



Reinventing MAINE Government

How Mainers Can Shape a Sustainable
Government and a New Prosperity



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ENVISION MAINE

Commissioned by GrowSmart Maine

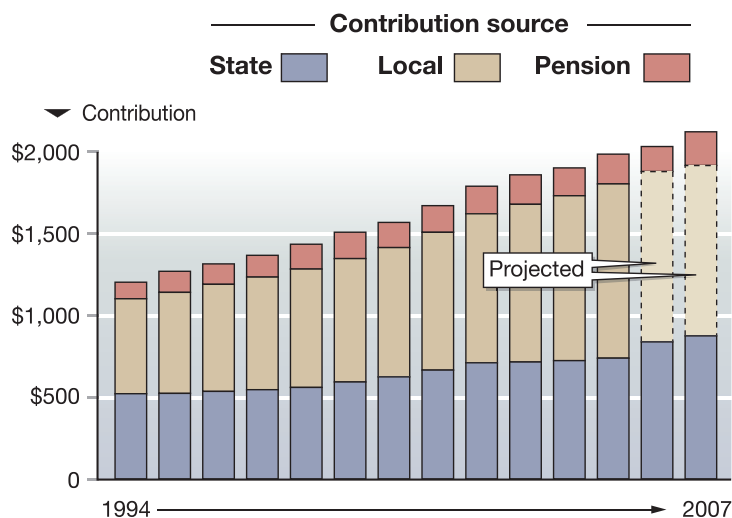
PUBLIC Education

High Cost, Falling Enrollments and Declining Results

Mainers have made a big and critically important investment in public education over the last 30 years. Maine now ranks 4th highest in the nation in the percentage of local government payroll devoted to education.

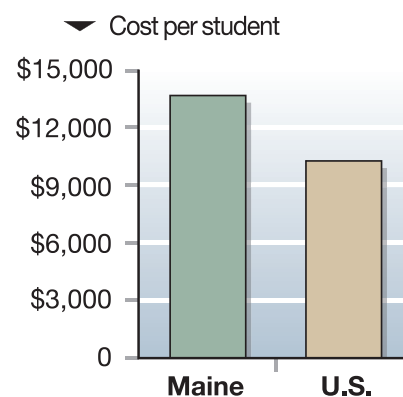
While those investments in public education need to continue, and perhaps even expand with more attention on early childhood development, streamlining and refocusing the system – and getting more return on our investment - is essential.

Maine's Commitment to Education



Source: Maine Department of Education

Estimated Per-Pupil Public K-12 Expenditures, 2008



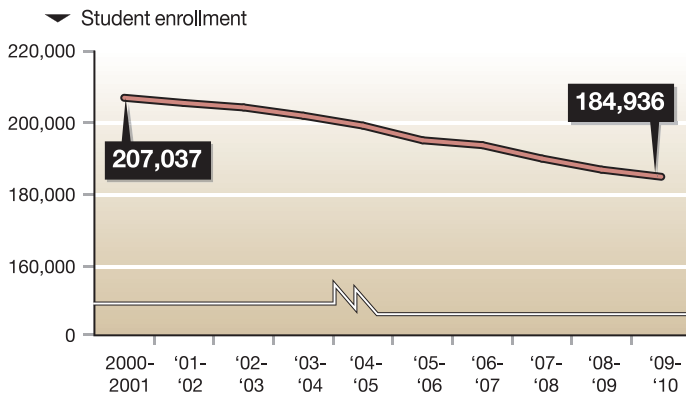
Source: CQ Fact Finder 2009

In 2008, Maine spent \$2 billion, in combined state and local dollars, on K-12 education. That worked out to \$13,513 per student – 25 percent more than the national average of \$10,259 per student, and more per student than all but nine other states. During the last few years, eighth-grade math scores plummeted from 1st place nationally a decade ago to 24th place in 2007. The dropout rate increased from 3.09 percent in 1998 to 5.17 percent in 2007.

In 2009, only 37 percent of Maine's eighth-graders tested as "proficient" in reading – which means 63 percent failed to meet standards. That same year, only 36 percent of our fourth-graders tested "proficient" in reading. Maine college-bound seniors scored below the national average in mathematics, writing and critical reading on the 2008 SAT taken by 11th graders. Part of the reason is that in Maine all students take the SAT, along with New York and Massachusetts. But both of those states scored much better than Maine.

