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Todd Benoit, Editor
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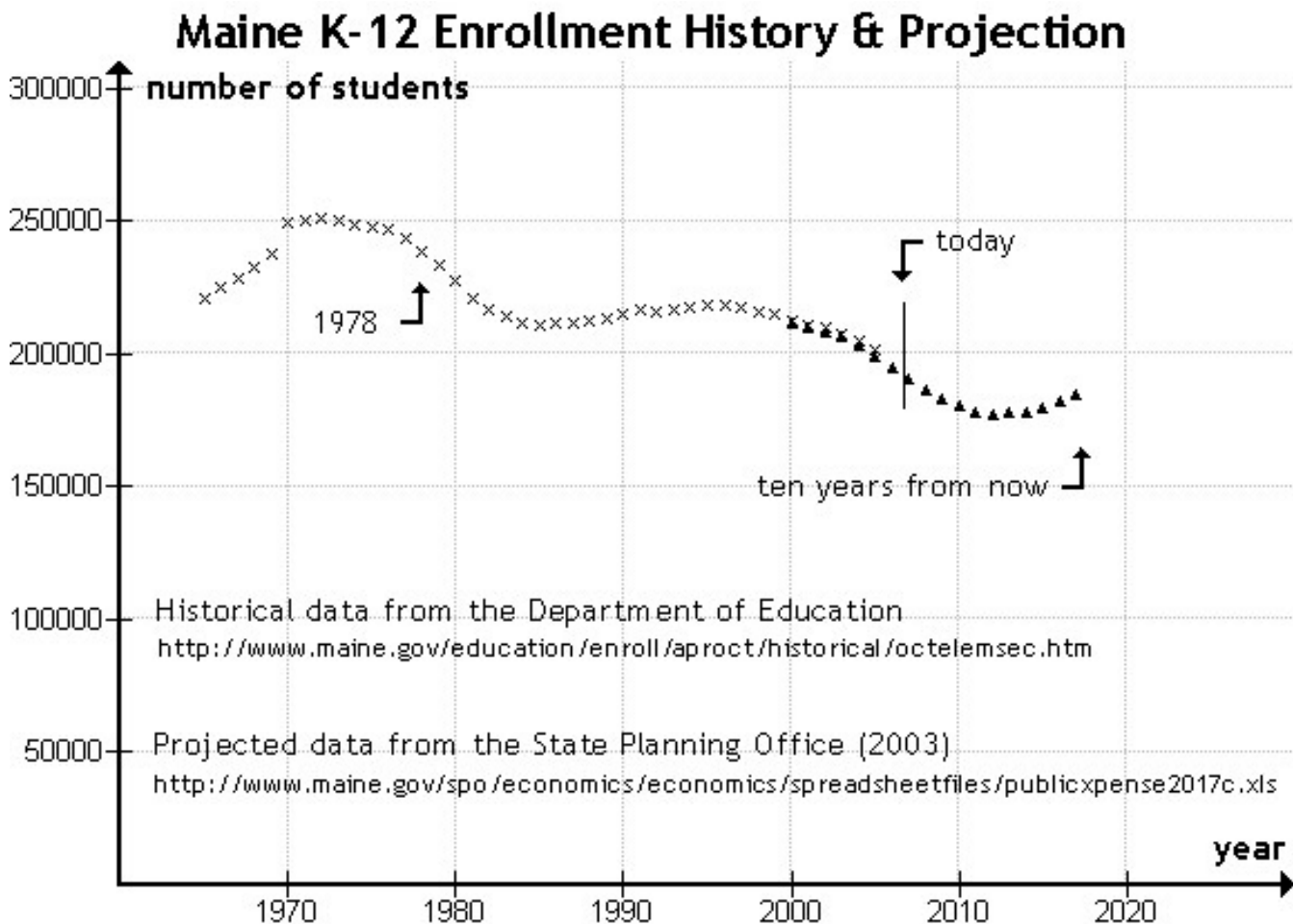
tbenoit@bangordailynews.net

Dear Editor,

A Non-Solution for a Non-Problem

Todd Benoit has fallen short of his responsibilities as the editor of the Bangor Daily News in reinforcing the erroneous information supplied by the Maine Department of Education in his editorial of May 26, 2007. Failing to research the information and thereby repeating it does not serve the public's interests. The concept that there will be a precipitous drop in student enrollment in Maine's K-12 educational system in the next few years that requires immediate and severe school consolidation is simply false.

