

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT


TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

OF THE 119th LEGISLATURE

January 1999



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ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT
January 1999

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 1998

Committee meetings were held as follows in 1998:

<i>February 7, 1998</i>	<i>Augusta</i>
<i>May 1, 1998</i>	<i>Bangor</i>
<i>October 1 & 2, 1998</i>	<i>(Retreat) Topsham</i>
<i>December 4, 1998</i>	<i>Augusta</i>

The Advisory Committee participated in a facilitated two-day retreat at the Sky-Hy Retreat and Conference Center in Topsham on October 1 & 2, 1998. The Committee worked on developing a comprehensive plan of activities to be carried out in 1999. A major goal of the committee will be to recommend changes to the habitual truancy statutes. The committee will seek legislation to resolve truancy at the local level of government by simplifying the process of identifying habitual truants at early grades with parent conferences to resolve the reasons for truancy.

Commissioner's Recognition Awards 1998

The Commissioner's Recognition Awards, were established in 1989, to recognize 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 SAU Dropout Prevention Committees to the Commissioner of Education. The 1998 awards were presented at a reception at the Pine Tree State Arboretum on June 12, 1998. The following persons received the awards:

- Scott Bramhall, Attendance Officer, MSAD #40, Waldoboro
- Elaine Chenard, Educator, MSAD #52, Turner
- David T. Eretzian, Principal, Steven Mills & Franklin Schools, Auburn
- Patricia Magaudda, Special Education director, Acton
- Bernard Peatman, Teacher, Alternative School, Waterville
- Martha Toothaker, Teacher, MSAD #5, Rockland

Star Dropout Schools 1997:

The following high schools have attained four years of successive dropout rate declines, from above the state average in 1993-94 (2.92%) to below the state average in 1996-97 (2.98%).

- Traip Academy, Kittery: 3.02% to 0.88%
- Forest Hills Consolidated School, Jackman: 5.71% to 1.67%
- Hall-Dale High School, Farmingdale: 3.31% to 0.73%
- Piscataquis Community High School, Guilford: 5.31% to 2.73%
- Mt. Ararat High School, Topsham: 4.01% to 2.44%

III. WHAT PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE?

Dropout Prevention

Maine high school dropout rates have averaged at or below 3.05% in the recent five school years (1991-92 to 1996-97). The cumulative number of dropouts in this 5 year period is 9,497 students. 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. All students must be provided an opportunity for a successful transition to education and/or further employment. Maine's goal to reduce high school dropout rates and to increase graduation rates depends on local Dropout Prevention Committees which are responsible for developing a school improvement plan for identifying students at risk. The SAU plan should be updated annually. The DPC shall present to the local school board, recommendations and resources needed to carry out its recommendations. Many dropout prevention committees meet regularly during the school year and connect their work to other groups, such as the student assistance team.

Increasing Graduation and Completion 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. High school graduates will enter the workforce where technical training and/or education will be required for most workers. The 1991, the 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. Research shows that a mother's educational level is an important predictor of future success of her children. Maine's goal to assure that all students attain a high school completion credential must be supported by increased efforts to provide adequate funding for alternative education and adult education programs which have historically provided alternative routes for many students to gain a high school completion credential.

Habitual Truancy

The Commissioner's Advisory Committee has consistently supported efforts to reduce truancy through early prevention strategies. Resolving habitual truancy requires the cooperation of local agencies, the parent and employers. While superintendents are expected to refer unresolved habitual truant cases to District Attorneys, 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 the parent and in-school teams such as the Student Assistance Team. Maine statute empowers a superintendent of schools to withhold and/or revoke a work permit for an habitual truant under age 16. Local employers who wish to help students succeed in school and at work often provide significant incentives by their cooperative efforts with school officials. School and work, and school to work programs show great promise in preparing youth for future employment and rewarding careers.

Support from other State Departments such as DHS and DOL is needed to reinforce efforts to resolve truancy at the local level. A 1996 report from the US Department Education and the US Department Justice supports the need to address truancy as a means to prevent day time crimes committed by youth. Truancy frequently is the first step for a youth to engage in delinquent behavior. However, if the principal of restorative justice is applied, the truant behavior may be reduced by providing the student with services to meet his/her needs more appropriately from his/her community.

