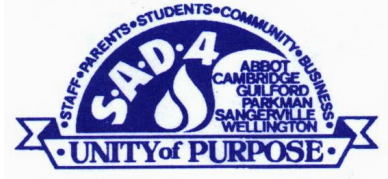


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To the Editor:

In his letter of May 16<sup>th</sup> State Board of Education Chairperson Carignan correctly points out that Maine needs to be more efficient in the way in which we deliver public education. I would further maintain that we could, and should, be far more efficient in nearly every other public category.

I strongly disagree with Mr. Carignan's claim that meaningful efficiencies can be achieved in all areas of the state by administrative restructuring alone. Let's look at the numbers:

Central office administrative costs amount to approximately 4% of the total cost of education statewide. That is 4% of what will very soon be 2 billion dollars a year. This is a sizable chunk of change, but very minor in proportion to other educational cost centers.

Education costs account for over half of all property taxes in the state. If we were to reduce spending in this one category alone by 25%, it would amount to property tax relief of one half of one percent statewide. I hope that folks are not yet considering how they might spend all of this newly found wealth just yet or, as Mr. Carignan suggests, that thousands of students will now be planning on attending college using all of this "saved" money.

There is no silver bullet to efficiency in education, or any other complex organization for that matter. It takes a silver shotgun approach. Every component of each system needs to be studied closely. It is not "simple" as Mr. Carignan asserts.

In some areas and school systems there is much less administrative efficiency than in others. A look at the central office staff, including superintendent and assistants, in one of the 20 systems that Mr. Carignan touted as efficient (because they have an "optimal" size of 2500 students) shows 18 people. In our area, if we were to combine the entire central office personnel of SAD's 4, 41, 46, and 68 (3,777 total students by the way) we would come up with less than 16 in the central office. These numbers are real; not a projection, prediction, or model.

Total spending on education is rising at over 9% per year under "Essential" Programs and Services. This is in a time when student population is declining. An educational system that many recognize as one of the nation's very best should not require that amount of growth per year. He is correct by saying that this is not sustainable. Leadership in the Department of Education, Legislature, and, yes Mr. Carignan, your

State School Board need to make some difficult choices about what is truly “Essential” and what isn’t. The increases in administrative spending over the past four years are directly proportional to the increase in “administrivia” required to manage various debacles, such as the “local” assessment system. Cut some of the mandates, both state and federal, and we will cut the administrators, and associated costs, that are required to oversee them.

Where is all the money going? For kicks, I compared the cost per pupil of SAD #4 with cost per pupil in the district where Mr. Carignan resides. His home system is one that happens to have 2,977 students while SAD #4 has 780. His system spends \$9,136 per pupil/per year. SAD #4 spends \$6,752 per pupil/per year. The difference is \$2,384 per pupil *every year*. If SAD #4 spent that amount per pupil, then every year we could hand each one of our graduates a check for \$30,000 dollars. Think about that.

It seems quite odd to me that Mr. Carignan’s solution to inefficiency in education in Maine would be to require districts in our area to consolidate into a system the size his home unit...I simply don’t think that our people can afford it.

Paul A. Stearns  
MSAD #4 Superintendent of Schools