The historical and projected school enrollments are shown in the accompanying graph:



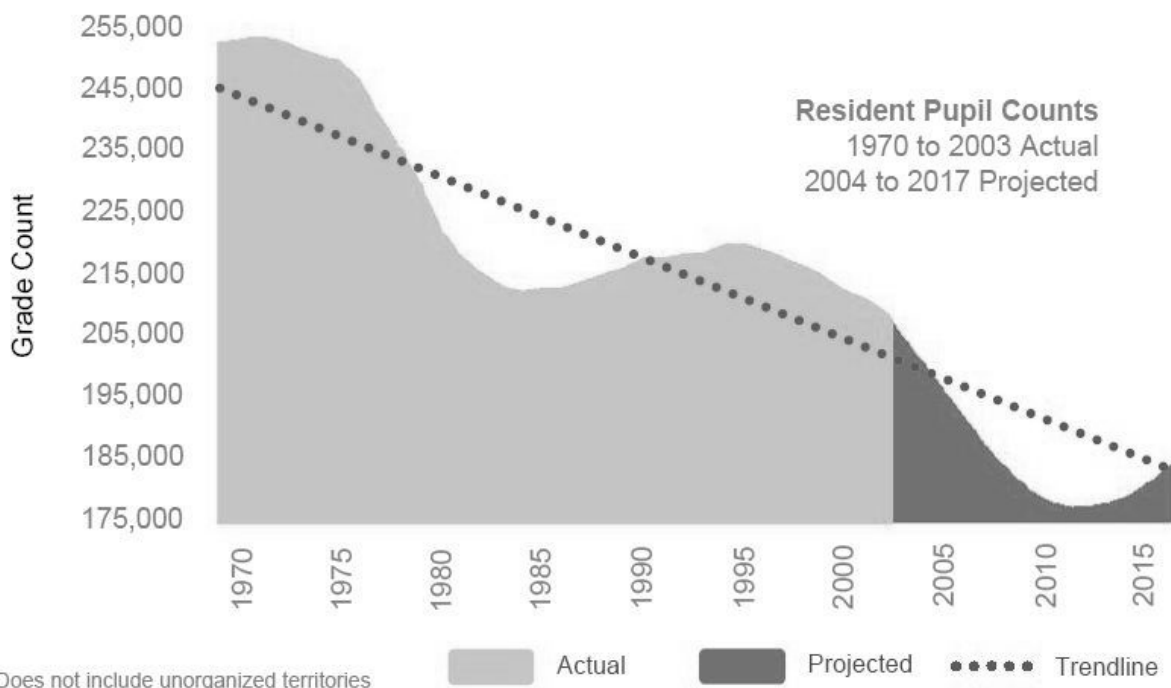
The statewide enrollment ten years from now is expected (by State Planning Office estimates) to be only three percent lower than today, hardly an alarming situation. Meanwhile, Mr. Benoit suggests that a fictitious school board member three years from now will have seen a forty percent reduction in his or her student enrollment. At the rates of decline from 1978 until now, the school board member would have to have served for fifty years! Why then are we struggling to solve this non-problem?

The Maine Department of Education has contributed to the public’s misunderstanding of the current circumstances. Not only did they widely distribute the fraudulent graphic shown below, they incorrectly attribute the high cost per pupil to administrative costs rather than to the low student/teacher ratio.



Why LSRS

Declining enrollments cannot sustain heavy administrative costs.



Note that the lower portion of the graph has been truncated to exaggerate the magnitude of the decline in enrollments. The trend line shown represents a decline of only SIX TENTHS OF ONE PERCENT PER YEAR and yet by the fraudulent presentation, it appears much greater.

The Maine Department of Education recognizes correctly that per-pupil costs in Maine are higher than the national average (by 17%) and that teacher salaries are lower (by 17%). While acknowledging the relative quality of Maine schools (fifth in the nation), the Department declares that it is the administrative costs that are particularly burdensome. Comparing Maine’s school administrative costs with national figures shows that Maine spends a SMALLER percentage of its education expenses for

administration (by 16%). Even on a per-pupil basis, Maine's administrative costs are BELOW the national average (by 2%).

The reason for Maine's high per-pupil costs is NOT "heavy administrative costs", but rather Maine's enviable low student/teacher ratio, the second lowest in the nation. While some may argue that Maine's commitment to quality education is too expensive, and others may prefer a greater commitment, it is not helpful to the public to form policy on the basis of faulty logic and fraudulent information.

I am confident that Mr. Benoit and his staff are professionally capable of researching the data behind issues of public interest, and that they can serve the public well by disseminating that information. I hope they do so in the future and that Mr. Benoit's loss of credibility on this issue due to his carelessness in researching the data will not extend to other areas of public importance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ralph Chapman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ralph Chapman