It's tempting to attempt to blame our high cost for public education on geography, since some parts of Maine are so sparsely populated. It's also wrong. Maine ranks 38th in population density nationally, with 42 people per square mile. Alaska, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming each have

Maine K-12 Public School Student Enrollment



Source: <http://www.maine.gov/education/enroll/attending/statefallpub.htm> (by SAU)

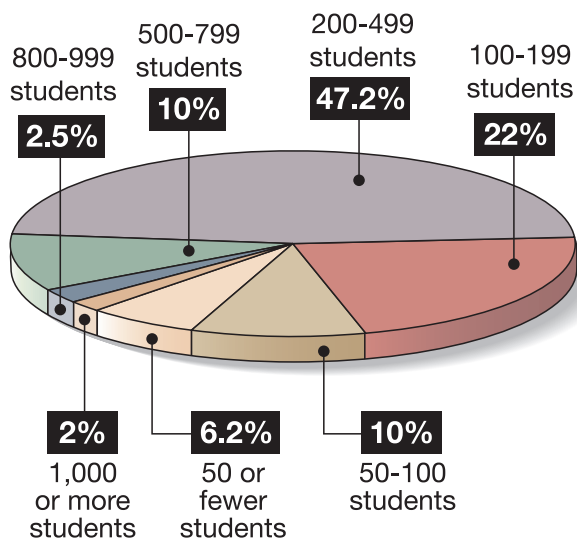
lower population density than Maine, and in the 2003-2004 school year, each of those states spent less per student than did Maine.

DECLINING ENROLLMENTS BUT GROWING STAFFING

Between the 1997 and 2009, enrollment in Maine schools fell from 213,867 to 184,936 in 2009. But districts did not make commensurate reductions in their teaching or administrative staffs. In fact, net spending per student grew 9.3 percent between 2002 and 2007 (versus 8.9 percent nationally), If we're spending so much money and getting such poor results, what are we doing wrong? The numbers and experts point to several areas of concern:

Enrollment of Maine Schools, 2007-08

Breakdown of school size by student enrollment.

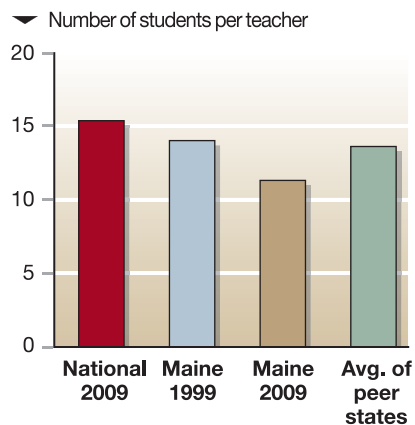


Student-teacher ratios

Maine has the second highest ratio of teachers to students in the country, with 11.3 students for every teacher. The national average is nearly 15.8 students for every teacher.

Other rural states, including Iowa, Kansas, Montana and South Dakota, perform as well or better than Maine on the National Assessment of Educational Progress and have a ratio of about 13.5 students per teacher. A decade ago, Maine's ratio was closer to those states – about 14 students per teacher.

Estimated Pupil-Teacher Ratio, K-12, 2009



Source: CQ Fact Finder 2009

Teacher to non-teacher ratios

In 2009, about 16,000 teachers worked in schools in Maine, along with roughly 22,000 non-teachers: administrators, aides, nurses, custodians, and other staff. Most of the growth in funding of schools in recent years has gone to non-teacher employment.

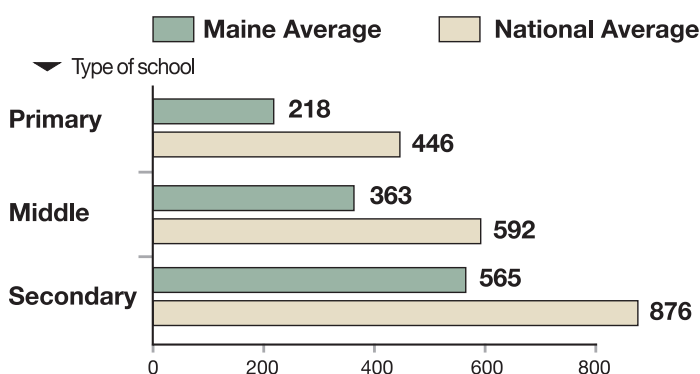
The Number of School Districts

Maine people have long valued local control of school departments, even when it has prevented them from taking advantage of economies of scale. In 2007, the Maine Legislature passed a school reorganization law that reduced the number of school units from 290 to today's 215. Of the 215 school units in Maine, 40 do not operate schools of their own, but instead send students to schools in neighboring districts. Of the 178 school units that actually operate schools, 60 have fewer than 25 teachers.

