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"Better Schools for Maine Students"

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TESTIMONY REGARDING LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS RELATIVE TO SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT CONSOLIDATION AND OTHER RELATED ISSUES

FEBRUARY 5, 2007

SENATOR BOWMAN, REPRESENTATIVE NORTON, SENATOR ROTUNDO, REPRESENTATIVE FISCHER, AND MEMBERS OF THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEES ON EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS AND APPROPRIATIONS AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS, MY NAME IS LARRY LITTLEFIELD AND I AM THE IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT OF THE MAINE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION (MSSA) AND SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS IN KITTEERY. I AM HERE TODAY REPRESENTING THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF MSSA.

DUE TO THE FACT THAT THERE ARE SEVERAL PIECES OF LEGISLATION THAT ADDRESS THE SUBJECT OF CONSOLIDATION AND THESE WERE NOT ALL AVAILABLE TO US, WE HAVE CHOSEN TO OFFER GENERAL COMMENTS AND WHERE APPROPRIATE, MORE SPECIFIC POSITIONS.

OUR ASSOCIATION HAS ALWAYS SUPPORTED EFFORTS FOR COLLABORATION, REGIONALIZATION, AND CONSOLIDATION. THERE ARE NUMEROUS SUCCESSFUL REGIONAL COLLABORATIONS CURRENTLY OPERATING THROUGHOUT THE STATE. MSSA IS READY TO JOIN WITH YOU, THE GOVERNOR AND OTHERS TO WORK TOWARDS SPECIFIC PLANS TO HELP US REACH THE NEXT LEVEL OF REGIONALIZING AND CONSOLIDATING.

FIRST, WE GO ON RECORD AS OPPOSING GOVERNOR BALDACCI'S CONSOLIDATION PLAN AS CONTAINED IN THE DRAFT BUDGET DOCUMENT. OUR ASSOCIATION FINDS THIS PROPOSAL TO BE TOO EXTREME, TOO FAST, TOO TOP DOWN AND BASED ON UNSUBSTANTIATED PROJECTED SAVINGS. FURTHERMORE, NO SUCH SERIOUS MAKEOVER OF MAINE'S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM SHOULD BE DONE WITHOUT THE OPPORTUNITY FOR INPUT FROM THOSE

AFFECTED AND FROM MAINE'S CITIZENS WHOSE LOCAL CONTROL WOULD BE OBLITERATED.

MSSA JOINS WITH THE MAINE SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION IN ASKING YOU TO TAKE THE GOVERNOR'S PROPOSAL OFF THE TABLE AND WORK WITH THE VARIOUS CONSTITUENCIES WHOSE COLLECTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS CAN HELP SHAPE A RESPONSIBLE PLAN THAT RECOGNIZES THE DIVERSITY OF OUR STATE AND HONORS ITS VALUES AND TRADITIONS.

MSSA SUGGESTS THAT THE FOLLOWING ARE CRITICAL ELEMENTS IN ACHIEVING ANY SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF A CONSOLIDATION PLAN:

- A CLEAR GOAL. THE PURPOSE OF A "COLLABORATION, REGIONALIZATION, CONSOLIDATION" (CRC) INITIATIVE SHOULD BE TO DELIVER EDUCATIONAL SERVICES IN A COST EFFICIENT MANNER WHILE FOSTERING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE, EDUCATIONAL EQUITY, ADEQUACY, AND IMPROVED STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT.
- CAREFUL PLANNING. CRC INITIATIVES SHOULD BE BASED ON SOUND DATA, CAREFUL ANALYSIS, AND THOROUGH STUDY WITH CONSIDERATION OF THE IMPACTS ON STUDENTS, TAXPAYERS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES.
- AN INCLUSIVE PROCESS. THE PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING CRC INITIATIVES AT ALL LEVELS SHOULD BE BROADLY INCLUSIVE WITH PARTICIPATION BY PARENTS, COMMUNITY MEMBERS, ELECTED OFFICIALS, SCHOOL OFFICIALS, BUSINESS AND CIVIC LEADERS, THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND OTHERS.
- ALIGNMENT OF GOVERNANCE AND SERVICES. THERE SHOULD BE A CLOSE ALIGNMENT BETWEEN SCHOOL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND THE DELIVERY OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN BROAD PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION IN MAINE.
- STATE'S SUPPORTING ROLE. THE STATE'S ROLE WITH RESPECT TO SCHOOL CRC INITIATIVES SHOULD BE TO PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR PLANNING EFFORTS, TO REMOVE BARRIERS TO REGIONAL COOPERATION AND TO CREATE INCENTIVES FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF CAREFULLY PLANNED CRC INITIATIVES. AT THE SAME TIME, THE STATE SHOULD ADDRESS ISSUES THAT HAVE LEAD TO THE WITHDRAWALS FROM AND DISSOLUTION OF SEVERAL SAD'S. THE STATE SHOULD NOT TAKE OVER THE DELIVERY OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES IN MAINE OR MANDATE THE CONSOLIDATION OF SCHOOL UNITS WITHOUT VOTER APPROVAL.
- LOCAL APPROVAL AND IMPLEMENTATION. CRC INITIATIVES SHOULD BE RESPONSIVE TO LOCAL CONDITIONS AND APPROVED AND IMPLEMENTED AT THE LOCAL LEVEL.

PLEASE KNOW THAT MEMBERS OF THE MSSA WANT TO PLAY A ROLE IN ASSISTING YOU TO DEVELOP A PLAN THAT MAKES SENSE FOR MAINE, AND

ENHANCES EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS. WE BELIEVE THAT THERE ARE MANY POSITIVE SUGGESTIONS CONTAINED IN THE VARIOUS REPORTS THAT ADDRESS CONSOLIDATION AND WE ARE READY TO WORK WITH YOU AND OTHERS TO CRAFT PLANS, DEVELOP OPTIONS, AND SECURE LOCAL SUPPORT FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION.