

Distributed at the request of Representative Richard Woodbury

THE KEY COMPONENTS TO ACHIEVE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE REGIONALIZATION AND CONSOLIDATION

The basic issue facing the Legislature regarding the regionalization of school administration and the consolidation of school districts is how to work with local communities on such a controversial topic. The bottom up approach would create "Regional Planning Alliances" made up of community members and local officials to give communities an opportunity to choose their partners for consolidation. The top down approach authorizes a State level board or commission to draw new school unit boundaries which would then be imposed by law on local communities.

By a 12-1 vote, the Education Committee adopted a bottom-up approach. Building on the work of a statewide coalition (Maine Education Association, Maine State Chamber of Commerce, Maine Municipal Association, Maine Hospital Association, and the Maine Service Center Coalition) that came together to defeat TABOR and create an alternative approach to addressing Maine's tax burden, the Education Committee plan establishes 26 "Regional Planning Alliances" based on existing vocational regions already in statute. Current groups that are already working on consolidation would be granted planning alliance status.

The Regional Planning Alliances are given strict goals and a strict timetable:

- March 1, 2008: Submit plans to cut non-instructional costs by 10%
- July 1, 2008: Submit consolidation plans to achieve a minimum school unit size of 1,200 pupils
- November 4, 2008: Submit consolidation plans to the voters for approval.

Work still needs to be done on the Education Committee's plan. It included financial incentives but it must also include enforceable consequences if the Regional Planning Alliances fall short. In other words, the process that is approved must be more than good intentions, the result must generate real cost savings for taxpayers.

Maine currently has 234 school units with less than 1,200 students and only 54 school units larger than 1,200 students. The Education Committee's report calls for school consolidation plans for more than 80% of the existing school units in Maine. These plans must address the details which were not adequately addressed in the Governor's original proposal: bonded indebtedness, cost-sharing, board composition, voting districts, and transfer of property.

When Maine voters defeated TABOR, they made two things clear – Yes, they want property tax relief, and No, they do not want a one-size-fits-all prescription that harms their local communities and schools. The Education Committee's initial majority proposal meets these tests.

We think it deserves your support.

Prepared by the Coalition of Maine Education Association, Maine State Chamber of Commerce, Maine Municipal Association, Maine Hospital Association, and the Maine Service Center Coalition

WHAT DOES THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE'S PLAN ACTUALLY DO?

- Establishes “**Regional Planning Alliances**” based on the existing 26 vocational education regions currently outlined in statute and brings together existing school collaboratives with school, municipal and public members.
- By March 1, 2008 requires each “Regional Planning Alliance” to submit a plan to **cut non-instructional costs in FY 2008-09 by 10%**. The Maine Dept. of Education estimates this would save approximately \$60 million on a state-wide basis.
- By July 1, 2008 requires each “Regional Planning Alliance” to submit plans to **consolidate all current school units below 1,200 students**. Currently, 234 school units in Maine, or 82% have less than 1,200 students.
- By July 1, 2008 requires every school unit in Maine to participate in a “**Shared Service Collaborative**” to **cut FY 2008-09 costs** for purchasing, payroll, transportation, building maintenance and special education.
- On November 4, 2008 **requires referendum votes on school consolidation plans** for all school units below 1,200 students.
- Establishes **financial incentives and financial penalties** to ensure that consolidation takes place.
- **Removes statutory barriers to consolidation** in the areas of:
 1. shared services
 2. cost sharing formulas
 3. school construction procedures
- **Authorizes contracting for administrative services** in small school units.