

USA's (Union School Associations) Another Option

This article is written to give a general overview of the minority report to the recent RSU bill submitted by the Education Commissioner Gendron to the Education Committee. The minority report was a 10-3 vote supported by Representatives Edgecomb R-Caribou, McFadden R-Edmonds, and Muse R-Fryeburg.

Should the full legislature pass this report, communities would have a choice of joining an RSU, which was passed in June '07 and amended by the Education Committee on December 13th, **or** form a USA. The USA's must have a minimum of 1,000 students. The Commissioner may approve a maximum of 20 USA's. This number could be increased should a large number of schools choose the USA option.

Listed below are concerns that may be corrected by the formation of USA's:

- Use existing School Unions as models with efficiency adjustments.
- Organize by June 1st, plans by September 1st.
- No USA will have the power to close schools.
- Meets the goals of reorganizations – allows schools to remain independent, yet share services to cut costs.
- Avoid cost shifts, governance, property ownership, and school choice issues.
- USA's can focus on maximizing savings and service quality for students.

The issue here is choice. Schools and community leaders should be able to choose between consolidation or collaboration to best meet our savings targets and their needs.

When this draft legislation is rewritten for legislative consideration, it may also consider other improvements for K-12 education such as:

- The Education Department report on education mandates is due in December '08; make it due in June '08.
- Have local unit pay 100% of administrative costs; state pays more for instructional costs.
- Replace penalties with incentives or grants. State could offer to pay a higher percent of Union services.

We certainly understand why many Maine citizens prefer the option of repealing a law that has and will require many hours and years to correct ... too drastic, too little time. Should the petition drive for repeal be successful then voters will have their say by voting on the repeal referendum. If the Legislature and Governor insist on keeping RSU's then it is our hope that USA's also become an option.

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