2006-2007 Average School Sizes

In many cases, excessive local control comes not only at the cost of economies of scale, but of quality. As the Maine Center of Education Policy and Applied Research reports, “There are approximately twice as many lower performing, less efficient schools and school districts as there are higher performing, more efficient schools and districts; lower performing districts are only about 1/3 the size of higher performing districts, yet the lower performing districts have approximately 25 percent more

Average School Sizes, 2006-07



staff per pupil; system administration costs per pupil in lower performing districts are 80 percent higher than they are in higher performing districts.”

Special Education

Our percentage of students designated as special education students is 30 percent greater than the national average, and we now rank 3rd in the country in that category.

Research by the Maine Center of Education Policy and Applied Research shows that Maine’s comparatively high poverty levels do not account for the high incidence of students in special education here. Rather, our identification guidelines make more students eligible for special education than do national guidelines. Further, guidelines are inconsistently applied even within the state. The same student would be placed in special education in one district, but not in another.

Maine children with special needs deserve appropriate services, and the state should continue to ensure that they receive such services. But the way we do that should make sense. Former Maine Education Commissioner Sue Gendron estimates that if the state’s identification

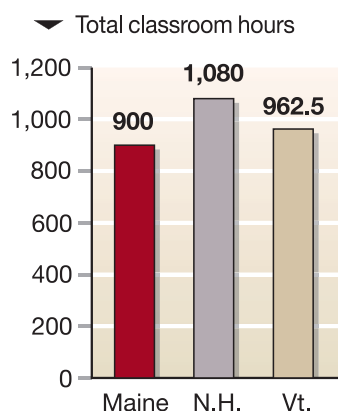
guideline matched the national average, Maine could save more than \$60 million per year.

Two factors may be driving this high use of special education in Maine schools. One is the desire to get more money into the local system. The other is the absence of ‘alternative’ schools, forcing parents toward a special education designation to get additional services for their child.

Length of school year

Maine’s allows its school year to be as short as 175 days per year. The national average is 180 days, both of which are well short of the federal government’s suggested 200 days per year.

Required School Year Hours



Source: Council of Chief State School Officers, 2006

The ‘One Size Fits All’ Dilemma

We have public schools built largely on a “one-size-fits-all” model, because they must try to meet the needs of all students in their community. We once thought this was the only fair way to provide public education: to treat every student the same. But educational psychologists have long since proven that there are multiple forms of intelligence and multiple styles of learning—which means a one-size-fits-all school may be profoundly unfair to the majority of its students.

To deal with this reality, many states have created hundreds of alternatives to the traditional public school: charter schools, alternative schools, magnet schools, even “second chance” schools for those who

have dropped out or are in danger of doing so. Yet Maine has very few alternative schools. This may be one reason why school districts have classified so many Maine young people as needing “special education”—because they don’t fit the typical school model, and there is nowhere else to put them.

Maine cannot afford to educate only 37 percent of its students to proficiency, if we are to thrive in today’s globally competitive information economy. We need to tap the talents of every student. We can only do that if we provide alternatives that fit the learning styles of every student. In

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a rural state like ours, this is no easy task. There are limits to how many alternatives we can provide in much of Maine, because of the way people are thinly spread in some areas, although the Internet offers wonderful opportunities for distance learning, and many states are far ahead of us in taking advantage of those opportunities.

As we create more alternatives, we need to know which ones are working and which aren’t. Maine has made a good start on collecting and analyzing data that permits Mainers – policymakers, educators, parents and other interested parties – to track performance. But we need a better system of identifying failing schools. Our current standardized tests only provide a snapshot of how each grade level is doing each year, compared to how the grades above it did last year and the year before. Since some age groups are better students than others—particularly in small schools—this data tells us nothing about how students are progressing from year to year.

