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Final Report of the Alternative Education Programs Committee

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Executive Summary

At the request of the Legislature, the Alternative Education Programs Committee (herein referred to as "the Committee") brought together experienced educators and current legislators to discuss and develop a strategy to increase public understanding of alternative learning and raise awareness of the benefits of providing alternative learning opportunities in our public schools not only to the students themselves but to our society as a whole. Towns, businesses and families all benefit from a higher number of Maine youth completing high school with the skills and confidence to become active and engaged citizens and move into the workforce or on to post secondary education. The Committee believes that Maine cannot move forward economically if it ignores this critical segment of its population.

Members of the Committee are enthusiastic about continuing to work together and providing the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs with additional information to make sound policy and appropriately fund alternative learning in Maine. As it completes its deliberations, the Committee recommends that:

1. **The Legislature enact statutory definitions for alternative learning, alternative education program, and at-risk students in Maine Law.** A clear articulation and consistent use of terms is integral to an understanding of alternative learning and the populations served. The definitions below are proposed for codification in statute and adoption in the relevant rules of the Department of Education: [1]

    - **Alternative education program.** "Alternative education program" means a program in which the primary purpose is to serve at-risk students with alternative learning opportunities that focus on curriculum and assessment and is in a setting designed to more effectively meet the student's academic, social and relational needs.
    - **Alternative learning.** "Alternative learning" means an educational option that a public school or publicly supported program offers at-risk students that include some combination of the following: small class size; flexible scheduling; relevant alternative curriculum and assessment; mentoring adults; uniquely skilled teachers; a focus on social, emotional and relationship skills; collaboration between home, school, and social service agencies; and any other measures designed to accommodate the needs of at-risk students.
    - **At-risk student.** "At-risk student" means a student who has not been successful in a traditional educational setting, as measured by at least one of the following: is not meeting the requirements for promotion to the next grade level or graduation from high school; is at risk for dropping out; is habitually truant; or is economically disadvantaged as signified by qualification for the free lunch program.

2. **The Department of Education develop a resources team of alternative education professionals available to consult with school districts.** This would allow the department to respond more effectively to requests for assistance from schools initiating

[1] Suggested legislation that codifies these definitions is in Section IV of this report.

or revising an alternative education program. The Committee envisions the department linking school boards, administrators and teachers with the team member or members whose skills and experience best match the resources needed for a particular request.

3. **The Department of Education incorporate assessment methods that correspond to alternative teaching and learning styles when revising graduation requirements.** The Committee recommends that the Department of Education develops these assessment methods with input from alternative education teachers.

4. **The Department of Education revise its Chapter 127 rules on diploma requirements to include assessment methods that correspond to teaching and learning styles employed in alternative education.** The Committee recommends that the Department of Education develops these assessment methods with input from alternative education teachers.

5. **The Legislature re-establish the Alternative Education Programs Committee with its current membership to continue its work until December of 2008**. With legislative authorization to continue, the Committee can significantly contribute to improving understanding and support of alternative learning in Maine. This group of education professionals and policymakers is uniquely suited to assist with analysis of the department's survey results, develop the funding methodology outlined in recommendation 6, review the needs of special at-risk populations such as teen parents and substance abusers, and evaluate the alignment of regional school units and alternative education programs in terms of geography and need.

6. **The Alternative Education Programs Committee develop an approach to funding that reflects the cost of providing alternative education programs and encourages regional school units to provide, improve and expand these learning opportunities.** The Committee proposes to work with the Department of Education and the Institute for the Study of Students at Risk to collect and analyze cost data from several exemplary alternative education programs. This information would be used to estimate per pupil costs associated with providing effective alternative learning opportunities and to develop descriptions of the activities, methods and resources that comprise a bona fide alternative education program.

7. **The Department of Education recognize alternative learning as an early intervention for students being considered for placement in special education.** The Committee recommends that the department encourages schools to consider alternative education as an appropriate intervention for many students before a possible referral to special education. The Committee recommends that the department conducts outreach on documenting responses to placement in alternative education programs and potential funding under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for alternative education as an intervention.

8. **Students in every regional school unit have access to alternative learning options including alternative education programs.** The Governor's Task Force to Engage Maine's Youth stated that "the inequitable access to a broad array of educational and social service options for youth across the state puts them at significant disadvantage".[2] The Committee supports increasing alternative learning opportunities and joins the Department of Education in proposing that every regional school unit be required to establish or provide access to alternative education programs.

9. **Professional development opportunities be expanded for alternative education practitioners.** The Committee supports the development of a graduate concentration in alternative education at the Institute for the Study of Students at Risk, University of Maine. The Committee also recommends embedding alternative learning components in all undergraduate teacher education courses.

10. **The Department of Education assert leadership in embracing alternative learning throughout Maine's educational system**. The Committee recommends that alternative education practitioners be included in education policy discussions and that the department fully utilizes the expertise of the Office of Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education and the Commissioner's Advisory Committee on Truancy, Dropouts and Alternative Education.

11. **The Department of Education allocate appropriate resources in support of the Office of Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education.** The Office of Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education provides a myriad of extremely valuable technical and other support services to schools, administrators and teachers as they deal with problems that perennially confound educators and deter students from meeting educational goals. This Office needs to be supported with appropriate resources, including financial resources, so that it can meet its statutory mission.[3]

12. **The Department of Education continue financial support for the Institute for the Study of Students at Risk.** The Committee recognizes the value of the primary research done by the University of Maine's Institute for the Study of Students at Risk. The Institute also serves as a centralized resource for reliable information on at-risk students and alternative learning in Maine and in the nation and is critical to moving the recommendations in this report forward.[4]

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[2] Governor's Task Force To Engage Maine's Youth, Executive Summary, June 2007.
[3] Shelley Reed did not participate in the discussion of this recommendation.
[4] Dr. James Artesani did not participate in the discussion of this recommendation.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Alternative Education Programs Committee was established in the First Regular Session of the 123rd Legislature by Resolves 2007, chapter 124.[5] The Committee was created to conduct a review of all existing alternative education programs and how they are beneficial to youth at risk in Maine. Specifically, the Committee was charged with the following duties:

1. Determine the number and types of kindergarten to grade 12 alternative education programs existing in the State;
2. Determine the number of students participating in alternative education programs;
3. Study the population served by the alternative education programs;
4. Review the practices that exist for at-risk youth and youth needing alternatives in education;
5. Determine how the alternative education programs help in raising graduation rates and lowering dropout rates;
6. Provide the percentage of youth who were identified as being at risk but completed high school through participation in an alternative education program;
7. Research local, state and federal funding sources;
8. Check how alternative education programs contribute toward helping students be college, work and citizenship ready;
9. Coordinate alternative education programs with extended learning opportunities such as 21st-century learning centers, advance placement and employment opportunities;
10. Identify the geographic regions in which students do not have access to alternative education programs;
11. Provide anecdotal data regarding the impact of alternative education on the lives of students and their parents; and
12. Seek professional development opportunities for staff and administration on meeting the needs of at-risk youth.

The 13-member Committee included three members of the Senate, four members of the House of Representatives, two representatives from the Advisory Committee on Truancy, Dropouts and Alternative Education, one representative from the University of Maine Institute for the Study of Students at Risk, one representative from the Department of Education, Office of Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education, one representative from the Alternative Education Association, and one representative from the Interdepartmental Committee on Transition.[6]

The Committee was authorized to hold four meetings and convened its first meeting on October 31, 2007. At its first meeting, the Committee determined the focus of the study given the wide-ranging list of duties listed in the resolve. The Committee discussed some of the particular student populations represented in the at-risk population including teen parents, substance abusers, students in legal difficulties and students with educational disabilities. The Committee also learned that in the fall of 2007, the Department of Education, Office of Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education designed and distributed a survey instrument to solicit

[5] Resolves 2007, chapter 124 is provided in Appendix A.

[6] The Committee membership list is provided in Appendix B. Only two members of the Senate were appointed.

information. The survey was designed to gather data on alternative education programs in the state.

The second meeting was held on November 27, 2007. The Committee received a presentation on Learning Results from Anita Bernhardt of the Department of Education. In addition, they had a presentation from Jim Rier and Andrew McMahan on the funding of adult education programs. The Committee was concerned that many students aged 16-20 find themselves enrolled in adult education classes. This may be appropriate for some but does not provide the social supports needed by others. Concerns were mentioned regarding the practice of using adult education programs as a school's alternative education program but not funding those programs commensurately. Problems with graduation and transferring of credit can also occur. At this meeting, the Committee determined that "alternative learning" is a broader and more encompassing approach to alternative education.

The third meeting on December 5 was dedicated to determining recommendations to the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. First, the Committee was briefed by Angela Faherty and Wanda Monthey from the Department of Education on future changes to Chapter 127 Rules on graduation requirements. At this meeting, the Committee broke into subcommittees. Topics for the three subcommittees were: defining "alternative learning" and "at-risk" in statute; funding options to ensure more equitable funding for alternative education programs; and increasing awareness of the importance of alternative learning options within the public education system.

The Committee held its final meeting on December 14. At this meeting the Committee finalized its recommendations, discussed the most recent results from the Department of Education survey and discussed its plans for presenting the report to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs during the Second Regular Session.

This report fulfills the Committee's requirement to submit a report on its review of alternative education programs and their benefit to the at-risk youth in Maine, including suggested legislation. Following receipt and review of the Committee's report, the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs is authorized to submit a bill in the Second Regular Session of the 123rd Legislature.

II. BACKGROUND

Alternative education has no uniform definition in either the literature or the law. However, there is general agreement that alternative schools and alternative education programs are "defined by the tendency to serve students who are at-risk for school failure within the traditional educational system."[7] In 2003, 34 states included definitions within their statutes. Themes include: (1) non-traditional settings separate from the general education classroom; (2) serving students at risk of school failure; (3) serving students who are disruptive or have behavior problems; and (4) serving students that have been suspended or expelled.

Maine currently does not define alternative education in statute or administrative rule. The Maine Department of Education on its website for the Office of Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education states:

> Alternative education is a perspective, not a procedure or a program. It is based upon the belief that there are many ways to become educated, as well as many types of environments and structures within which this may occur. Further, it recognizes that all people can be educated and that is in society's interest to ensure this. To accomplish this requires that we provide a variety of structures and environments such that each person can find one that is sufficiently comfortable to facilitate progress.[8]

The Institute for the Study of Students at Risk at the University of Maine, Orono states that the "rationale for the establishment of most alternative education programs in today's society is that many students require a *different* type of educational environment and program in order for them to remain in school, to maximize their full potential as adult citizens, and – clearly, in some cases, to minimize the adverse effects that they may be having upon other students within the regular education system."[9]

The Alternative Education Programs Committee believes that it is important for Maine's statutes and corresponding administrative rules to include a definition of alternative education programs. However, alternative learning more appropriately focuses attention on the learning style of the students rather than programs. Consequently, the Committee chose to suggest legislation that also includes a definition of "alternative learning".

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[7] Lehr, Camilla A., Eric J. Lanners, and Cheryl M. Lange. "Alternative Schools: Policy and Legislation Across the United States, Research Report 1." Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, 2003, p 1.
[8] Maine Department of Education website. Attributed to B. Fizzel (1990) and cited in Raymond E. Morley, "Alternative Education," National Dropout Prevention Center, 1991. http://www.maine.gov/education/tdae/alted.htm
[9] Institute for the Study of Students At Risk, University of Maine. "Students at Risk: Analysis of Major Issues Involving Identification, Effective Programming, and Dropout Prevention Strategies." September 2004. Italics in original.

A. Populations served by alternative learning options:

Alternative education is characterized by the type of students served in the educational programs. These learning options serve students with different personal and learning styles that can be difficult to accommodate within the traditional educational system. Often these students are at risk of dropping out of school and if programs are not available, they may fall through the cracks between regular education and special education.[10] Alternative education programs are the most visible and widely employed type of alternative learning option in Maine.

