

2/1/07 Sample Education Hearing Talking Points:

- **Island Schools Require Unique Solutions!**
- **We are encouraged that Governor Baldacci and other legislators are serious about reducing the state's property tax burden. No one understands the need to achieve tax relief better than island communities, some of which have seen their property taxes triple during the past few years.**
- **The proposed plans school consolidation plans will have the effect of dismantling island schools and, by doing so, will dismantle the very communities that have come to define Maine's coastal heritage as "the way life should be."**
- **The public comment process seems like more of an exercise than a truly democratic process. The projected savings from the Governor's plan has already been factored into the state's budget. There is very little real opportunity for public input on this flawed plan.**
- **Local governance is critical to island school survival. Island Schools are different than mainland schools, and different from one another. It is hard to imagine a "cookie cutter" governance approach such as that proposed by the governor that would work for these very different schools.**
- **This plan will take away local control from island schools. Robbing island communities—parents, teachers, students, and town governments—of their voice in school governance will effectively dismantle the role of island schools as a vital part of island community life.**
- **If governance of the new districts is based on population, island voices would be entirely lost in the new super-districts. For example, the mainland population of the Cumberland super-district is 400 times larger than that of Chebeague Island. The school board would need 400 members to justify one member from Chebeague. Effectively, this plan writes off island schools—and the communities they serve—as irrelevant.**

Possible discussion points for public hearing testimony (these are the things suggested by participants in the January 26 brainstorming meeting in Rockland):

While each island school is different, these schools share a number of characteristics:

- **Geographic isolation**—you cannot get to an island without a boat.
- **Multi-graded classrooms**
- **Heavy community investment in the school**—island communities know how important their schools are to community sustainability, and many provide significant support for their schools beyond that which is provided by the state.
- **Island schools make the most of every dollar**, with minuscule administrations and staff who play multiple roles (from teaching in multi-level classrooms to driving the bus, to cleaning the floors, to doing the bookkeeping).
- **Island schools individualize and differentiate instruction**, allowing each child to receive the most appropriate education for his or her needs.
- **Island schools are important providers of adult education** to community members.
- **Island schools are community cultural centers** whose buildings are used more efficiently than most mainland schools—for meetings, community suppers, and a host of other activities.
- **Island schools provide a safe and secure environment for kids** that encourages new families to move to island communities—thereby strengthening those communities.

Collaboration among island schools has enabled them to share knowledge and programs that enriches and strengthens individual schools, while allowing them to maintain their unique local character.

Examples of collaboration include:

- Bringing **private investments and grants** to improve island education
- Offering **professional development opportunities** for island teachers through such programs as the Island Teachers Conference
- Sharing the expense of **inter-island arts programming**
- Creating opportunities for **inter-island physical education programming** such as sports tournaments, track and field, etc.
- **Sharing library resources** with other islands
- Providing **transitional programming for students** transferring from island to mainland schools
- Providing **college readiness and aspirations** programming for students graduating from island schools to attend college on the mainland.

Other points:

Island Schools function with part time administrations – with superintendent support from 1 day per month to 3 days per month

Island School Board do more than just attend meetings – they act as the school nurses, physical education teachers, curriculum consultants and much more

There are approximately 500 island students attending island schools