We should take a hard look at creating a testing approach that tells us whether our students have done a year’s learning in a year’s time. In Tennessee, for instance, principals get data showing the average gain of students in every teacher’s class, every year. Some teachers regularly help their students gain more than a year, some less. Principals use this information to meet with teachers, give them the training and coaching they need to improve, and ultimately remove them if they prove incapable of helping students make adequate progress.

Tennessee’s data shows that in elementary school, if a student has a poor teacher for two years in a row, he or she rarely recovers. No state can afford to let its students fall behind and never catch up. Yet in Maine, we do not even measure how much learning each teacher’s students have done each year.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

■ 1. Move Maine toward the national average on student-teacher ratios.

Ten years ago we had teacher/student ratios at the national average. Even though we’ve dramatically lowered the numbers of teachers to students since then, our test scores are about what they were then.

Class sizes and student/teacher ratios matter, especially if you’re talking about the difference between 15 students per teacher compared to 30 students per teacher. But despite all the strong feelings about student/teacher ratios there is very little compelling, independent evidence that it makes much difference below a certain point,

especially after the first few grades.

There isn’t any reason why Maine’s student/teacher ratios should be among the country’s smallest. We can do the job with ratios that move us closer to the national average, and pay more attention to how those classrooms work.

■ 2. Reduce administrative expenses with a new round of district administrative consolidations, but this time put the savings back into the classroom rather than the state’s general fund.

Maine still has far too many administrators and

school districts for the number of students we have. It is one of the reasons that we pay our teachers far less than the national average. We need to keep working on the problem of too many school districts, and to put savings from administrative consolidation into the classroom.

■ **3. Investigate the increase in non-teacher employment over the last decade and move the teacher/non-teacher ratio to the national rural state average.**

For reasons that are difficult to understand, increased spending in public education in recent years has produced a disproportionate increase in non-instructional payroll, in public education and higher education. Maine needs to better understand where that money is going and why we need more support staff than other states do.

■ **4. Evaluate teacher performance, rewarding good teachers by bringing their pay to the national rural state average and removing under-performing teachers.**

This has been an area of great debate for many years. Both sides of the debate make good points. But we can't possibly improve schools in Maine – or government as a whole – without knowing who is doing good work and who isn't, and without having the ability to reward the best teachers and to remove the worst. The state needs to agree on a way to measure performance and on practical ways to constantly improve the system. Kids can't afford a year or two working with a bad teacher, just because the politics of protecting every teacher from evaluation and consequences has won out.

■ **5. Create a statewide standard for special education programs that brings Maine closer to a national average.**

This is another area where we're way outside the norm, with a growing percentage of Maine students being designated for special education. That costs Maine too much and it is no service to some of those kids. There isn't any reason why our per-

centage of special education students should be higher than other rural states or, for that matter, the national average.

■ **6. Transform Public Schools Through Innovation and Experimentation**

If public schools only work for 37 percent of our students, we need to create new models that will help more students succeed. We can do so through several avenues:

- Maine should pass a charter school law that encourages teachers, parents, community members, community organizations, colleges, and even businesses to create new schools. Four-fifths of all states now have such laws, and 1.5 million students attend more than 5,000 charter schools in the United States. Most charter schools operate independently of any school district, with far fewer rules; they use their flexibility to create longer school days, more rigorous academic programs, workplace internships for all students, and many other innovations that heighten their effectiveness.

But along with the increased flexibility should come increased accountability: if their students are not learning, their charters should not be renewed. The most successful state programs do this: they charter a school for five years, and at the end of the period perform a rigorous evaluation. If the students are not making adequate progress, they close the school. Massachusetts offers an excellent model of charter accountability.

- Maine should create “second chance” schools for students who have dropped out or at risk of doing so. Here Minnesota offers an excellent example. It has a large sector of alternative schools that cater to students who have dropped out, to students who have had children, to students who work full-time during the day, and so on. (In Minneapolis, one quarter of the system's graduates came from these

schools in the 1990s.) Most of these schools are run by nonprofit organizations, on contract with school districts. They are small, and they handcraft their efforts to meet the needs of their students.