1. Typology of alternative education programs

In the 1960s and 1970s, alternative schools and programs were often a reaction to dissatisfaction with the public education system. These programs incorporated several core beliefs: not all students learn in the same manner; many students require more individualized attention in small classes; and the organizational structure, rules and culture of most public schools is not conducive to promoting optimal learning for many students requiring more flexibility in scheduling, different assessment methods and different strategies to deal with their behavior.[11]

Alternative education programs developed in the 1980s and 1990s are more closely aligned with the traditional public school structure with the majority being provided within public schools and are mostly associated with at-risk students. The Institute for the Study of Students at Risk identifies three types of alternative schools and programs:

- Type I (Innovative): schools or programs "designed to make education more responsive, engaging, challenging, fulfilling, and humane that it often is in conventional schools." These programs usually have small classes, a personalized approach and serve all types of students. These programs are voluntary.
- Type II ("Last Chance" or Disciplinary): schools and programs designed to modify the behavior of students exhibiting behavioral or disciplinary problems at their regular school environment. Generally, these are compulsory programs and the curriculum and instruction is similar to a regular school.
- Type III (Remedial): schools or programs designed for students with remedial needs within either the academic or emotional/behavioral arena. The student often returns to regular school after receiving extra services. These programs may be voluntary or involuntary.[12]

Alternative education programs usually include a number of components to be successful. These include: low staff-to-student ratio; strong leadership; highly trained staff; a common

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[10] Institute for the Study of Students At Risk, University of Maine. "Students at Risk: Analysis of Major Issues Involving Identification, Effective Programming, and Dropout Prevention Strategies." September 2004.
[11] Institute for the Study of Students At Risk, University of Maine. "Current Status of Alternative Education Programs in Maine: Impact Upon Policies and Practices for Students with Disabilities and Students Considered to Be "At Risk", Final Report 2000-2001 Project."
[12] Ibid

vision and set of objectives for the program shared by staff; district-wide support; innovative instruction with an emphasis on real-life experience; collaboration with all parts of the school system and agencies; opportunities for work experience; counseling and monitoring; and are voluntary.[13] [14]

2. Alternative education in Maine – 2007

Although the types of students served in alternative education programs can be characterized, it is a more difficult task to identify how many alternative learning programs exist in Maine and how many students are served in those programs. The Maine Education Data Management System (MEDMS) includes codes for Alternative (At Risk) Education Programs (4200) and Alternative (At Risk) Education – Teen Parent Programs (4210). These codes are designed to capture the number of alternative education students in each school district and provide that data to the Maine Department of Education. However, the data has proved to be incomplete. It undercounts the number of students and gives no insight into different types of programs. Unlike special education or free/subsidized lunch with clear subsidies attached, there is no extra subsidy for students enrolled in alternative learning programs and this also impacts data collection. It is also surprisingly difficult to count programs as a whole. There is rapid turnover of programs as many programs become identified with a single professional individual and do not last after that person leaves.

The Department of Education, Office of Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education is conducting a survey of alternative education programs within the state. At the time of this report, the Office had sent out 76 surveys to superintendents, and later to practitioners in the field, and had 22 returned. The expectation is that an accurate picture of alternative learning programs in the state will eventually emerge with returned surveys and follow-up calls. This includes data to satisfy a number of the duties of the Alternative Education Programs Committee:

- Determine the number and types of K-12 alternative programs in the state;
- Determine the number of students in programs;
- Determine how the programs help in raising graduation rates and lowering dropout rates;
- Provide the percentage of youth identified as at-risk but completed high school through participation in an alternative education program; and
- Identify the geographic regions in which students do not have access to alternative education programs.

The data from the 22 programs show an enrollment of 611 students, including 105 special education students. An average of 57% of the students in the past two years graduated, 9% returned to regular education, 8% were asked to leave, 2% dropped out and returned, and the remainder left the program for a variety of reasons (relocate, enter the workforce, have a child, be

[13] Aron, Laudan Y. and Janine M. Zweig. "Educational Alternatives for Vulnerable Youth: Student Needs, Program Types, and Research Directions". Washington DC: The Urban Institute, 2003; November 2001

[14] Institute for the Study of Students At Risk, University of Maine. "Current Status of Alternative Education Programs in Maine: Impact Upon Policies and Practices for Students with Disabilities and Students Considered to Be "At Risk", Final Report 2000-2001 Project."

incarcerated, mental health placement). Full results of the survey, as of December 14, 2007 are provided in Appendix C. Final results will be available to the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee in the near future.

A map showing the geographic distribution of alternative education programs has been developed by the Department of Education and is provided in Appendix D. Although the map shows where individual programs are situated, it cannot take into account the changes to school districts that will result from the current consolidation effort into larger regional school units. For example, students in small school districts that currently have no alternative education program may have access as part of a larger regional unit. The Committee believes that the Department of Education survey combined with a regionalization map could go a long way toward understanding the scope of programs and access to them but this is not yet available.

B. Funding

There is no consistent method across states in funding alternative learning programs. Sources of funding include federal, state, local, private and in kind contributions. For most states, the costs of these programs are borne by state and local sources.[15] Allum identifies the different ways states fund alternative programs:

- Equalized per pupil allocations (every student gets the same amount of money)
- Index of need (students get additional funds based upon their particular needs)
- Categorical flat funding (based on program types)
- Excess cost reimbursement (school districts are reimbursed for extra costs of special needs students)
- Unit allocation according to personnel or classroom
- Competitive discretionary grants[16]

Federal funds streams make up only a small amount of total funding. Federal funding streams include the Workforce Investment Act, Carl Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act, and IDEA.[17] The federal government also provides grants to school districts with dropout rates that exceed the state average.[18] No states have federal funds as a primary source.[19]

In general, the cost of alternative education programs is higher than regular education because of smaller staff-to-student ratios.[20] However, the myriad of missions and designs for

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[15] Camilla A. Lehr, Rachel A. Moreau, Cheryl M. Lange, and Eric J. Lanners. "Alternative Schools: Findings from a National Survey of the States, Research Report 2." Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, 2004.
[16] Allum, Jeffrey R. "Funding Alternative Education Pathways: A Review of the Literature." Prepared for the National Youth Employment Coalition, February 5, 2005.
[17] Thakur, Mala B. and Kristen Henry. "Financing Alternative Education Pathways: Profiles and Policy 2005." National Youth Employment Coalition.
[18] U.S. Department of Education website. http://www.ed.gov/programs/dropout/index.html
[19] Allum, Jeffrey R. "Funding Alternative Education Pathways: A Review of the Literature." Prepared for the National Youth Employment Coalition, February 5, 2005.
[20] Ibid.

alternative education programs make it difficult to calculate reliable per pupil costs. A national survey of states, specifically state level education officials and alternative school leaders, conducted by the Alternative Schools Research Project at the University of Minnesota reflected a widespread concern with inadequate funding, concerns about continued funding, and the impact of budget cuts on alternative programs.[21]

Maine's Essential Programs and Services Model (EPS) is designed to ensure that all schools have the programs and services needed to provide all students with equitable educational opportunities. Alternative education programs are, indeed, essential for many at-risk students and non-traditional learners to achieve graduation standards and become good citizens and productive workers. Although the EPS model acknowledges that educational needs are more costly for specialized student populations, at-risk and non-traditional learners are not designated as a specialized population.

Four specialized populations under EPS exist in current statute: special education students; disadvantaged youth; limited English proficiency (LEP) students; and early elementary age children. Funding for special education and early elementary students is targeted so that additional funds associated with those students must be used for services to those populations. Funds for disadvantaged youth and LEP students are weighted, meaning a school unit receives more per pupil funding for students in these populations, however, spending of the additional funds is determined by the local school unit. In its continuing review of EPS components, the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI) has recommended converting the LEP and disadvantaged youth components to targeted funds. Slides from MEPRI's presentation to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs are provided in Appendix E.

C. Resources for technical assistance, research and professional development

The Alternative Education Programs Committee included members from the primary resource groups for alternative learning programs in Maine. Those offices, institutes and interest groups are described below:

1. Office of Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education

The Office of Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education was created in 1985 within the Department of Education. Under the statute, the Commissioner employs a consultant whose sole responsibility is to provide technical assistance on truancy, dropouts, reintegration and alternative education. The statute lists a number of duties of that consultant including: assistance to schools to establish alternative programs; develop screening tools to identify potential dropouts; act as a clearinghouse for information on alternative programs; develop model curricula for alternative programs; evaluate the standards of alternative education programs; develop training programs; develop and submit a plan to the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee on the prevalence of truancy, assess alternative education programs and prepare strategies to remedy problems

[21] Camilla A. Lehr, Rachel A. Moreau, Cheryl M. Lange, and Eric J. Lanners. "Alternative Schools: Findings from a National Survey of the States, Research Report 2." Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, 2004.

including reintegration for juvenile offenders that are enrolling in schools in the state; collect data on dropout and truancy; and coordinate grant writing to stimulate programs and research on dropouts, truants, alternative education and adult education. The statute is provided in Appendix F.

2. Advisory Committee on Truancy, Dropouts and Alternative Education

At the same time as the Office of Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education was established, an Advisory Committee was also created. The 15-member Advisory Committee on Truancy, Dropouts and Alternative Education advises the Commissioner on the development and implementation of state and local policies and programs that are needed to deal with the incidence of truancy and dropouts in state schools. It reports annually to the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. The consultant in the Office serves as a liaison among the commissioner, department staff, advisory committee, and school administrative units and private schools with respect to truants, dropouts, reintegration, and alternative education, as well as compiling the report of the Advisory Group. See Appendix E for the statute.

3. Governor's Task Force on Engaging Maine's Youth

In June 2006, Governor Baldacci established a Governor's Task Force to investigate and report back on issues related to Maine youth who are disengaged from school and work. The charge was to review state and national research and data on the challenges for youth and to create a plan by June 30, 2007 that identified strategies to engage Maine's disengaged youth in school and work. "Specifically, the Task Force was asked to provide long and short term strategies, policies, and/or legislation that will result in supporting active youth engagement in their communities, school, and/or work."[22] The Task Force determined that educational resources are not equitably distributed across the state and those without access are at a significant disadvantage. Recommended legislation of the Task Force was passed during the First Regular session of the 123rd Legislature.[23] Public Law 2007, Chapter 451 sets up a process to recognize the academic work of students that experience educational disruption by ensuring that records and credits are transferred accurately and fairly.

4. Institute for the Study of Students At Risk, College of Education and Human Development, University of Maine

The Institute for the Study of Students At Risk was established in 1988 as a center for research and policy analysis on broad-based issues and concerns involving children, youth, and their families at risk. It provides both practitioners and policy makers with essential information regarding appropriate services for children and youth with special needs as well as for those considered to be at risk. The Institute is sponsored and funded by the Division of Special Services, Maine Department of Education and the College of Education and Human Development, University of Maine. The Institute also sponsors conferences and symposia. Among many publications, it recently published the *Maine Dropout Prevention Guide*. The

[22] Governor's Task Force to Engage Maine's Youth, Executive Summary, June 2007.
[23] Ibid.

guide is a resource for public school personnel, particularly Dropout Prevention Committees within School Administrative Units, with specific information to identify the factors and conditions that place students at risk of dropping out and identify the programs and strategies that are most helpful in keeping students in school and on track toward graduation.[24] The Guide is freely available on the Institute's website.

One of the findings in the Institute's 2001 report was that no graduate or undergraduate training programs in the area of alternative education existed and that substantial efforts would be needed to provide practicing and aspiring alternative educators in Maine with good professional training programs and experiences.[25] The Institute for the Study of Students At Risk is currently in the process of setting up a graduate concentration in alternative education at the University of Maine. However, there is still a need for ongoing professional development opportunities for current teachers that relate to alternative learning as well as an alternative learning perspective in all teacher education courses.

5. Interdepartmental Committee on Transition

The Interdepartmental Committee on Transition was created in 1986 to implement service planning and coordination for youth with disabilities between the ages of 14 and 26 years who are transitioning from school to the community. The Committee includes representatives of the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Labor, and Corrections, as well as members of regional transition boards and the public. In its efforts to build networks between youth, schools and communities, one avenue to assist youth with disabilities transition to adulthood is through the paths of alternative learning that allow flexibility and adult mentoring to capitalize on youths' strengths.

6. Alternative Education Association of Maine

The Alternative Education Association of Maine is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing a network of resources and support for alternative education in traditional and non-traditional school settings throughout Maine. The Association holds conferences, networking meetings, lobbies for programs that affect alternative education programs, consults with those setting up or maintaining alternative education programs, and offers peer support. Members are involved with the Advisory Committee on Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education and the Maine Association for Charter Schools.

