

# **Superintendent Regional Group Report-backs**

## **Recommendations, Feedback and Issues**

Financial Strategies Summit  
Augusta, Maine  
August 28, 2009

Notes below are as recorded at the conference on screen and collated from written notes submitted by regional break-out groups at the conference. Each superintendent region was asked to submit written copies of the notes to the Superintendent Funding Committee and to the Commissioner. Edits for clarity and spelling have been made; nothing has been omitted or edited for content. (*Notes in italics are from DOE.*)

When doing report-backs, groups sometimes did not report issues already reported by others – thus some of the later groups have shorter lists.

### **What we heard most**

- Tell us as soon as possible what the hit will be so we can plan for it.
- Purchasing Portal does not produce significant (or, sometimes, any) savings
- Closing schools process is too cumbersome
- Certification – increase to 10 years (*currently 5 year cycle*)
- Combine DOE reviews (NCLB, food service, special ed, etc.)
- Do not make changes to funding formula
- Can we remove/change the Budget Validation Referendum (BVR) requirement
- Pass two-year GPA budgets so we can plan; allow districts to propose and pass two-year local budgets
- Special Education had several themes: do not exceed Federal requirements, revisit eligibility, and investigate regional options
- Statewide contracts and health benefits
- Statewide reductions that would reduce the number of days in a school year (Shutdown days, or the Commissioner reduces the number of days required) or a wage freeze
- Explore retirement incentives
- Reduce notification to employees from 90 days to 30
- Statewide energy bids

### **Mid Coast (actual notes submitted)**

- Leave Funding Formula alone
- Do not consider the whole state as an entity
- Statewide teacher and health contracts
- Reduce 90 day notice requirement for teacher layoffs to 30 (*Legislation*)

- Open up retiree health insurance to more providers (*Legislation*)
- Do not shift state share of PERS to funding formula
- Don't see the Purchasing Portal (Best Bid) as effective; can beat the price on our own
- Special Ed –pick up regional conversation again
- Risk management – every 5 years, take the lowest bid (no emotional attachment to who our insurer is)
- Fuel oil, statewide purchasing might help
- Why is there declining enrollment – tax policy? Tourism, exploring the economy, how to attract new families, workers comp concerns
- Bus transportation software could help/need it now (*Delayed due to two appeals processes in the bidding stage. Contract has been finalized and we are beginning to implement.*)
- Don't ignore the implications this suggest: workers Comp maybe disadvantages
- Feds – more flexibility on stimulus funding, on Title 1, IDEA (*Working with Congressional delegation, national organizations and USDE to introduce legislation.*)
- Loss of REAP because of reorganization
- Reorganization, three RSUs, and an AOS anxious about what will happen, if set aside; huge savings soon to be realized; because of the impact of low-receiving districts, some can't consider reorganization
- Eliminate GT staff at DOE (*There isn't any, a piece on an assignment*)
- Why is agriculture position at DOE separate from the rest of Career and Technical Education? (*The position is a part of CTE but is defined in statute as a separate program. The individual is a member of the CTE, and Curriculum and Instruction Team*)
- RISC contract, is there a better way of using the funds
- Establish pre-K education statewide, rather than patchwork; if funded with startup, this would have a huge impact on prevention programs, capture children earlier, huge payout (reduced Title IA identification later)
- Statewide plan to incentivize retirements
- More specifics the sooner about curtailment, how much, when, etc this would be helpful

### **Western Maine (actual notes submitted)**

#### Collective Bargaining:

Help breach the disconnect with the unions on what is available (*Legislation*)  
 Establishing a retirement incentives at the State level for teachers (*Legislation*)  
 Examine the issues that are fixed costs associated with contracts  
 Identify and develop a plan for dealing with the discrepancies among contracts within in RSUs

Examine class size limitation according to either Chapter 125 or 127 (don't remember which)

#### Needs:

Waive class size requirements (Chapter 125 or 127)

Eliminate penalties for folks not raising the local share of EPS, since the State is not able to reach 55%.

Develop a new method of determining valuation, perhaps using averaging and establishing a fiscal capacity.

More recent economic data

One funding model does not seem to work. Rural vs. Urban

How can we adjust for unique needs.

Elimination or softening of maintenance of effort language on Federal grants

Clarify that the ratios in EPS are personnel ratios and not class size!!

The earlier we can have information on reductions the better (sooner vs. later)

The consensus was to take the hit this year and not delay it (although there was concern for new RSUs and perhaps giving them an option of using it this year or carrying it over.)

There was a strong feeling that the curtailment adjustment should be based upon local choice and not done at the State level.

Furlough days implemented at the State level for all concerned. A system could opt out, if the system had adequate resources and received little or no State money. This needs to come from on "high."