To encourage the rapid formation of such schools, Maine should empower and incentivize districts to act, but the state should act also, contracting with nonprofit organizations to run second chance schools wherever they are needed.

- Maine should create its alternative schools in a way that increases the pressure on existing schools to improve. The state should pass legislation that gives every parent the right to choose their childrens' public school and requires all public funding for a student to move with that student when he or she leaves a school district for another district, a charter school, an alternative school, or a second-chance school.

When this is done in other states, the effect is clear. When the Pioneer Institute hired education experts to study Massachusetts' approach to school choice a decade ago, they found that when districts lost 3-5 percent of their money to competitors, their leaders usually responded by figuring out why parents were leaving and making reforms to alleviate the problem. Other studies, done nationwide, have shown the same pattern. Not all superintendents and principals respond to competition by innovating, but most do. And we desperately need innovation in our public schools if we are going to make them effective for more of our students.

- Maine should do more with distance learning. We should create a distance learning program available to all students at all schools in the state. By chartering a distance learning school or by contracting with a distance learning organization. For rural students in particular,

quality courses taken over the Internet can significantly expand their opportunities—and therefore their engagement with education.

- Maine should create a “Postsecondary Options” program. Minnesota’s program, launched in 1986, allows juniors and seniors in high school to take college courses for both high school and college credit. The program costs nothing: public funds leave the high school and follow the student to their chosen college or university.

This innovation quickly became wildly popular with students: those who were bored with high school; those who needed more demanding courses; those who were worried they wouldn't be able to afford college; and those who just didn't fit in high school. Some took only a few college courses, while others attended college full-time.

The state auditor's office found that by 1994-1995, participation was up to 6 percent of Minnesota juniors and seniors (12.5 percent in the Twin Cities). Not all were high performers in high school—60 percent were B, C, and D students. At the University of Minnesota, 50 percent were from the inner city. Most took their college courses very seriously; on average, they had a higher grade point average than college freshmen at all postsecondary institutions except technical colleges. Some 73 percent students said they were “very satisfied” with their experience, and 95 percent of parents said they would “probably” or “definitely” encourage their children to participate again.

Even more impressive was the effect the competition for students and dollars had on the high schools. By 1996 almost two thirds of secondary schools provided at least one course for college credit, and 38 percent of high schools provided courses under contract with colleges. Overall, the percentage of Minnesota juniors and seniors who took an advanced placement exam had tripled.

- Maine should consider creating a “Recovery School District,” to take over schools where students repeatedly fail to meet state standards.

Louisiana’s Recovery School District may be the most important innovation in American education today.

Merely invoking the phrase “most important” is bold among the policy wonks and professionals who spend their lives in the thick of this kind of stuff, but what the RSD is doing is enormous and effective. It creates a mechanism to shut down failing schools and reopen them under new management – often charter school management – with new educational models. If the new management fails, it too is shut down and replaced with management that has a proven record elsewhere. The idea is to turn underperforming schools into successful ones.

In 2003, Louisiana voters, fed up with underperforming schools, passed a constitutional amendment authorizing a new Recovery School District to take over schools that were deemed “academically unacceptable” for at least four consecutive years. After Hurricane Katrina wiped out much of New Orleans, the new district began creating charter schools – public schools that operate without many of the regulations that apply to traditional public schools, but do have “charters” that establish their missions, programs, goals, students served, methods of assessment and ways to measure success – in *The Big Easy*.

It also has taken over failing schools in other parts of the state - either contracting with a successful charter school operator to take over the school or hiring an experienced turn-around specialist as principal.

RSD schools all develop “School Recovery Plans,” that outline how they expect to turn around the underperforming schools and why the changes will improve the way students perform. Today 70 RSD schools are open in New Orleans. Of them, 33 are traditional public

schools and 37 are public charter schools. The RSD also has two charter schools in Caddo Parish, 11 charter schools in East Baton Rouge Parish and one charter school in Pointe Coupe Parish. Another 33 schools eligible for placement in the district are operating under Memorandums of Understanding with the state Department of Education. If those 33 do not improve, they will be placed under the RSD.

The RSD is showing results: Test scores have improved in every grade and every subject in the two years that scores are available. RSD students have achieved double-digit gains in half the grades and subjects and growth that outpaced overall growth in 25 of 30 categories in Louisiana’s assessment programs.