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[24] Davis, William E., Leslie A. Forstadt and Roxanne Lee. "Maine Dropout Prevention Guide." Institute for the Study of Students at Risk, University of Maine, April 2006.

[25] Institute for the Study of Students At Risk, University of Maine. "Current Status of Alternative Education Programs in Maine: Impact Upon Policies and Practices for Students with Disabilities and Students Considered to Be "At Risk", Final Report 2000-2001 Project."

D. Alternative education in statute and Chapter 127 of department rules

Under Maine law, a school administrative unit may establish one or more alternative education programs and the programs must be in alignment with the system of learning results.[26] School administrative units may also enroll a student in an alternative program in another school administrative unit or private alternative program if the superintendents approve.[27] Department of Education Chapter 127 rules establish the basic instructional requirements for public elementary and secondary schools regarding compliance with the system of Learning Results, including secondary school diploma standards. These rules mirror the statutory language that grants authority to school administrative units to establish or participate in one or more programs as alternatives to the regular course of study to meet the needs of students at risk.

The Department of Education recently proposed changes to Chapter 127 that would require all school administrative units to establish or participate in alternative education programs. Combined with the school consolidation effort, the Committee believes that this would be an appropriate mandate on regional school units. This also requires a statutory change (recommended legislation is provided in Section IV).

The Advisory Committee on Truancy, Dropouts and Alternative Education expressed its concerns to the Commissioner of Education about proposed changes to diploma requirements and subsequent effects on alternative learners in April 2007. The Advisory Committee stated that it recognized the importance of high standards as the cornerstone to success but was concerned that students with non-traditional learning styles already struggling to meet graduation requirements would find added requirements an insurmountable barrier. It also expressed concern that added requirements would reduce options for students, including vocational courses, art classes, as well as driving out any local level innovation. The Alternative Education Programs Committee expressed similar fears. The letter is available in Appendix G.

Angela Faherty (Deputy Commissioner) and Wanda Monthey (Team Leader/Policy Director: PK-20 Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment) answered questions by the Committee on the proposed rule change. They stated that the Department's intention is to create systems that enhance opportunity. They clarified that assessment would be aligned with teaching methods in each class and that the Department would be developing syllabi with teacher input for all classes, including all alternative programs. The Committee believes that the Department has made useful and encouraging changes to the proposed rule.

E. Changes to the pre-referral process to special education

Special education has recently come under increasing scrutiny because of the cost of the programs. Increasing numbers of students have been identified as needing special education services, sometimes for behavioral reasons. Alternative education programs may be more effective in meeting the needs of many students who are currently in the special education system. Where alternative programs do not exist, special education becomes the only option.

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[26] Title 20-A MRSA section 4729
[27] Title 20-A MRSA section 5104-A

For students with emotional or behavioral problems, or who need a different learning environment, alternative education programs may be a more appropriate placement.[28]

A new provision in the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) requires schools to document responses-to-intervention (RTI) as part of the pre-referral process for entry into special education. Other interventions must be undertaken prior to a student being enrolled in special education to determine if a student responds to a research-based intervention. In order to encourage school districts to develop early intervening services for students, IDEA 2004 allows districts the option of using up to 15% of their federal special education funds for additional academic and behavioral support programs.[29] [30] Alternative learning programs can provide effective intervention methods for struggling students that do not qualify for special education.

[28] Institute for the Study of Students At Risk, University of Maine. "Current Status of Alternative Education Programs in Maine: Impact Upon Policies and Practices for Students with Disabilities and Students Considered to Be 'At Risk', Final Report 2000-2001 Project."

[29] Section 300.226 of IDEA 2004. U.S. Department of Education website. http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/,root,dynamic,TopicalBrief,8,

[30] National Center for Learning Disabilities, IDEA Guide. http://www.ncld.org/content/view/900/456084/

III. RECOMMENDATIONS:

The following proposals are unanimous recommendations of the Alternative Education Programs Committee:

Short term recommendations:

1. **Define "alternative learning", "alternative education program" and "at-risk" in statute.** The Committee recommends enacting statutory definitions for "alternative learning", "alternative education program" and "at-risk". Currently the statute makes several references to alternative education and at-risk students but without definitions. The Committee identifies "alternative learning" as a more encompassing definition of learning styles; alternative education programs are the most widely employed type of alternative learning option. The Committee recommends including alternative education within the definition of alternative learning in order to prevent disruption of current programs and statutes surrounding alternative education. The Committee is submitting suggested legislation for these definitions for consideration by the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. *(Requires statutory changes)*

2. **Develop a team of professional educators for use by school districts.** The Committee recommends that the Department of Education develop and support a team of professional educators well-versed in pedagogy and with experience in developing and providing alternative learning programs. Members of the team would be available to school districts and teachers with alternative education programs as an informational and motivational resource.

3. **Incorporate alternative educator input in graduation standards.** The Committee recommends that the Department of Education develop the Chapter 127 rules on diploma requirements with the input of alternative education teachers. The Committee endorses the Department's proposals to develop syllabi with teacher input for all classes, including classes within alternative education programs. Assessment in every class should reflect the teaching and learning method of that class.

4. **Extend the life of the Committee.** The Committee recommends that the Alternative Education Programs Committee be extended until December of 2008 with existing membership. The Committee believes it would be useful to continue its work after the impact of school regionalization is clearer and the Department of Education has completed its survey and analysis of alternative education programs in Maine. *(Requires legislation)*

Long term recommendations:

5. **Develop an approach to funding that reflects the cost of providing alternative education opportunities and encourages regional school units to improve and expand these opportunities.** A primary focus for the Committee as it continues its

work is to develop an approach to ensure equitable funding for alternative education. A first step is to estimate per pupil costs for alternative education. The Maine Education Data Management System (MEDMS) does not receive complete data from all school administrative units and can not generate useable student numbers or cost data for alternative education programs.

The Committee proposes working with the Department of Education and the Institute for the Study of Students at Risk to collect and analyze cost data from several exemplary alternative education programs in Maine. This information would be used to estimate per pupil costs associated with providing effective alternative learning opportunities. Examining alternative education programs with demonstrated success is useful not only for developing cost information but also for describing the activities, methods and resources that comprise a bona fide alternative education program.

As pupil counts and costs estimates are refined, the Committee proposes to develop an appropriate multiplier for at-risk students. Incorporating this multiplier into the EPS calculation is philosophically consistent with the goal of EPS. The multiplier would reward those school units that are providing for this population and be an incentive for other units to address the needs of this population. If done in concert with revisions to other EPS components, the total fiscal impact at the state level could be neutral and result in better accountability for funds reaching the intended specialized populations.

6. **Recognize alternative learning within response-to-intervention definitions as a method of intervention for at-risk students.** The new federal and state requirements for assessment and intervention as part of the pre-referral process for entry into special education may result in fewer students being placed in special education. The Committee believes that increased documentation of response-to-interventions may illuminate the needs of students that are not eligible for special education services but are at risk for school failure. The Committee recommends that alternative learning be officially recognized as an evidence-based intervention for students who are identified through the pre-referral screening process.

7. **Require access to alternative learning opportunities within every regional school unit.** The Committee recommends that every regional school unit have alternative education programs or access to them. The Governor's Task Force To Engage Maine's Youth stated that "the inequitable access to a broad array of educational and social service options for youth across the state puts them at significant disadvantage".[31] The Committee also supports increasing opportunities for access to alternative learning programs and thus supports the Department of Education's proposed change to Chapter 127 that would require every school administrative unit to establish or participate in programs as alternatives to the regular course of study. *(Requires statutory change)*

[31] Governor's Task Force To Engage Maine's Youth, Executive Summary, June 2007.

8. **Encourage professional development opportunities for alternative education practitioners.** The Committee recommends improving access to training opportunities for alternative education practitioners. It is encouraged by the current development of a graduate concentration in alternative education at the Institute for the Study of Students at Risk, University of Maine. The Committee would like to see easy access to this type of professional development opportunities for current teachers of alternative learners. This includes both on-line and on-site courses and continuing education. In addition, the Committee believes that it is important to include alternative learning viewpoints in all current teacher education courses.

9. **Include alternative education teachers in the consideration of education policy in Maine.** The Committee believes that alternative education must be fully embraced within the educational system. It recommends that the Department of Education consult with alternative education practitioners when developing relevant education policy in the state. The Committee also encourages the Department of Education to fully utilize the technical assistance within the department of the Office of Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education.

10. **Support the Office of Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education with appropriate resources.** The Committee recognizes the critical importance of the Office of Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education to provide technical and other various services to schools, practitioners and the Department of Education. The Committee expressed concern that the responsibilities of the Office have expanded without any expansion of resources; the Office is essentially operated by a single professional staff person. The Committee recommends that the Office be supported with appropriate resources, including financial resources, so that it can meet its statutory mission.[32]

11. **Continue to financially support the Institute for the Study of Students at Risk.** The Committee recognizes the value of the research work done by the University of Maine's Institute for the Study of Students at Risk including research on alternative learning, truancy and dropout prevention. The Institute is critical to supporting all the recommendations of the Alternative Education Programs Committee and serves as a centralized resource for reliable information on at-risk students, technical assistance on school dropout prevention, and alternative learning in Maine and in the nation. The Committee recommends that the Institute be financially maintained and supported.[33]

[32] Shelley Reed did not participate in the discussion of this recommendation.
[33] Dr. James Artesani did not participate in the discussion of this recommendation.

IV. RECOMMENDED LEGISLATION

The Committee recommends that the following legislation be enacted:

An ACT to Implement the Recommendations of the Alternative Education Programs Committee

Be it Enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. 20-A MRSA §1, subs-§1-B and 1-C are enacted to read:

1-B. Alternative education program. "Alternative education program" means a program in which the primary purpose is to serve at-risk students with alternative learning opportunities that focus on curriculum and assessment and is in a setting designed to more effectively meet the student's academic, social and relational needs.

1-C. Alternative learning. "Alternative learning" means an educational option that a public school or publicly supported program offers students at-risk that includes some combination of the following: small class size; flexible scheduling; relevant alternative curriculum and assessment; mentoring adults; uniquely skilled teachers; a focus on social, emotional and relationship skills; collaboration between home, school, and social service agencies; and any other measures designed to accommodate the needs of at-risk students.

Sec. 2. 20-A MRSA §1, sub-§2-B is enacted to read:

2-B. At-risk student. "At-risk student" means a student who has not been successful in a traditional educational setting, as measured by at least one of the following:

A. Is not meeting the requirements for promotion to the next grade level or graduation from high school;

B. Is at risk for dropping out;

C. Is habitually truant; or

D. Is economically disadvantaged as signified by qualification for the free lunch program.

Sec. 3. 20-A MRSA §4729 is repealed.

Sec. 4. 20-A MRSA §4730 is enacted to read:

§4730. Alternative education programs

A regional school unit shall establish, or have access to, one or more alternative education programs as defined in section 1, subsection 1-B that are in alignment with the system of learning

results established in section 6209 as alternatives to the regular course of study, including options allowed in sections 5104-A and 8605, to meet the needs of at-risk students as defined in section 1, subsection 2-B. These programs operate as part of the elementary or secondary school program.

SUMMARY

This bill adds definitions to the definition section in Title 20-A. It defines alternative learning as an educational option within the publicly supported system that accommodates at-risk students with flexible schedules, collaboration between home, school and agency, alternative curriculum and assessment, mentoring adults, uniquely qualified teachers and any other measures. Alternative education program is defined as a program that employs alternative learning opportunities to serve at-risk students with curriculum, assessment and setting that meets the student's academic, social and relational needs. The bill defines at-risk students to mean those at risk of school failure as measured by failure to be promoted through the grades, a potential dropout, habitually truant, or a student that is economically disadvantaged and qualifies for the free or subsidized lunch program. The bill also requires all regional school units to have alternative education programs to meet the needs of at-risk students in order to facilitate meeting the standards for high school graduation, or to have access to those programs.

