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Re: "Mend, don't end, school consolidation process" Sunday Telegram, Jan 22, 2008

Ron Bancroft's conclusions need to be revisited after he checks his facts.

He says:

"Here are the facts: Maine's school population has already declined from 219,000 in 1995 to 209,000 in 2005-2006. It is projected to decline to 190,000 by 2010."

Later, he says:

"Much of the reason for the cost increase stems from population decreases and the difficulty of reducing teachers and other school personnel to reflect this trend, particularly in smaller towns and districts.

From the Department of Education statistics and the State Planning Office projections*, the decline from 1995 to 2005 (218598 to 201912) was three quarters of one percent per year, the projected decline from 2005 to 2010 (201912 to 180314) is two percent per year, and the school population starts increasing again in less than five years. The attrition rate for Maine teachers is more than eight percent per year, four times the rate of enrollment decrease.

Therefore it is simply not true that the population decreases account for the high (relative to the national average) per-pupil cost of public education in Maine. Nor do the administrative costs (which are below the national average) account for the high per-pupil cost. Nor do the teacher salary levels (about seventeen percent below the national average) account for the high per-pupil cost.

It is Maine's enviable low student/teacher ratio that accounts for the cost. Maine's superior educational performance (fifth in the nation, with those states ranking number one through four all spending more per pupil) is apparently achieved by the level of individualized attention given to Maine students.

I note that Mr Bancroft offers no evidence of savings from consolidation. Doubts about saving money are fed, in part, by the observation that consolidated rural districts will have increased transportation costs, rarely if ever mentioned by consolidation advocates.

* <http://www.maine.gov/education/enroll/aproct/historical/octelemsec.htm>
<http://www.maine.gov/spo/economics/economics/spreadsheetfiles/publicxpense2017c.xls>

—Ralph Chapman