

Regional School Units
Proposal from AFA Subcommittee
Monday, April 9, 2007

Purpose

“to provide sufficient resources to support the reorganization of school administrative units into regional state-approved units of school administration to provide:”

1. **Opportunity.** Equitable educational opportunity for all students to demonstrate achievement of the content standards of the State’s system of Learning Results
2. **Programs.** Rigorous academic programs that meet the requirements of Learning Results and that prepare Maine students for college, careers and citizenship
3. **Delivery.** Uniformity and equity in the delivery of the academic programs designed to meet the Learning Results
4. **Tax rates.** A greater uniformity of school tax rates.
5. **Sustainability.** The efficient use of limited resources in order to achieve long-term sustainability and predictability in the support of public schools.
6. **Public funds.** A more effective use of public funds expended for the support of public school by means of – the creation of more cost efficient organizational structures; and administrative structures and efficiencies that permit the organized and regular delivery of uniform state-sponsored professional development programs to promote coherence and consistency in the understanding and application of the State’s standards-based system for continuous improvement in student achievement.
7. **School Choice.** The preservation or enhancement of existing opportunities for school choice.
8. **Services.** The maximization of opportunities to deliver services that can more effectively be provided in larger districts than from within smaller units or individual schools.

Savings

- \$36.5 million in FY 09
- achievable and ongoing; sustainable

New Regional School Units

- Maximum of 80 new school units; based on the efficiency goals and size of 2500 resident students per district
- New school units built on the following criteria:
 - geography: physical proximity, transportation
 - demographics: population density
 - maximizing existing collaborations
 - economics / finances
 - educational opportunities
 - at least one secondary school in the unit
- Governance:
 - single governing board of directors; overseeing at least one secondary school
 - local advisory councils – optional, with locally determined functions

Role & Responsibilities of the Department of Education

- Provide concrete and sequential support and guidance to districts to bring new regional school units together
 - preparing one or more models for the reorganization of new regional units consistent with parameters
 - assist statewide with data collection and presentation
 - assist in organization of meetings and caucuses convened during the planning process
 - facilitation services provided during the planning process

Role & Responsibilities of Realignment Steering Committee

- Realignment Steering Committee members are chosen by communities
- 3 suggested subcommittees (others likely, but determined locally): budget, personnel, policy
- one or more public meetings to receive community input during the planning process
- geographic design of new units
- board of directors size, composition, apportionment, and method of voting
- disposition of real and personal school property
- disposition of existing debt, leases, etc. through local agreement or using Municipal Bond Bank language
- disposition of existing school funds
- transition plan for the 2008-2009 school year budget and any interim personnel policies
- other issues, as determined during the planning process

Role of the State Board of Education

- reviews for ratification/policy approval the consolidated units in January, 2008 based on the recommendations from the Commissioner of Education
- if there are units that have not realigned, and are not deemed to be an exception to realignment, the State Board, in consultation with DOE, is empowered to work with those units to include them in a new regional unit

Transparency in Budgeting

- Transparency in budgeting is key to local citizens' understanding state and local spending on schools and tax relief
- Increase public awareness of, and process for, school approval
- Make a clear link between school spending and changes in tax rates
- Standardize budget format statewide for transparency

Timeline

2007:

- Now – May 30: District Options Designed (local and state)
- May 15 – June 30: DOE Presents Proposed Models around State
- July 1 – October 30: Reorganization Committees Formed and plans developed at local level with state support *Realignment*
- November 15: Deadline for plans to be submitted
- November 30: Deadline for DOE to approve or disapprove plans
- December 21: Deadline for revised plans submitted to the DOE
- December: DOE presents approved plans to State Board for certification

2008:

- January 15: Deadline for State Board to certify all new regional school units
- January 15 – April 15: Prepare budget; elect new governing boards; recruit superintendent; new district budget
- April 15 – June 30: Budget approval; superintendent selected; administrative team selected
(note: current school boards and administrators remain during this time)
- July 1: New regional school units become operational

Notes for New Regional School Units

- no changes to career and technical education centers
- Each new regional school unit governing board will choose a name for their unit
- Finances:
 - any cost sharing agreements in existence that were created as part of LD 1, or by private and special law will remain in existence unless the agreement is modified or eliminated as part of reorganization or as a result of a negotiated agreement
 - No cost sharing agreement, whether created as part of LD 1, by private and special law, or through local agreement shall not be construed to preempt the formation of new regional school units
- Supermajority vote of board of directors to close school; followed by current law process for municipal votes

Collaboration

Legislative Intent Language:

- Ongoing, simultaneous collaboration; beginning immediately and developing over time
- Recognize and build upon existing collaborative efforts
- Expand collaboration to include municipal, county, and state government opportunities

Still Under Discussion

- transition resources / incentives to units
- specifics of tax relief (MM-118); report from Taxation Subcommittee
- specific process for transitioning current contracts and collective bargaining units
- referendum vote process for budget approval each spring

Reports from the Department of Education

- Report for any additional necessary legislation
 - no later than January 31, 2008, the DOE will submit to the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee recommendations for any proposed legislation necessary to fully implement the new school units
- Review of mandates pertaining to school systems
 - full list, identifying the origin of each mandate, the costs of each mandate (state/local/federal), and the characteristics of each mandate
 - the DOE shall submit a report to the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee that includes the findings and any recommendations for repeal, modification, or redesign the current mandates
 - the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee may report out a bill during the 124th Legislative Session