
K	Labor	Mary Fran Kiesow	State
L	Local Dropout Prevention Committee	Helen Nichols	Belfast
M	Business	John Butler	Lewiston
N	College Teacher	Edward Schultz	University of ME
N	Maine Indian Schools	Neana Neptune	Old Town

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Support Staff: Catherine Crosier  
 Sandy St. Michel

MAINE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE OF TRUANCY, DROPOUT, AND ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

TABLE I  
HABITUAL TRUANTS IDENTIFIED

School Year	Identified Student Age		Total	Identified but Unresolved					
	7-14	15-16		7-14	(%)	15-16	(%)	Total	(%)
1990-91	230	722	952	73	31.7	175	24.2	248	26.1
1991-92	344	724	1,068	134	39.0	205	28.3	339	31.7
1992-93	231	909	1,140	84	36.4	280	30.8	364	31.9
1993-94	336	890	1,226	102	30.4	261	29.3	363	29.6
1994-95	414	1,011	1,425	134	32.4	291	28.8	425	29.8
1995-96	366	782	1,148	117	31.9	240	30.6	357	31.0
1996-97	454	814	1,268	142	31.2	308	37.8	450	35.4

TABLE II  
HABITUAL TRUANT CASES REFERRED TO DISTRICT ATTORNEY

School Year	Student Age		Total
	7-14	15-16	
1990-91	6	4	10
1991-92	3	1	4
1992-93	6	4	10
1993-94	2	1	3
1994-95	6	1	7
1995-96	5	0	5
1996-97	0	0	0

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

Table I. MAINE HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATES

School Year	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96
Pupils 9-12	62,872	63,240	64,001	64,865	65,575
Number of Dropouts	1,795	1,733	1,867	1,981	1,935
Percentage	2.8%	2.74%	2.92%	3.05%	2.95%

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

Table II. MAINE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES

Class of	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Number of Graduates	12,471	12,480	12,642	11,705	13,090
Percentage	82.6%	82.4%	80.4%	74.5%	81.3%

A *graduation rate* reflects the percentage of 9th graders who graduated with their class four years later. Maine calculations are not adjusted for migration or deaths in this cohort group. The rates in this table reflect only traditional diploma recipients from public high schools.

Table III. MAINE SCHOOL COMPLETION RATES

Class of	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Number of Completers	13,436	13,479	13,511	12,810	14,121
Percentage	88.9%	89.0%	85.9%	81.5%	93.4%

A *high school completion rate* reflects the percentage of persons under age 21 who have completed either a regular diploma or a GED 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 graduation class by their age at the time of attaining a GED or diploma in Maine.

August 1997

# MAINE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

## A Summary of Stewart B. McKinney Grants for Assuring Access to Education for Homeless Children

### USDE Grant Awards

YEAR	DATE AUTHORIZED	AMOUNT	AUTHORIZED USE OF GRANT	PERIOD OF GRANT USE
1	1/29/88	\$50,000	Develop State Plan Public Hearings Census	2/88-9/89
2	7/20/89	\$50,000	Implement State Plan	3/89-9/90
3	6/14/90	\$50,000	Pilot Projects to Carry our Plan Implement State Plan	10/90-9/92
4	11/90	\$50,000	Demonstration Projects Revise State Plan	7/91-7/94
5	7/91	\$50,000	Special Projects Implement Revised State Plan	7/91-7/94
6	8/92	\$131,655	Grants to Schools, Operation, Administration	7/92-7/94
7	8/93	\$106,717	Grants to Schools, Operation, Administration	7/93-9/95
8	9/94	\$96,845	Grants to Schools, Operation, Administration	7/94-9/96
9	8/95	\$107,254	Grants to School, Operation, Administration	7/95-9/97
10	8/96	\$100,000	Grants to Schools, Administration	7/96-9/97
11	7/97	\$100,000	Grants to Schools, Administration	7/97-9/98

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:

*Affirmative Action Officer  
Maine Department of Education  
23 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333-0023  
(207) 287-5114  
TDD (207) 287-2550*