

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Sunday, December 16, 2007  
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### **Department of Education rejects Mount Desert Island's school plan**

BAR HARBOR -- This Saturday evening Mount Desert Island's school Reorganization Planning Committee received written notice from Commissioner Susan Gendron that the Department of Education is not approving the reorganization plan submitted by the seven towns of MDI and its outer islands.

One of approximately 80 submissions from regional planning committees across the state responding to the school reorganization law passed last June, MDI's plan represents a half year of collaboration between Island school boards, municipal officials, state legislators, and local citizens.

"Frankly, we're a little astonished," said Brian Hubbell, Bar Harbor school board member and vice-chair of the RPC. "Not only do we believe the law supports what the RPC proposes but we also understood through our legislators that we had the State's support on this as well."

According to Saturday's letter from the Commissioner, the disapproval centers around the plan's assigning substantial autonomy within the new reorganized administrative unit to local school committees each with authority over individual elementary schools.

"Our communities have clearly and consistently communicated to us the importance of this," said Mount Desert school board member Gail Marshall, chair of the RPC, "It's always been central and necessary to our plan and our legislators certainly have always understood that also."

Indeed, it was through the political negotiations of MDI's representatives that two key amendments regarding local school committees were made to the final version of the law:

Section 1478 of the law, regarding school governance, states without restriction:

*'A regional school unit board may create local school committees and specify their powers and duties.'*

And Section 1481, regarding school financing, states:

*Notwithstanding any provisions of law to the contrary, a municipality within a regional school unit may raise money and direct the spending of the funds, to a school serving children from kindergarten to no higher than grade 8.*

"The Commissioner was at the table with us and our legislators when we settled on this language," Ms. Marshall said. "At that time, she said the law, as written, offered no impediment to our plans. If it had, our legislators were committed to oppose it."

So, at this time, the matter has returned to Augusta for some clarification. The RPC has forwarded the Commissioner's letter to MDI's legislative delegation.

"From the initial response from them this weekend, we gather that they were as blindsided as we were," said Ms. Marshall. "But our legislators have been consistent allies and understand that the plan represents the clear requirements of MDI's communities and that it is the product of extensive efforts made in good faith by our officials and citizens."

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Attachments:

12/15/2007 letter from Commissioner Gendron to MDI RPC

12/16/2007 email from Majority Leader Hannah Pingree to Commissioner Gendron