Alternative Education

Alternative programs have been established in at least eighty-five (85) Maine schools. Some of these programs have long histories. Funding for alternative programs remains as a challenge to school officials. 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 for each student. Planning and implementation of strategies should be tied to plan of action generated by the local Dropout Prevention Committees. The Department of

Education's role is to provide technical assistance to SAU's by supporting the state's commitment to serving the needs of students of risk of school failure.

Dropping out of school is a cumulative process arising out of a series of events and experiences which impact on youth in their transition into adolescence. Social influences cause the adolescent to become alienated and disengaged from school, and inevitably some drop out. Dropping out is not an episodic event, occurring as result of short-term or whimsical displeasure with treatment in school. Nor is dropping out simply and irrational decision made as result of a combination of economic hardship and prior school failure. Although this may explain a part of the phenomenon, the process of dropping out is more complex.

Educational research has identified at least two categories of influences of dropping out – both *push* and *pull* effects (Rumberger, 1987; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Push effects are factors located within the school itself, which negatively impact the connection adolescents make with the school's environment and cause them to reject the context of schooling. This rejection, on the part of students, may manifest in disruptive behavior, absenteeism, or a cessation of academic effort. In sanctioning this kind of behavior by suspending, failing, or issuing poor grades to students, schools sometime produce continued failure, rather than redirecting students on a course to success.

Homeless Education

Maine has continued to receive federal funding under the Stewart B. McKinney Act. The Department may 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 from the Department for implementing projects is awarded by a grant application notice from the Office of Homeless Education to all school units. Maine's state plan for meeting the provisions of federal and state law for homeless students is connected to Maine's IASA Coordinated Plan to assure that all students may achieve the Learning Results. All Maine principals and superintendents have been advised to support the needs of students who are receiving education support in shelters by cooperating with shelter teachers in documenting pupil's learning results.

DROPPING OUT: A NATIONAL DILEMMA

In the last half of the 1980s, the terms at-risk and high risk were not used as descriptors in literature about dropouts. Today researchers seek out ways to identify three types of at-risk students: (1) children who come from different cultural backgrounds or minority students, (2) children from limited English-speaking families, and (3) children from poor families. These students are characterized as “children and youth who lack the home, and community resources to benefit from conventional schooling practices.” Because of poverty, cultural obstacles, or linguistic differences, they tend to have low academic achievement and high dropout rates. Such students are heavily concentrated among minority groups, immigrants, non English speaking families and economically disadvantaged populations.

Research in the 1990s has been responsible for recognizing the depth of the problem. Many researchers have noted their concerns about the growing, youthful minority population in America and the lack of success of minorities in our schools. Based on an analysis of the U.S. population, Harold Hodgkinson projected that by the year 2000, one third of the nations school population will be minority. Other research shows that dropout rates vary significantly by ethnicity and class and that these rates are highest among American Indians, Blacks and Hispanics. These studies serve to demonstrate that the dropout problem in America is not restricted to the poor inner city minority youth, but that it is diverse in ethnic as well as class characteristics.

Youth who drop out are more likely to become economic burdens on society and are more likely to require public assistance. Business leaders and policy makers alike predict that the public will pay heavily for the high proportion of youth who drop out, creating an increased need for social and welfare programs.

In the past, an economy existed to provide an orderly transition from dropping out to entry into numerous labor occupations. Such an economy no longer exists, therefore dropping out of school often leads to no employment, or to underemployment in low-paid, often part-time jobs. Researchers have reported that not only are high school dropouts expected to be a massive drain on welfare programs, but they are more likely to be involved in juvenile courts and prison systems. Since 1960, delinquency rates of teenagers have increased by 130%. In fact it has been demonstrated in some research that failure to graduate from high school is a predictor of adult criminal activity.