APPENDIX A

Resolve Authorizing the Committee

STATE OF MAINE

APPROVED
JUN 2 7 '07
BY GOVERNOR

CHAPTER
124
RESOLVES

IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD
TWO THOUSAND AND SEVEN

H.P. 1224 - L.D. 1758

Resolve, To Promote Alternative Schools within Existing School Systems

Sec. 1. Committee established. Resolved: That the Alternative Education Programs Committee, referred to in this resolve as "the committee," is established; and be it further

Sec. 2. Committee membership. Resolved: That the committee consists of 13 members appointed as follows:

1. Three members of the Senate, appointed by the President of the Senate;

2. Four members of the House of Representatives, appointed by the Speaker of the House;

3. One member from the University of Maine Institute for the Study of Students at Risk, appointed by the President of the Senate;

4. Two members from the alternative education advisory committee established under the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 20-A, section 5152, appointed by the Speaker of the House;

5. One member from the Department of Education, Office of Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education, appointed by the President of the Senate;

6. One member from the Alternative Education Association of Maine, appointed by the Speaker of the House; and

7. One member from the Interdepartmental Committee on Transition, established under the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 20-A, section 7803, appointed by the President of the Senate; and be it further

Sec. 3. Chairs. Resolved: That the first-named Senate member is the Senate chair of the committee and the first-named House of Representatives member is the House chair of the committee; and be it further

Sec. 4. Appointments; convening of committee. Resolved: That all appointments must be made no later than 30 days following the effective date of this

resolve. The appointing authorities shall notify the Executive Director of the Legislative Council once all appointments have been completed. Within 15 days after appointment of all members, the chairs shall call and convene the first meeting of the committee; and be it further

Sec. 5. Duties. Resolved: That the committee shall conduct a review of all existing alternative education programs and how they are beneficial to youth at risk in Maine.

1. The committee shall:

A. Determine the number and types of kindergarten to grade 12 alternative education programs existing in the State;

B. Determine the number of students participating in alternative education programs;

C. Study the population served by the alternative education programs;

D. Review the practices that exist for at-risk youth and youth needing alternatives in education;

E. Determine how the alternative education programs help in raising graduation rates and lowering dropout rates;

F. Provide the percentage of youth who were identified as being at risk but completed high school through participation in an alternative education program;

G. Research local, state and federal funding sources;

H. Check how alternative education programs contribute toward helping students be college, work and citizenship ready;

I. Coordinate alternative education programs with extended learning opportunities such as 21st-century learning centers, advance placement and employment opportunities;

J. Identify the geographic regions in which students do not have access to alternative education programs;

K. Provide anecdotal data regarding the impact of alternative education on the lives of students and their parents; and

L. Seek professional development opportunities for staff and administration on meeting the needs of at-risk youth.

2. The committee may hold informational sessions and discussions with experts and interested parties; and be it further

Sec. 6. Staff assistance. Resolved: That the Legislative Council shall provide necessary staffing services to the committee; and be it further

Sec. 7. Compensation. Resolved: That the legislative members of the committee are entitled to receive the legislative per diem, as defined in the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 3, section 2, and reimbursement for travel and other necessary expenses related to their attendance at authorized meetings of the committee. Public

members not otherwise compensated by their employers or other entities that they represent are entitled to receive reimbursement of necessary expenses and, upon a demonstration of financial hardship, a per diem equal to the legislative per diem for their attendance at authorized meetings of the committee; and be it further

Sec. 8. Report. Resolved: That, no later than December 19, 2007, the committee shall submit a report that includes its findings and recommendations, including suggested legislation, for presentation to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. The committee is authorized to introduce legislation related to its report to the Second Regular Session of the 123rd Legislature at the time of submission of its report; and be it further

Sec. 9. Extension. Resolved: That, if the committee requires a limited extension of time to complete its study and make its report, it may apply to the Legislative Council, which may grant an extension; and be it further

Sec. 10. Committee budget. Resolved: That the chairs of the committee, with assistance from the committee staff, shall administer the committee's budget. Within 10 days after its first meeting, the committee shall present a work plan and proposed budget to the Legislative Council for its approval. The committee may not incur expenses that would result in the committee's exceeding its approved budget. Upon request from the committee, the Executive Director of the Legislative Council shall promptly provide the committee chairs and staff with a status report on the committee budget, expenditures incurred and paid and available funds.

APPENDIX B

Membership list, Alternative Education Programs Committee

Alternative Education Programs Committee Members

Appointments by the Senate President:

Sen. Peter B. Bowman (Chair)
16 Old Ferry Road
Kittery, ME 03904

Sen. S. Peter Mills
P.O. Box 9
Skowhegan, ME 04976

Dr. A. James Artesani
University of Maine Institute for the Study of Students at Risk
University of Maine
304 Shibles Hall
Orono, ME 04469-5766

Christopher B. Bean
Interdepartmental Committee on Transition
5 Millison Way
Lewiston, ME 04240

Shelley Reed
Dept. of Education
Office of Truancy, Dropout & Alternative Education
23 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0023

Appointments by the Speaker of the House:

Rep. Emily Ann Cain (Chair)
103 Forest Avenue
Orono, ME 04473

Rep. Roberta M. Muse
35 Warren Street
Fryeburg, ME 04037

Rep. Jacqueline R. Norton
85 Thomas Hill Road
Bangor, ME 04401
Rep. John C. Robinson
15 Cranberry Pond Road
Raymond, ME 04071

A. Pender Makin
Alternative Education Association
11 Shell Street
Higgins Beach
Scarborough, ME 04074

Emanuel Pariser
Alternative Education Advisory Committee
10 Pleasantdale Avenue
Waterville, ME 04901

Jonathan Ross
Alternative Education Advisory Committee
135 Whites Bridge Road
Standish, ME 04084

APPENDIX C

Results of the Department of Education Survey on Alternative Education Programs

Alternative Education Programs Survey

First 18 surveys returned as of November 26, 2007
*22 Surveys returned as of December 14, 2007

The location of programs is split almost 50-50 on/off campus.

Programs do offer credits toward graduation.

Most programs have been in operation more than 10 years.

Most programs are at the high school level in this survey 19, 4 programs were at the middle school level, 2 programs extended middle to high school, and 1 was elementary level.

Number of students enrolled in the 18 programs was 486. In a breakdown 471 students were recorded with 47.5% female, 52.4 % males.
*Number of students in the 22 programs was 611. On a breakdown of 596 students 42.2% were females, 55.3% were males.

Almost double the students are in full time rather than part time programs.

Student demographics:

- 40 pregnant or parenting
- 402 live with parent
- 21 live with significant other
- 40 live on won
- 21 Homeless
- 209 known to have involvement with law enforcement agency
- 184 holding or held a job

Grade entered program:
54 as Freshmen
146 Sophomores
192 Juniors
144 Seniors

Special Education identification (those with IEP's)
105 students

Special education identification categories:

- 25 Emotional Disability
- 48 Specific Learning Disability
- 28 Other health impairments (includes AD/HD)
- 0 Mental Retardation
- 7 Multiple Disabilities

- 22 504 Students

Major focus of the Program:
To serve students having difficulty learning/and or adjusting in conventional school setting

Major Objective of the Programs
To support students as long as they require the program with expectations that they MAY return to regular program.

Major focus of program in rank order: (Directions were 1-6 1 being top priority)

- 1.857 Improve both student academic and emotional/behavioral outcomes
- 2.47 Allow students to earn a high school diploma in an alternative setting
- 2.69 Prepare students to become lifelong learners and compassionate, productive, and active citizens
- 3.50 Improve student's academic outcomes
- 3.80 Improve student's emotional/behavioral outcomes
- 4.83 Allow students to gain work experience

Students in the survey receive a regular high school diploma.

Programs almost 50-50 split on following the traditional time frame and a flexible time schedule.

Programs have a collaborative and voluntary admissions process.

Students sign a contract for entrance and participation.

Individuals influencing admittance to the program are the students, school counselors, teachers, parents and principals in ranking from most influential.

Most common referent: School Counselors, Principals and Teachers in rank order.

How Students exit the program (Directions were to think of students over the past 2 years)

- 56.61 % graduated (range of 10% to 90%)
- 9.25 % Returned to regular education program
- 8.04 Asked to leave
- 5.35% Relocated /moved
- 2.21% Dropped out to work
- 1.86% Dropped out and returned
- 1.87% Dropped out to have child or to take care of a child
- 1.23 Incarcerated or mental health placement

Students who graduated in June 2006 and since then:

- 103 Maintained contact with the program
- 46 Obtained full time employment
- 43 Were living independently
- 42 Enrolled in post-secondary
- 40 Were pregnant or parenting
- 21 Enrolled in post-secondary Vocational/technical
- 7 Joined the military
- 3 Were homeless

Support Services available by number of programs:

- 16 career counseling
- 15 mental/health/psychological counseling
- 12 substance abuse counseling
- 6 student mentoring provided by citizens from community

Sources of funding:
Funding from local school district

Current Program needs:
Top 3 major need and most important needs:

- Increased funding
- Using technology in the classroom
- Networking with other alternative educators

Taking into account moderate to high needs the top 4 needs are:

- Networking with other alternative educators
- Training and consultation specific to program needs
- Parent Involvement
- Funding

Current professional staff highest levels of educational attainment:
0 high school
1 Associate Degree
31 Bachelors Degree
11 Masters Degree
4 Post-Masters Degree

Alternative Education Programs Survey

Contact Person: _____ School District: _____ Phone Number: _____

Title/Position: _____ Name/Title of Program (if any): _____

Mailing Address: _____ E-Mail Address: _____

Location of Program (address): _____

This program is located: _____Off campus

_____On campus (within regular school building)

_____On campus (separate building)

_____Other. Please explain: _____

Does your program offer credits toward graduation?

_____Yes _____No _____Not Applicable (e.g., elementary or middle level program)

Number of years the program has been in operation?

_____1-2 _____3-5 _____6-10 _____More than 10

Grade levels served by program:

_____Elementary (K-5) _____Middle School (6-8)

_____High School (9-12) _____Other. Please explain: _____

Number of students currently enrolled in program? _____

How many are: _____Female _____Male

How many of these students are currently enrolled in program? _____Full-time _____Part-time

_____Other. Please explain: _____

How many of your students are currently:

_____ Pregnant or parenting

_____ Live with parent (s)

_____ Live with significant other

_____ Live on their own

_____ Homeless

_____ Known to have had involvements with law enforcement agency

_____ Holding or held a job

How many students in your current program entered the program as:

_____Freshmen _____Sophomores _____Juniors _____Seniors

Participation of identified special education students:

_____ Number of identified special education students (those with IEPs) currently enrolled in program.

Of these students, how many are identified within each of the following disability categories:

_____ Emotional Disability

_____ Specific Learning Disability

_____ Other Health Impairments (including AD/HD, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, etc.)

_____ Mental Retardation

_____ Multiple Disabilities

_____ "504 " Students

_____ Others: Please explain. _____

Focus/Purpose/Goal of Program:

Major Goal of Program: Which of the following descriptions most closely characterizes your program. Choose one:

_____ Serves students needing short-term *remediation* or *rehabilitation* within academic/social/ emotional/behavioral domains to prepare them for return to regular education program (students participation is voluntary or involuntary).

_____ Serves students who are at risk of suspension or expulsion (or who have already been suspended or expelled) (participation is involuntary – students are placed in program).

_____ Serves students having difficulty learning and/or adjusting in conventional school setting (student participation is voluntary – students *choose* to be in program).

_____ Serves students who choose to learn through a theme based setting such as the arts, music, military, or other focus.

Major Objective of Program: Which of the following descriptions most closely characterizes the major objective of your program. Choose one:

_____ To support regular education students, as long as they require the program, with the *expectation* that they will return to a regular education program in order to graduate with a regular high school diploma.

_____ To support regular education students, as long as they require the program, under the condition that they eventually must return to their regular education program in order to graduate with a regular high school diploma.

_____ To provide students with a separate program, with the expectation that they will not return to a regular education program to graduate.

_____ Other (please describe): _____

_____

Major Focus of Program: Rank order the following functions from 1 to 6 with 1 being the most important. If one or more of these functions does not describe the program, use the rating NA (not applicable).

