

Regional School Units Proposal from AFA Subcommittee

Purpose

“to provide sufficient resources to support the reorganization of school administrative units into regional state-approved units for 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 savings in FY 09
- achievable and ongoing; sustainable

New Regional School Units

Language from proposed statute: *On or before June 1, 2007, the Commissioner of Education shall design one or more plans for the reorganization of school administrative units into regional school units that ensure that each regional school unit serves no fewer than 2,500 resident students, with approved exception, but not more than 80 regional school administrative units statewide. The commissioner shall have flexibility in granting exceptions from this requirement for those units with geographic, demographic, economic, transportation, population density or other unique circumstances.*

- All current school units must participate in the planning process for regional school units
- Maximum of 80 new school units; based on the efficiency goals and size of 2500 resident students per district, with flexibility to grant exceptions based on unique local circumstances (e.g. island schools, geographic isolation, Native American Schools)

- 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
 - prepare 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
 - provide facilitation services during the planning process
- Submit recommended plans to State Board of Education for approval at the end of the planning process

Role & Responsibilities of Reorganization Planning Committee

- Reorganization Planning 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
- determine geographic design of new units
- determine 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
- if there are units that have not reorganized, and are not deemed to be an exception to reorganization, the State Board 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 of state and local spending on schools and tax relief
- Increase public awareness of, and process for, school budget approval
- Make a clear link between school spending and changes in tax rates
- Standardize budget format statewide for transparency

Budget Validation Referendum

- Local vote
 - FY09 – required in all regional school units
 - FY010, FY011 – required only when local share exceeds Essential Program and Services requirement

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 Planning Committees formed and plans developed at local level with state support
November 15: Deadline for plans to be submitted to DOE
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 be construed to preempt the formation of new regional school units as approved by the Commissioner
- All units, regardless of resident pupil count, will have a minimum 2 mil contribution required for education in the new regional school unit
- Supermajority vote of board of directors to close school, followed by current law process for municipal votes
- All current teacher and employee contracts that extend beyond July 1, 2008 shall be transferred to and employed by the regional school unit as of that date. The salaries or wages, insurance and retirement benefits, accumulated leave and accrual rights thereto, seniority, contract and employment status, or working conditions will be maintained. Any contracts or agreements of retired or former employees will be maintained or honored as well. Collective bargaining will be governed by existing state labor law when the regional school units replace the current school administrative units as the employer.

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

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 school budget validation referendum process
 - collect and analyze data on the validation process, and report findings and recommendations, including suggested legislation to extend, repeal, or modify the process, to the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee by December 1, 2010
 - the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee shall report out a bill to the First Regular Session of the 125th Legislature to extend, repeal, or modify the process
- 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 of the current mandates
 - the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee may report out a bill during the 124th Legislative Session

To be determined by the full Appropriations Committee

- transition resources / incentives to units
- sunset provision for school budget validation referendum on June 30, 2011