Other research points to a number of social problems in American society which place youth at risk. In 1994, the Alan Guttmacher Institute reported that each year 1.1 million teen age females became pregnant. Approximately 40% of the females who drop out of school do so for reasons related to pregnancy and marriage; however, the majority (60%) of females dropout for a variety of other reasons. In 1986, the National Center for Health statistics reported that between 1950 and 1984, the rate of suicide among individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 had increased by 178%. Research has consistently demonstrated that the relationship between inappropriate attitudes toward health and self are strongly related to dropping out of school.

The Minority in our Schools

Schools in America are geared to success, not failure. Historically minority students from their earliest school experiences have been labeled as potential failures, their language criticized, and their origins suspect. Some researchers report that certain indigenous minorities have developed a resistance to school and suggested that “an apathetic dominant society” has historically excluded American Indians from the dominant culture. This in some ways has become a double-edged sword in that frequently the American Indians have chosen to exclude themselves, thus exacerbating the situation.

Research clearly indicates that Blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians are more frequently alienated by school than are Asian Americans and other new immigrants. In fact it has been found that Asians and new immigrants regard the school experience as a major path to success. Some researchers maintain that the nation’s tolerance of high dropout rates among certain minority groups is a manifestation of a social strategy to keep minorities out of the political decision making process. Given the fact that the typical high school dropout participates minimally in the political structure, and is less likely to become involved in political decision-making as an adult and is therefore far less able to shape his/her own fate.

Many researchers conclude that minority youth experience more factors associated with dropping out than the general population, such as poverty, school failure, family problems and involvement in the criminal justice and social welfare systems. In addition, they note that minority youth are more likely to come from families or environments with high rates of drug and alcohol abuse; therefore, they have greater chance of residing under conditions that are conducive to dropping out of school.

Excerpts: PDK. Hot Topics: School Expulsions and Dropouts
Understanding the Issues, June 1998.
FJA: 12/23/98

APPENDIX

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

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

July 1, 1997 - June 20, 1999

STATUTE	REPRESENTATIVE COHORT	MEMBER	GEOGRAPHIC
A	Teachers	Nancy Cook	York
B	Elementary Principals	Dick Marchi	Damariscotta
C	Secondary Principals	Roger Lachapelle	Lewiston
D	Guidance Counselors	Shelley Reed	Greene
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	Alternative Education	Al Laplante	
N	Maine Indian Schools	Neana Neptune	Old Town

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Sandy St. Michel

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

Table I. *MAINE HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATES*

School Year	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Pupils 9-12	63,240	64,001	64,865	65,575	66,443
Number of Dropouts	1,733	1,867	1,981	1,935	1,981
Percentage	2.74%	2.92%	3.05%	2.95%	2.98%

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	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Number of Graduates	12,480	12,642	11,705	13,090	13,121
Percentage	82.4%	80.4%	74.5%	81.3%	85.2%

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

Table III. *MAINE SCHOOL COMPLETION RATES*

Class of	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Number of Completers	13,479	13,511	12,810	14,121	13,448
Percentage	89.0%	85.9%	81.5%	93.4%	88.8%

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 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.

**MAINE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF TRUANCY, DROPOUT, AND ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION
ANALYSIS OF DROPOUT DATA
MAINE PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS**

School Year	1990-91		1991-92		1992-93		1993-94		1994-95		1995-96		1996-97		1997-98	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Membership 9-12	28,776	26,941	28,380	27,006	28,779	26,956	28,803	27,302	29,103	27,407	29,612	27,943	29,819	28,467	30,272	28,893
Percent of Total Membership	51.65%	48.35%	51.24%	48.76%	51.64%	48.36%	51.34%	48.66%	51.50%	48.50%	51.45%	48.55%	51.16%	48.84%	51.17%	48.83%
Number of Dropouts	1,094	757	1,000	797	995	738	1,096	793	1,163	818	1,141	706	1,108	783	1,178	767
Percent of Male & Female Dropouts	59.10%	40.90%	55.65%	44.35%	57.41%	42.59%	58.02%	41.98%	58.71%	41.29%	61.78%	38.22%	58.59%	41.50%	60.57%	39.43%

The percentage of male dropouts is higher than their proportion in membership.

The percentage of female dropouts is less than their proportion in membership.

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, Maine 04333-0023
(207) 287-5114
TDD (207) 287-2550*