_____ Improve student academic outcomes

_____ Improve student emotional/behavioral outcomes

_____ Improve both student academic and emotional/behavioral outcomes

_____ Allow students to gain work experience while enrolled in program

_____ Allow students to earn a high school diploma in an alternative setting

_____ Prepare students to become lifelong learners and compassionate, productive, and active citizens

Type of Diploma Students Receive Upon Graduation from Program:

_____ Regular Standards-Based High School Diploma

_____ Alternative Diploma. Please explain: _____

_____

Time Schedule:

_____ Program follows traditional time schedule of the regular school program

_____ Program allows for a flexible time schedule (e.g., flexible scheduling during school day, length of school day or school year, etc.)

Student Entrance Criteria:

To what degree is student entrance to program voluntary?

Involuntary (Student is assigned)		Collaborative Decision (Made by student, parents & school)		Voluntary (Student chooses to participate)
|		|		|
1	2	3	4	5

Do you have a combination of voluntary, collaborative, and involuntary student admissions in your program?

_____Yes _____No

If YES, what percentage (approximate) of students is represented in each category?

_____Involuntary _____Collaborative _____Voluntary

How much influence does each of the following individuals typically have in the decision to admit a student to this program?

	None		Moderate		Very High
Student	1	2	3	4	5
Parents	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers	1	2	3	4	5
Principal	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	1	2	3	4	5
Guidance/Counselor	1	2	3	4	5
Others	1	2	3	4	5

Describe Others: _____

Is student required to sign a formal contract for entrance to and participation in program?

_____Yes _____No

Who most commonly refers students to the program?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of Time	Always
Student (himself/herself)	1	2	3	4	5
Other Students	1	2	3	4	5
Parents	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers	1	2	3	4	5
Principal	1	2	3	4	5
Superintendent	1	2	3	4	5
Guidance/Counselor	1	2	3	4	5
Other	1	2	3	4	5

Describe Other: _____

How do students typically exit the program? [Respond ONLY if program was in operation for the preceding two years (2004-2005 and 2005-2006).]

Combining student data from the past two years, please indicate the approximate percentage of students who exited your program via each of the following categories?

_____ Graduated
_____ Asked to leave
_____ Relocated/moved
_____ Dropped out to work
_____ Dropped out to have child or take care of child
_____ Returned to regular (conventional) high school program
_____ Dropped out and returned
_____ Incarcerated or mental health placement
_____ Other. Please explain: _____

The following questions target *only* those students in your alternative education program who held *senior status* during the first quarter of the last school year (2005-2006). *Senior status refers to those students whose course credits put them on target for graduation in June 2006.*

How many students had senior status during the first quarter of 2005-2006 school year? _____

How many of these students were:

_____Female _____Male

_____Full-time _____Part-time

By the close of the last school year (June 2006), how many of these students had:

_____ a. Graduated with a regular high school diploma
_____ b. Graduated with an alternative type diploma

_____ c. Dropped out to work

_____ d. Dropped out to have a child or to take care of a child

_____ e. Stopped attending school, but didn't officially drop out

_____ f. Asked to leave

_____ g. Relocated/moved

_____ h. Were incarcerated or placed in a mental health program

_____ i. Returned to the regular or conventional high school program

_____ j. Other. Please explain. _____

How many of those students represented in c, d, e, f, g, h, and i, (above) returned to your alternative education program at the beginning or during the current year (2006-2007)?

_____

How many students who completed your program (graduated in June 2006 and since then):

_____ Enrolled in a post-secondary higher education program

_____ Enrolled in a post-secondary technical/vocational program

_____ Joined the military service

_____ Obtained full-time employment

_____ Were pregnant or parenting

_____ Were living independently

_____ Maintained contact with the program one or more times

_____ Were homeless

Student Recovery/Follow Up Efforts:

What type of follow up strategies do you typically employ to encourage students who have dropped out to return to program? Check all that apply. Circle the strategy that you have found to be the most effective.

_____ Personal contact (meeting(s) with student)

_____ Phone call(s)

_____ Written letter (s) from program

_____ Other(s). Please explain. _____

_____ None (leave it to student to reconnect)

Which of the following information sources are used to assess student progress? Check all that apply.

_____ MEA results

_____ Standardized test results (other than the MEAs)

_____ Anecdotal student information

_____ Personal Learning Plans

_____ Alternative assessments (specify): _____

_____ Others (specify): _____

Which of the following support services are currently available in your program? (Check all that apply.)

_____ Substance abuse counseling
_____ Student mentoring provided by citizens from community
_____ Mental/health/psychological counseling
_____ Career counseling
_____ Others. Please explain. _____

Indicate the sources of funding for your program. Check all that apply. Circle the major funding source.

_____ Student tuition from sending school district
_____ Funding from local school district
_____ Parents
_____ State Grant
_____ Federal Grant
_____ Private donation(s)
_____ Student self-pay
_____ Program fund raising events
_____ Student operated business
_____ Other. Please explain. _____

Current program needs: Indicate which of the following represent the most important needs to improve your current program. Circle the one item that you believe to be your greatest current need.

	No Need	Mild Need	Moderate Need	Major Need	Most Important (Critical) Need
1. Training and consultation specific to the needs of program (including professional development opportunities).....	1	2	3	4	5

2. Increased funding.....	1	2	3	4	5
3. Improved quality of physical space.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Increased size of physical space.....	1	2	3	4	5
5. Increased community support.....	1	2	3	4	5
6. Increased parent involvement.....	1	2	3	4	5
7. More effective communication with administrators and teachers within regular school program.....	1	2	3	4	5
8. Networking with other alternative educators.....	1	2	3	4	5
9. Using technology in the classroom.....	1	2	3	4	5
10. Curriculum development (including adapting curriculum to Maine's Learning Results.....	1	2	3	4	5
11. Grant writing.....	1	2	3	4	5
12. More effective communication with and information from the University of Maine with regard to professional development opportunities; current, applicable research; good lunches, etc.	1	2	3	4	5

13. Other(s). Please specify: _____

STAFF:

We are interested in your program's current staffing pattern. Please respond by using Full-Time Teaching Equivalents (FTE's). For example, a teacher employed full-time would be listed as 1.0 FTE. A teacher employed one-half time would be listed as .50 FTE. Two fully certified teachers, each working one-half time would equal 1.0 FTE, etc.

How many of your current staff are employed in each of the following categories:

Administrators _____ (FTEs) Fully certified teachers _____ (FTEs) Ed Techs _____ (FTEs)

Others (specify) _____

How many of your current professional staff have as their highest level of educational attainment:

_____ High school diploma
_____ Associate's degree
_____ Bachelor's degree
_____ Master's degree
_____ Post-master's degree

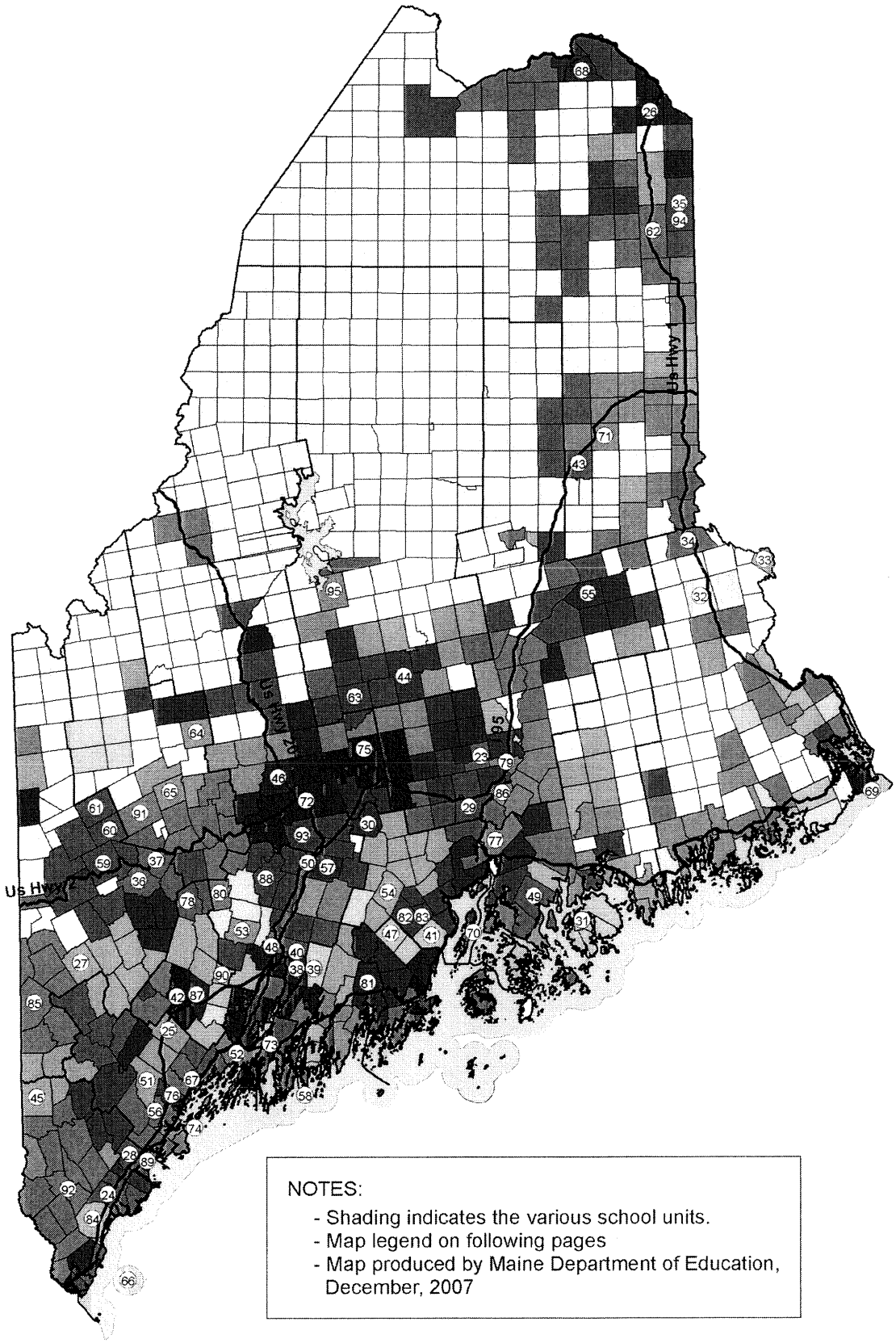
How many of your current professional staff have:

_____ No or less than 2 years of experience teaching in regular (conventional) school
_____ Five (5) or more years of experience teaching in regular (conventional) school
_____ Less than 2 years of experience in alternative education
_____ 3-5 years of experience in alternative education
_____ 6-10 years of experience in alternative education
_____ 11-15 years of experience in alternative education
_____ 16-20 years of experience in alternative education
_____ 21 or more years of experience in alternative education

APPENDIX D

Geographic Distribution of Alternative Education Programs

Maine Alternative Education Sites



NOTES:

- Shading indicates the various school units.
- Map legend on following pages
- Map produced by Maine Department of Education, December, 2007

Maine Alternative Education Sites		
Location No.*	School Unit	City/Town
23	Glenburn School Department	Glenburn
24	MSAD 71	Kennebunk
25	MSAD 15	Gray
26	MSAD 24	Van Buren
27	MSAD 17	South Paris
28	UNION 007	Saco
29	MSAD 22	Hampden
30	MSAD 53	Pittsfield
31	UNION 098	Mount Desert
32	East Range CSD	Topsfield
33	UNION 108	Vanceboro
34	MSAD 14	Danforth
35	MSAD 20	Fort Fairfield
36	MSAD 21	Dixfield
37	MSAD 21	Dixfield
38	MSAD 11	Gardiner
39	MSAD 11	Gardiner
40	MSAD 11	South Gardiner
41	Five Town CSD	Rockport
42	Auburn School Department	Auburn
43	MSAD 25	Stacyville
44	MSAD 68	Dover-Foxcroft
45	MSAD 55	Hiram
46	MSAD 59	Madison
47	UNION 069	Appleton
48	MSAD 16	Farmingdale
49	UNION 093	Blue Hill
50	Waterville Public Schools	Waterville
51	Windham School Department	Windham
52	Brunswick School Department	Brunswick
53	Winthrop Public Schools	Winthrop
54	MSAD 03	Thorndike
55	MSAD 30	Lee
56	Westbrook School Department	Westbrook
57	UNION 052	Winslow
58	UNION 049	Southport
59	MSAD 43	Rumford
60	MSAD 43	Mexico
61	MSAD 43	Mexico
62	MSAD 01	Presque Isle
63	MSAD 04	Guilford
64	MSAD 58	Salem Twp
65	MSAD 58	Salem Twp
66	York School Department	York
67	Yarmouth Schools	Yarmouth
68	MSAD 33	Frenchville
69	MSAD 19	Lubec
70	Islesboro School Department	Islesboro
71	Southern Aroostook CSD	Dyer Brook
72	MSAD 54	Skowhegan
73	Bath School Department	Bath

