

## A position in support of our schools

*adopted by*

*the Board of [School Union 98](#), Mount Desert Island, March 21, 2007*

*Selectmen of the [Town of Mount Desert](#), April 2, 2007*

*Selectmen of the Town of [Cranberry Isles](#), April 3, 2007*

*Town Council of [Bar Harbor](#), April 3, 2007*

*Selectmen of the Town of Tremont, April 9, 2007*

*Selectmen of the [Town of Southwest Harbor](#), April 10, 2007*

Maine schools [by most measures are very good](#). Maine schools [perform above the averages](#) in national tests. College admission officers recognize graduates of Maine schools as desirable.

The costs of running our schools are [not out of line](#) with other New England states. Maine's school administrators work hard and typically have more varied responsibilities than many of their counterparts in other states. This has resulted in less administrative support staff and generally allowed Maine teachers to spend more time teaching.

In Maine, school administrators are more than just business managers. Personally involved with their individual schools, they provide the educational leadership and vision that has earned Maine's schools their reputations.

Studies such as the [Brookings Report](#) show that Maine's local governments are relatively frugal.

The Brookings report also shows that Maine towns, with their distinctive local governments, [provide a recognizable and valuable "brand"](#) that brings people to live and work in Maine.

Many people move to certain towns because of the quality of schools.

Businesses in communities known for supporting good schools find it easier to attract and maintain employees.

While schools in more densely populated areas may sometimes enjoy lower costs per pupil, studies have shown that school consolidations in rural areas do [not necessarily result in similar reductions in costs](#).

The largest districts in Maine in fact have [higher than average per pupil costs](#).

The [savings projected from proposed consolidation](#) in Maine assume that all schools can be operated as efficiently as the most compact existing schools, without regard to location, demographics and geography.

In cases where rural schools find it impossible to operate at the same minimum per pupil costs as their compact counterparts, the [state funding formula](#) and regional governance both will pressure them to reduce programs until they reach the same minimum costs.

[Under regional and state control](#), individual towns would no longer be permitted to provide their own schools directly with any additional funding. The governor's approach pits the state against its towns, asserting that local citizens are either incapable of managing their budgets or irresponsibly profligate and ignorant of the consequences.

Schools in more rural areas often survive on extraordinary beneficial support from their taxpayers and significant voluntary contributions from their citizens. Because of this community engagement and commitment, often [such schools perform among the best in the state](#).

Consolidation of such smaller schools will result in both [disenfranchisement of traditional local commitment](#) and shallower involvement from a more distant and less accountable regional government. For these schools, less support from both sides will mean a lower quality of education.

Consolidation of schools such as these in areas that already receive relatively little state subsidy will face not only diminished quality in their own schools but may also find their own tax resources diverted

and subject to broader regional control.

Overall savings from consolidation are likely overstated. To achieve the projected savings more than non-instructional services will have to be cut. From this combination, the damage to children's education, and the danger to a community will be real while the savings may not.

There is no fundamental reason that all the real savings achievable through consolidation -- specifically, system administration, payroll, transportation, operations of facilities, and special education -- could not be accomplished under the existing systems of school government working in regional cooperation with other municipalities.

In this regard, cooperation and collaboration between school districts should not be arbitrarily limited to any regional boundary as it's possible that local schools could participate in a single statewide payroll operation, or negotiate their fuel purchases as a single entity with every other municipality in their county.

Any state endeavor toward reducing the cost of employee health insurance potentially will deliver more significant savings to Maine taxpayers than anything likely to result from school consolidation.

The danger is that consolidation as proposed will not necessarily reduce costs to the taxpayers, but the reduction in educational quality, and the damage to communities that results from alienating them from their schools, will be very real.

### **We call upon our governor and legislators**

to work with us and not against us in governing and operating our schools,

to allow us to continue to determine how our schools are structured and how they may change reasonably over time with our communities' needs,

and to allow us to determine without limitation what advantageous relationships may arise through cooperation with other school units and municipalities, whether our partner schools and municipalities are adjoining or state-wide.

Board of School Union 98, Mount Desert Island, March 21, 2007

Amy Young, Southwest Harbor, Board Chair

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Paul Murphy, Bar Harbor

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Mia Brown, Mount Desert

Heather Jones, Mount Desert

Laurel Robins, Mount Desert

Gail Royal, Southwest Harbor

Eric Henry, Southwest Harbor

Joe Saunders, Southwest Harbor

Skip Strong, Southwest Harbor

Liz Erickson, Tremont

Tina Jewett, Tremont

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