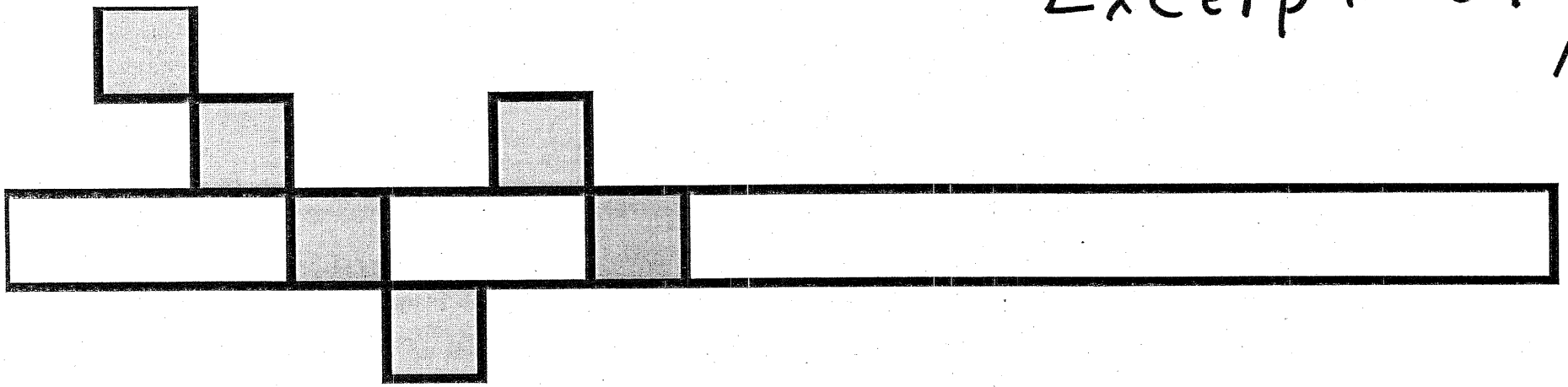
* Location numbers start with 23 and end with 95. (1-23 were not used on this map.)

74	Portland Public Schools	Portland
75	MSAD 48	Newport
76	Falmouth School Department	Falmouth
77	Bucksport School Department	Bucksport
78	MSAD 36	Livermore Falls
79	UNION 087	Orono
80	Fayette School Department	Fayette
81	MSAD 40	Warren
82	MSAD 34	Belfast
83	MSAD 34	Belfast
84	Wells-Ogunquit CSD	Wells
85	MSAD 72	Fryeburg
86	Brewer School Department	Brewer
87	Lewiston School Department	Lewiston
88	MSAD 47	Oakland
89	Old Orchard Beach School Dept	Old Orchard Beach
90	UNION 044	Wales
91	MSAD 09	Farmington
92	Sanford School Department	Sanford
93	MSAD 49	Fairfield
94	MSAD 20	Caribou
95	UNION 060	Greenville

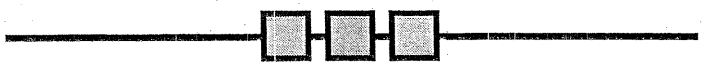
APPENDIX E

Maine Education Policy Research Institute presentation on EPS to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Excerpt only

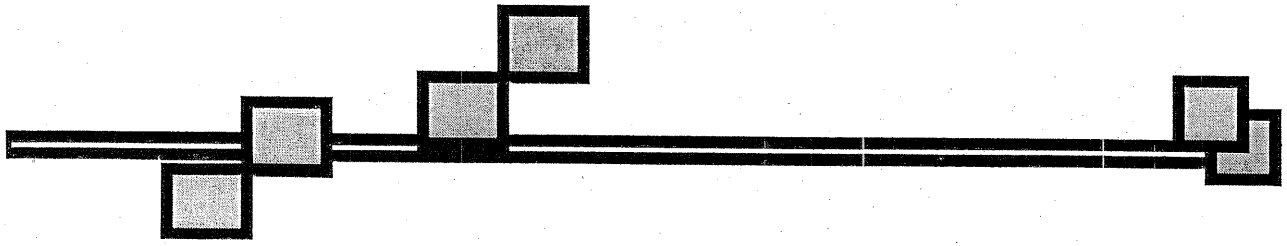


Review of Essential Programs and Services Components



Presentation to
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Maine Education Policy Research Institute
December 2007

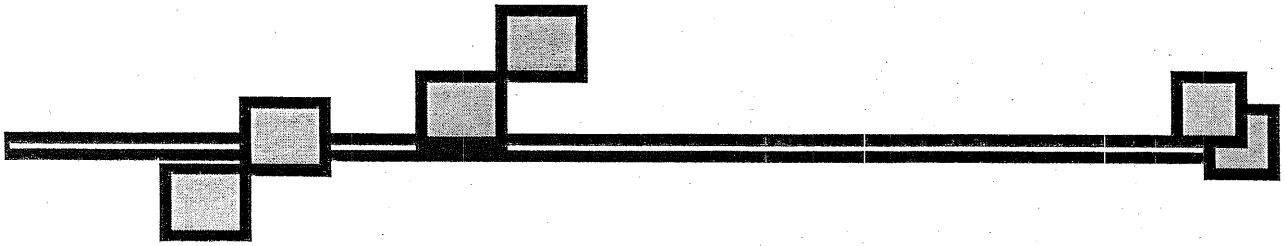


Goal

The goal of Maine's Essential Programs and Services Model is to insure that all schools have the programs and services that are essential if all students are to have equitable educational opportunities to achieve Maine's *Learning Results*.

Fundamental Premises of Essential Programs and Services

- There must be adequate resources to achieve desired outcomes.
- There must be equity in the distribution of adequate resources.



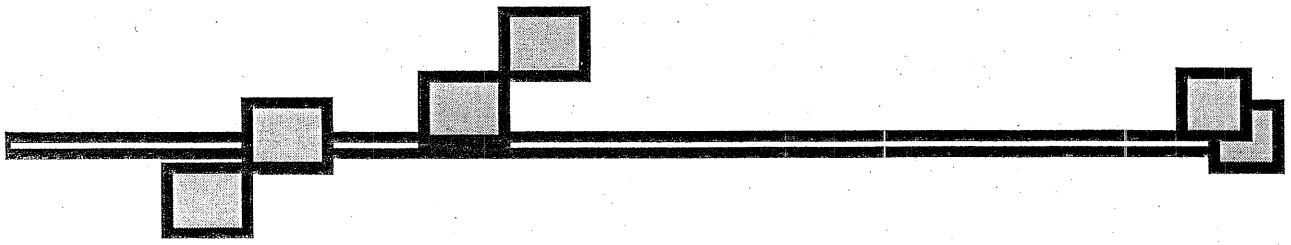
2007-08 EPS Component Development and Review

Development

1. Career and Technical Education (CTE)

Review

1. Specialized Populations
   - A. Special Education
   - B. Disadvantaged Youth
   - C. Limited English Proficiency (LEP)
   - D. Early Elementary Age Children
2. System Administration
3. Operations and Maintenance



Disadvantaged Youth Component

Current Practice

SAUs receive an additional allocation of 15% on their EPS per pupil calculation for each student who qualifies for free or reduced lunch.

Example

SAU has a $5,200 per pupil allocation for each of its students. For each free or reduced lunch qualified student the per pupil allocation would be $5,980 [$5,200+$780(15%)=$5,980].

Strategy Used in Review:

Question: What does it cost for higher poverty schools to achieve the same proficiency level as lower poverty schools?

Analysis of 2005-06 SAU expenditures results:		
	K – 8 Grades	**9 – 12 Grades**
Average per pupil spending for **non**-FR/L student to achieve State average proficiency level.	$6,943.65	$7,281.90
Average per pupil spending for FR/L student to achieve State average proficiency level.	$6,831.15	$8,848.40
Difference in per pupil spending	-$112.50	+$1,566.50
Additional pupil weight for FR/L student.	-2%	+22%

Illustrative Examples of Different Costs for Similar Results:

K – 8 Examples:			
8th Grade Meet Plus Percentage	**Free/Reduced Lunch Percentage**	**Per-Pupil Expenditure**	**SAU**
54%	15%	$6,491	Gorham
56%	33%	$6,320	MSAD 6
53%	52%	$6,205	Medway

Illustrative Examples of Different Costs for Similar Results:

9 – 12 Examples:			
11th Grade Meet Plus Percentage	**Free/Reduced Lunch Percentage**	**Per-Pupil Expenditure**	**SAU**
43%	16%	$6,643	Windham
43%	28%	$6,774	MSAD 47
41%	50%	$7,353	MSAD 27

Reasons for Difference Between Policy and Practice

1. Still ramping up to 100% EPS.
2. More time needed to see impact of policy.
3. Funds not being used specifically to address problem.
4. Spending levels more related to valuation than poverty.

Correlations Between Operating Expenditures and Selected Characteristics		
Characteristic	**Correlation Coefficient**	
	K – 8	**9 – 12**
Free/Reduced Lunch Percentage (2005 K-8)	-.238**	.022
MEA Percent Meets Plus (Composite)	.160*	.312**
Per-Pupil Valuation	.707**	.581**
SAU Enrollment	-.277**	-.437**

* Significant at .05 level; ** Significant at .01 level

5. Policy incorrect.

Recommendation:

1. Maintain current weighting of 15% until more accurate information available.
2. Convert Disadvantaged Youth Component to be a targeted EPS component.

APPENDIX F

Statutes related to the Office of Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education and the Advisory Committee on Truancy, Dropouts and Alternative Education

TITLE 20-A EDUCATION
SUBCHAPTER 4
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

20A § 5151. Technical assistance for truants, dropout prevention and reintegration and alternative education

The commissioner shall provide technical assistance regarding truancy, dropouts and reintegration and alternative educational programs. To do this, the commissioner shall employ at least one consultant whose sole responsibility is to cover the area of truancy, dropouts and alternative education.

1. Qualifications. Any consultant must be knowledgeable in the problems of truancy, dropouts and reintegration and policies and programs pertaining to the problems and have this as the consultant's sole responsibility.

2. Duties. The consultant shall:

A. Provide technical assistance to school administrative units and private schools approved for tuition purposes to establish alternative programs;

B. Develop screening tools for early identification of potential dropouts;

C. Act as a clearinghouse for information on alternative education programs in the State, on exemplary programs in other states and on research pertaining to the subject, and promote effective programs;

D. Function as a liaison among the commissioner, department staff, advisory committee and school administrative units and private schools as it pertains to truants, dropouts and reintegration, alternative education and adult education;

E. Develop model curricula and programs for alternative educational schools and programs;

F. Assess and provide for the evaluation of alternative educational programs consistent with the standards established by the commissioner;

G. Develop training programs for superintendents, principals and school attendance officers to improve effectiveness in performance of their duties as pertains to truants, dropouts and reintegration and alternative education;

H. Develop and submit a plan on behalf of the commissioner for the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education and the state board on the prevalence of truancy and dropouts, assess alternative and adult educational programs and prepare positive strategies to prevent and remedy the problems identified, including reintegration planning for juvenile offenders

who have been released from juvenile facilities and are enrolling in schools in the State;

I. Have the responsibility for preventive and alternative programs;

J. Collect data on the scope of the dropout and truancy problem in the State;

K. Evaluate the scope of the problem of dropouts and truants and programs and policies directed to meet it, including reintegration planning and aftercare services provided for juvenile offenders who have been released from juvenile facilities and have enrolled in schools in the State;

L. Provide staff services to the advisory committee; and

M. Plan and coordinate programs and grant writing to stimulate programs and research on the problem of dropouts, truants, alternative education and adult education.

20A § 5152. Advisory committee

1. Commissioner. The commissioner shall appoint an advisory committee on truancy, dropouts and alternative education.

2. Duties of the advisory committee, as appointed by the commissioner. The advisory committee shall advise the commissioner on the development and implementation of state and local policies and programs that are needed to deal effectively with the incidence of truancy and dropouts in state schools. They should consider their mandate in a broad context to assess the causes of truancy and dropouts, the effectiveness of alternative and prevention programs and the social and educational programs or changes needed to encourage students to remain in school, including reintegration planning and aftercare services provided for juvenile offenders who have been released from juvenile facilities in the State and have enrolled in schools in the State.

3. Membership. The advisory committee shall have a broad membership reflecting the range of individuals and public and private institutions which are involved or interested in the problem and its solution. These shall include representation from each of the following:

A. Teachers;

B. Elementary school principals;

C. Secondary school principals;

D. Guidance counselors;

E. Adult education teachers with experience in high school completion education;

F. Superintendents;

G. Administrators from private schools involved in alternative education;

H. Department of Health and Human Services;

I.

J. Department of Corrections;

K. Department of Labor;

L. A local positive action committee on truancy, dropout and alternative programs;

M. Representatives from the business community; and

N. Other individuals who the commissioner feels will contribute to the development of effective policies and programs.

Two of the representatives in paragraphs A to D shall be directly involved in alternative education. There shall be no more than 15 members on the committee.

4. Term of office. The members of the advisory committee shall serve for 2 years and may be reappointed.

5. Expenses. Members of the advisory committee shall be reimbursed for expenses only for attending meetings or performing other functions authorized by the committee.

6. Annual reports. The committee shall report annually by February 1st to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education.

20A § 5153. Rules

The commissioner shall establish rules to implement this subchapter by January 1987.

APPENDIX G

Letter to the Commissioner of Education from the Advisory Committee on Truancy, Dropouts and Alternative Education

April 2007

Commissioner Susan Gendron
Maine Department of Education
State House Station #23
Augusta, Maine 04333

Dear Commissioner Gendron:

As Chair of the Truancy, Dropout and Alternative Education Committee, I'd like to provide you with a brief update of our work since October 2006. There are several initiatives that we have identified as important work for this year and have met several times to ensure that all of our work gets done.

Dropout Prevention Summer Conference 2007 ~

You helped us kick off last year's Dropout Prevention institute at UMO and the feedback suggests that most participants got a lot out of conference. The TDAE Committee is well underway planning this summer's conference scheduled for late July. I hope you can join us again.

Alternative Education Program Review ~

Two members of the Committee, Dr. Bill Davis or UMO and Emanuel Pariser, former Director of the Community School, are in Phase 2 of an Alternative Program Review which is a study to collect current data on alternative education programs in Maine. Their work will result in a formative peer evaluation process that will provide many Maine programs with valuable information.

Truancy Brochure ~

The Committee endorsed the idea of creating a Truancy Brochure that would answer basic questions about Habitual Truancy as defined in 20-A, 5051-A. A Westbrook Alternative Learning student, Chelsea DiBiase, volunteered to design and write the brochure as part of her English requirement in the WHS Alternative program. She has completed her second draft which has been given to the TDAE Committee for review. Perhaps you'll have the opportunity to meet Chelsea at the Commissioner's Recognition Awards Ceremony this spring.

Task Force to Engage Maine's Youth ~

Shelly Reed has continually updated the TDAE Committee on the progression of the work completed by the Governor's Task Force to Engage Maine's Youth. The key components of the proposed legislation include:

- Commitment to students: School Completion Plans for those whose education has been disrupted.
- Credit for work completed: Academic materials shared or an academic programming waiver signed between sending and receiving schools/placements.
- Timely access and enrollment: School records transferred within 5 school days.
- State Review Team designated to address disputes.
- New Diploma Option: School Establishment of a Department of Education Diploma as designated by the Commissioner of Education.

Because our Committee exists as part of Maine statue, it makes sense that the TDAE Committee have a role to play in the award of a potential State diploma. The Governor's Task Force will report out it's findings to the legislature before the end of June.

An Act to Prepare All Maine Students for College, Work and Citizenship ~

The TDAE Committee has discussed this piece of legislation several times. Although the Committee recognizes the achievement of high standards as the cornerstone to success, we question the proposal for increasing graduation requirements in terms of its direct and immediate impact on high-risk learners. The following are some of our concerns:

1. Students with non-traditional learning styles and at high risk of dropping out who are struggling <u>now</u> to meet the graduation requirements may find these added requirements in high difficulty - low interest curriculum areas an insurmountable barrier between them and graduation.

2. Added requirements will drive out important options for all students - vocational students will have less time to take vocational courses, alternative students will have less time to work on critical high interest, high relevance courses; special education students will have less time to work on developing learning adaptations; fine arts focused students will have less time for critical arts-related classes.

3. What is the research that shows the effectiveness of this top-down approach? Does research demonstrate that increasing graduation requirements Statewide by adding more mandatory courses creates a more productive learning environment

for all students? What are the impacts relating to School dropout and disengagement for marginal school populations?

4. Extra requirements will drive out innovation on the local level - between the current requirements and these new ones teachers and schools will have even less time to develop their own innovative teaching and learning approaches especially in regards to creating successful approaches for marginal populations.

The TDAE felt is was important to share our thoughts and concerns with you as we were created by the Legislature in an "Advisory" role. You have always been open, proactive, and attentive to our input and for that, we are very thankful. We are all looking forward to the 2007 Commissioner's Recognition Awards Ceremony on May 24th at the Blaine House.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Ross
Chair, Commissioner's Advisory Committee on Truancy, Dropouts, and Alternative Education

APPENDIX H

Profiles of Students in Alternative Education Programs

From the Bangor Daily News, June 22, 2004 / By Leanne Robicheau

CHILDREN INSPIRE MOMS' SCHOOL SUCCESS
PROGRAM ISSUES EIGHT DIPLOMAS

NORTHPORT - Dressed in graduation caps and gowns, eight high school students - each with a baby or toddler planted firmly on her hip - marched down the aisle Saturday to receive their hard-earned diplomas

Before reaching the stage, the moms paused for a moment to hand children over to proud grandparents or fathers who were eagerly awaiting the special graduation ceremony.

Heidi Moores, Shauna Pomeroy and Viktoria Robinson (from left) contemplate the audience during the Passages graduation ceremony while Kristina Vaughan kisses her 2-year-old daughter, Mercedez.

The young mothers had successfully completed the Passages Program through the Community School in Camden, which offers alternative education opportunities.

The Passages Program, with its home-based, one-on-one teaching curriculum, is the only one of its kind in Maine, although there are several similar school-based programs around the state, including those in Bangor, Waterville and Augusta, according to head teacher-counselor Deidre Sousa.

"We don't know of another [home-based] one in the country," she said.

Emanuel Pariser, co-director of the program, said during the commencement held at MBNA's Ginley Hall that he had learned a lot in the past year.

"One lesson that stands out is that the experience of many of our young parents is that they are not always warmly welcomed into our communities," Pariser noted. "Many

people have the attitude that having children young is a problem. Well, these young women in front of us have proved that notion incorrect.

"They have turned their lives around, worked hard at being good mothers, worked hard at being students, worked hard to make their children's lives better than theirs was," he said. "Achieving their diplomas today is a major step in that direction.

"What was seen troubling to some is actually the key motivating force in our students' lives - their children, whom they cherish more than anything else in the world."

At times, misty-eyed family members seemed to make it damper inside the hall than outdoors where it was raining. Fathers, grandfathers, grandmothers and friends shed tears while expressing pride in their graduates.

In the Passages Program, students must successfully complete 23 course requirements, which include basic academics, such as math, science, English and history. They also must pass courses such as parenting, first aid and nutrition.

In the past decade, 59 students have graduated from the program, including one dad. There have been only eight graduation ceremonies because students study at their own pace. The school waits until there are a sufficient number of graduates to hold commencement exercises.

"They basically set the goal for themselves," co-director Martha Kempe said.

The final requirement is completing a "passage," which is addressing or confronting a real fear, challenge, need, interest or passion in their life.

One graduate, Whitney Mills of Rockland, was 15 when she got pregnant. For the now-17-year-old, however, it wasn't the end of the world.

"I was nervous," she said Friday, "but, I was almost excited at the same time."

Being a mother at such a young age and studying at the same time is "definitely difficult," she said, "but it's manageable. There's some nights I just want to sit on the couch and sleep."

Mills said that before she became pregnant, she was an honor student at Camden Hills Regional High School. She chose the Passages Program because it offered her the opportunity to stay at home with her son, Cameron Kilton Jr., now 15 months old and nicknamed "C.J.," and to work.

Students in the program have "one-on-one" teacher-counselors who come to their homes once a week to teach or guide them through the mostly self-directed studies. They also must attend a weekly workshop at the school.

Mills' passage was figuring out how she would manage to attend nursing school.

Two weeks ago, she finished the certified nursing assistant program at the Mid-Coast School of Technology in Rockland. She and Cameron Kilton Sr. are engaged to be married.

"I plan to get my R.N.," she said, referring to becoming a registered nurse.
For Viktoria Robinson, 19, of Thomaston, Passages was the only avenue for earning a high school diploma.

"I wanted a real diploma, not a GED," she said.

Robinson, who finished the program a year ago, has been attending the University of Maine's Thomaston campus for a degree in physical therapy, while her mother, Sharon, watches her 16-month-old son Brayden.

Brayden's dad, Andrew Hyatt of Thomaston, also helps with the baby a couple of days a week, Robinson noted. "I'm not totally alone, like some girls are," she said.

Attending school and caring for a baby have sometimes been "overwhelming and tiring," she said. "It's hard, but it will be worth it in the long run."

Letter from a Teen Parent
October 9, 2007

Dear Committee,

My name is Christie; I am a twenty-four year old mother of two incredible children, Andrew, age seven, and Benjamin, age three. Besides being a full-time mother I also work full-time for Unity College in Unity Maine as the Office Coordinator for the Registrar's Office. I also take as many classes as I can to further my education working towards an Associates degree in Early Childhood Education, and a Bachelors degree of which I am not certain of the concentration. In my spare time I also like to support my role in the community by volunteering for different organizations, one of which being a children's program at a local church.

I write to you today to explain how I have become who I am and hope you will see that the Community School in Camden Maine has been instrumental to my success.

In 1999, as a high school drop-out I found myself pregnant, and had long given up any ideas of becoming a contributing member of my community. I had lacked the self confidence and foundational education needed to complete high school. With a baby on the way, I felt destined to be the poor house wife that lived in a small apartment built off the side of her parent's home. At least that was the case until I was introduced to the Passages Program at the Community School. The basis on which the C-School teaches is a self directed learning program. This nontraditional style of education allowed me to work quickly through core skills that I was comfortable with, such as budgeting, science, and art. It also awarded me the freedom to take more time on skills that I had not developed such as math and reading. Also, the flexibility of having my one-to-one teacher come to me and the personalized attention was ideal for a new mother with a lack of transportation.

The Passages Program of the Community School is so much more than just traditional academics. Core skills, like parenting, conflict resolution, and health care bring light to some of the challenges young parents are faced with as they provide for their children and themselves. Learning that to be a good mom meant that I would have to take care of myself was something I never would have been introduced to without the C-School.

Perhaps though the most significant part of the school for me was the connections it provided me with when I needed them the most. The school provided adults who could be positive role models, who could give insight and wisdom, when it was asked for, and who could instill confidence by showing their confidence in me. The Community School and my one-to-one showed me opportunities in my life that I could not see. They supported my passions and inspirations and encouraged me with a gentle, guiding hand to develop my own moral compass, spirituality, and character. All of these things led me to become the person I am today.

The passages program has support many teen parents to become successful by their own definition. I know I am not certain of the path I would have been on today without them. Even if this program benefited just one young parent that should be enough for anyone to want to implement this program within their community.

Respectfully,

Christie Heath
2002 Graduate of the Passages Program, Camden Community School

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Letter from a Seventh Grade Dropout:

To the Rockland Board of Education:

My name is Amanda Cates. I'm writing this letter to the Rockland Board of Education in reference to the Community School. I am currently a student in the Passages program who will be graduating in May after two years of being in the program. The last grade I completed in public school was the seventh grade. I had no intention of going back to school because it was really hard for me and I could not have one-on-one time with teachers.

In 2003 I found out I was pregnant and I knew that I could not tell my kid she had to finish school and go through with it when I didn't finish school and had no intention of going back. I knew to set a good example I had to find a way to get into a school that was willing to have one-on-one time with me and to really fully explain things that I couldn't understand. A friend named Trisha told me about the Passages program and highly recommended it. She brought me over to fill out the forms. Two months later I was in school. At the time I was five months pregnant.

I chose to stay in the Community School. The subjects that I studied, which they don't have in public school, such as: pregnancy, infant care, parenting and early childhood development, prepared me for being a mom. Something that public school staff don't address is that teenage parents have a very hard time staying in school while being pregnant and raising a child. You have to have a job to pay for day care, pay for gas, and all the other expenses that come along with having a kid. Obviously, it's hard to stay in school, have a job, and raise a kid at the same time. There is no time in there to be with your child, to raise her; there's just so much you would miss out on. That's not fair to the baby or to the parent. With the Passages program, they're willing to work around your schedule, they come to your house so you don't have to send your child to a babysitter, and they spend a huge amount of one-on-one time with the student. The teachers support each student, going out of their way at times to help the student find the strength they need to make difficult choices.

I don't think you fully understand how difficult it is to be a teenager and

have to raise a child, have a job, yet still have no money because you have so many expenses. The Community School allows me to be a full-time student on my own time; that way I can still get a part-time job and be a full-time mom.

I just want to thank the Community School for everything they have done to help and support me, and for the way they made me feel confident enough to finish and get my high school diploma.

Sincerely,

Amanda Cates

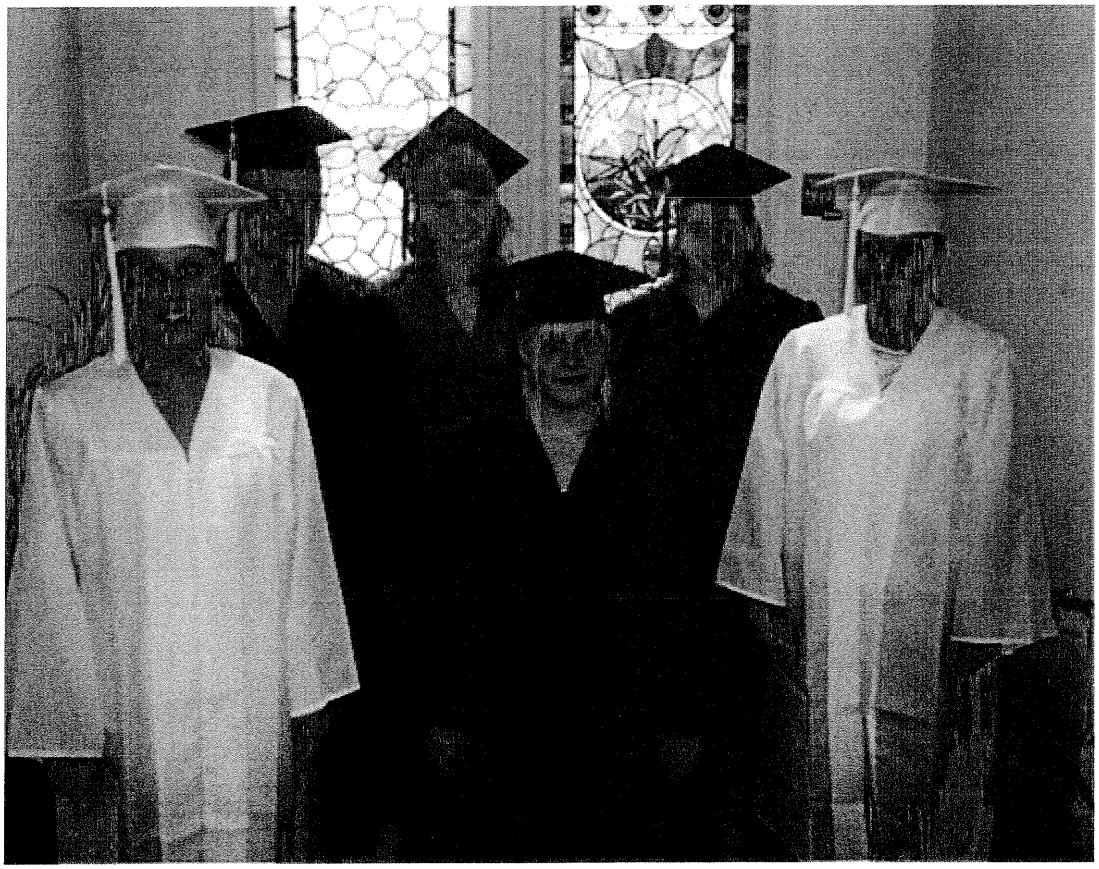
Long Term Results from Alternative Education:

"Joe" came to the Community School residential program from a short stay at the Youth Center, after having upended his principal's desk in a brief altercation. This mid-coast Maine boy was bright, came from a family that was in the process of disowning him, and so was temporarily homeless. He succeeded in completing the Community School, gaining his diploma, and eventually graduated at the top of his class in college, gained entry into a highly regarded graduate school in Boston, and graduated, and now works with one of Maine's top businesses in the import division.

"Fran" came to the Community School in 1976 after having left her family, gotten into a variety of minor legal conflicts in her mid-Maine community, and gotten support from a non-profit that was working with at-risk youth in the area. She made it through the school by the skin of her teeth, and several years later gained entry into the Onward Program at UMO. Seven years later she had her clinical social workers degree and worked in social services with chemically addicted HIV/AIDS patients, as well as consulting at the Community School as our clinical social worker.

"Jerry" is a Passamaquoddy tribal member who arrived at the Community School at 17 with a long string of school failures behind him. He was a top-notch athlete in several previous high schools but could not focus on his academics. At the School's residential program he had the opportunity to work and study while living at the school. He graduated and returned to the reservation with his diploma. Since then he has gotten a certificate for building trades, been employed steadily, begun a family, and has served on the tribal council for several years.

Passages Teachers receiving Commissioner's Award, their students speaking on their behalf (left to right) Teacher Janet Larkin, Student Ashley Luce, Teacher Andrea Itkin, Student Jessie Smith.



07 Graduates (left to right) Ashley Coffin, Cara Johnson, Kayla Norwood, Natasha Ward, Kendra Jameson, Santa Havener

Student Profiles:

1. One student in western Maine is the youngest in the family and the only one to graduate in the family. He was not attending classes and could not tolerate restrictions of a regular education classroom. However, the school allowed him to attend class every other day and work in the community alternate days for school credit--3 1/2 credits. He had already gotten required courses and the credits were essentially electives. He has a regular diploma.

2. One student in Down East Maine attended the Compass Rose program. She had depression and anxiety and a difficult family life so she had weeks that she was not at school. She also had difficulty with some legal issues. The alternative education program allowed her some flexible scheduling, including a few classes at regular education. The flexibility allowed her to get a regular diploma and she currently is successfully attending UM/Machias.

3. Another student was not handling the pressures of a full course caseload and was allowed to take concentrated courses in history and math to complete in a half- year, and then go on to take other classes similarly. He coincidentally did very well academically when allowed this format.

Source: Chris Bean, Committee member

Alex Doherty
2005 JMG Graduate
Hall-Dale High School

"I joined JMG at the beginning of my senior year because I was going into my last year of high school not knowing what it was that I wanted to do after I graduated. I had heard so many good things about the JMG program that I knew it could be a great asset to me during a confusing year. This proved to be very true as is shown through all of the knowledge and skills I gained and my current position as an estimator for EJ Prescott in Round Lake, New York. I would like to give a special thanks to my JMG Specialist, Mr. John Burgess, for introducing me to the people at EJP and for first giving them my name for what was my future enrollment in the University of Prescott program. The JMG program has been helpful to me in many ways. In the classroom we spent time on exercises that helped to build a strong work ethic and taught us all how to become and remain professional while working with co-workers in an actual work setting."

Alex Doherty, JMG Graduate

Bob Moody, Safety Manager for EJ Prescott, selected Alex for the University of Prescott program and has this to say about Alex: "Alex is the youngest estimator in our industry that we can remember and it is well earned. Alex is the type of employee that any employer would want to have. He has been extremely self motivated to learn and accepts any challenge that we have given him with a great attitude and a can do spirit."

Kristin Lee
2003 JMG Graduate
Penquis Valley High School
"2006 Soldier of the Year"

"My name is Kristin Lee. I am from Milo, Maine, where I attended Penquis Valley High School. While there I was an officer in JMG for 3 years. This experience helped me perfect many skills that later helped me gain some amazing experiences in life. My first job out of high school was working for an employment agency where I assisted others in writing resumes and cover letters. Without JMG this would have been very difficult. My next adventure was the Army National Guard where I excelled in my training becoming the physical fitness winner in Basic where I beat out approximately 300 other soldiers both male and female for this award. I later was deployed to Kuwait and learned a great deal through this experience. When I returned I was honored with a nomination to compete for Soldier of the Year. I won several competitions and became the Soldier of the Year for the state of Maine in 2006. This experience allowed me to travel to Washington D.C. where I marched in the Memorial Day Parade and I also held the State of Maine flag on stage for the concert at the Capitol Building. These opportunities have been some of the best experiences in my life. I am currently in my senior year at the University of Maine where I major in Communication and minor in Public Relations. I also work with children with disabilities. I have been able to accomplish all of these things because I learned good leadership skills and professionalism through my JMG experiences."

Josh Dudley
2006 Graduate
Project Reach
China Middle School

Josh has always hated school. In the 7th grade when he joined Project Reach, Josh's grades were in the C-D level. He was just getting by. His participation in school and Project Reach was minimal. Josh often skipped school, paid many visits to the office and received numerous lunch detentions. In the 8th grade, Josh began to hang out in the Project Reach classroom before classes started, during his lunch periods and in his free time. Josh asked his Project Reach Specialist for some extra help with school work because he decided he wanted to pass. At the end of the school year, the China Middle School principal recognized Josh as the "Most Improved Student of the Year." Now a Freshman at Erskine Academy, Josh continues to work hard at his studies and was recently nominated for and received a Renaissance Award.
Josh is described by his teachers as "respectful toward other students in class, often responding to his peers with a thoughtful comment. He has become a class leader, a role model and a voracious reader. He has accomplished much in his short time here, and we look forward to seeing his accomplishments in the next three years."
Keep up the good work, Josh!

Lindsey Ketch
2006 JMG Graduate
Messalonskee High School
Oakland

Lindsey Ketch is currently enrolled in the Elementary Education Program at UMF. She is also participating in the work-study program there. Her employer stated that she wishes there were more students like Lindsey. As a member of the Admissions Club, Lindsey gives tours to high school seniors interested in attending UMF.

Lindsey says of her experience with JMG, "I originally joined JMG my junior year to help me decide what I wanted to do with my life and to gain the skills needed to get a good job. Everything I have learned so far has come into play. The resume I constructed in JMG has helped when applying for jobs both on and off campus. My summer job consisted of working in the mail room at Gould Health Systems sorting claims. I would have never been able to receive this job without JMG's preparation. I also learned team building skills to get myself involved on campus such as in Student Admissions Club. JMG has played a major role in my life and my overall success so far at UMF."

Keep up the good work, Lindsey!

Name: Joshua Heath
Year of Graduation: 1999
School: Mt. Blue High School, Farmington, Maine
Specialist of Record: Cal Dorman
Reason for joining JMG: Josh was accepted into the JMG program because of his financial situation and his potential as a student leader. Josh grew up in Chesterville, a small town southeast of Farmington. Josh's father is disabled and his mother works as a receptionist. Neither of Josh's parents attended college. In high school, Josh participated in National Honor Society, Student Government and two varsity sports (football and wrestling.) He was voted "Most School Spirit" by his classmates and attended many sporting events to cheer for his classmates.
Post-graduation: After high school, Joshua attended Unity College in Unity, Maine, and graduated in 2003. He received a Bachelors of Social Science degree with an emphasis on Park Management. While at Unity, Josh had two jobs – RA and work study. He worked during the summer months as well.
Current Status: Josh is a JMG job specialist at Leavitt Area High School. Now at Sabattus Middle School.