The group prefers furlough days to reduction or loss of educational programs.

Reduced teacher notice from 90 days to 30 days.

Streamline special education guidelines back to Federal regulations and publish a cost comparison.

Provide and allow school systems to adopt a biennial budget

Teacher certification – move to 10 year certificates

Move schools in unorganized territories under the nearest local school system.

Extend school approvals to 5 years instead of annual.

Combine NCLB/Hot Lunch/Special Education reviews for school systems.

Allow transfers in excess of 5% for cost centers

Allow districts to carry forward ARRA funds outside the 3% cap without reduction in State subsidy. (*Language permitting this was added to the budget last session, need to continue*)

Student Assistance Team vs. RTI – duplication??

Adjust RTI timeline (*Current rule is for 2010*)

Examine the continuation of MLTI down the road

Purchase portal – many of the systems within Western Maine do not find it useful

One of the larger city districts has used it for equipment, furniture, supplies and saved around \$20,000.

Most systems found they could do as well or better through individual contract.

Risk management - many municipal systems are covered under the municipal insurance plan.

Combine DOE and DHHS

### **Kennebec**

- GT is very restrictive
- Legal fees too excessive, especially for negotiations
- Push back to fed standards for special education
- Statewide ADS contract (*Financial system*)
- Audits – statewide solution/provider?
- Better comparative data on student achievement, also cost information (*Dr. Silvernail is preparing for the Education Committee*)
- Revenue solution: dedicated tax on wind turbines to education
- Issue of due process, too many advocates, schools do not prevail, is it unfair
- Challenging behavior: how can HHS, DOC & DOE work together
- Closing schools process is too cumbersome
- Certification – increase from 5 years to 10 years
- Reducing committees
- Combining reviews
- Reduce the 90 days notice requirement for layoffs
- Statewide freeze on salaries/statewide furlough days

### **Penquis (actual notes submitted)**

1. Define Basic Core (essential)  
EPS minimum not maximum
2. Define Enrichment Programs.
3. Federal Funds – Clarify regular non-federal funded teaching positions only in EPS.
4. Separate PE, Music, and Art Teacher from teaching positions.
5. Money decisions need NOW not next spring.
6. Money flows in & out of formula in same fashion.
7. Use stimulus money for FY10 – Notify schools early on FY11 shortfalls.
8. Be honest & accurate NOW on money situation – statewide from MDOE.
9. Healthcare benefit cost reduction thru medical cooperation – new companies.
10. Statewide freeze on all salaries including any step increase in any employee contract.
11. Waive regulations for use of various State targeted funds for application across programs.
12. Stop adding special education identification categories at local/state expense.
13. Balance regular & special education needs with money equilibrium for funding.
14. Streamline rules for school closure.

### **Aroostook**

- Early notification of curtailment
- Ability to move funds across cost centers

- More flexible use of Maine care funds
- Concern about testing –
- RTI deadline: move it out
- Wage freeze
- Remove the Budget Validation Referendum (BVR) requirement

### **Hancock**

- Importance of knowing as soon as possible about curtailment, even a date of when it might be known
- Communication of \$30 m still to be identified (did not know Legislature did not really have a final budget)
- Furlough days for all schools faculty/staff
- Commissioner reduce number of school days below 175
- Retirement incentives: need clarification about what is possible
- Sports programs: shorten season, reducing transportation, user fees, fund raising (*Maine Principals Association*)
- Cash flow issues, RSU without carry forward
- DOE is getting tougher on withholding subsidy due to non-submission of forms
- Power of Legislature in trumping local contracts
- Two year budgets
- Budget Validation Referendum: how cost-effective is this
- Loss of REAP funds
- What happens in November with school district reorganization if repeal passes; the Legislature needs to respond quickly, planning should be happening now (want to be able to keep newly reorganized district as is)
- Accreditation process is NEASC only option? (expensive/burdensome)
- Certification length process, concern should be spent on outputs
- Special Ed where we exceed Federal law
- Give local district choices

### **Cumberland (actual notes submitted)**

- Knowing curtailment amount as soon as possible
- Unsettled contracts and the “unknown”- several districts have unresolved contracts
- Concerns about planning for the future with enrollment projections from different sources that are at odds (Planning Decisions vs. State Planning Office)
- The impact of the closing of BNAS on SAD 75 and Brunswick – will the State be helping out?
- Unfunded mandates – RTI and G&T as examples
- The lack of flexibility of ARRA Title 1 and IDEA moneys
- The large percentage ARRA funds in GPA is a concern for many districts
- The impact on districts that don’t get a lot or any Title 1 or IDEA ARRA funds.
- The concern about health insurance, and the “soft” money that MEA put up to buy down the rate. How much longer can that go on? Double digit insurance rate increases.
- A suggestion that the State move to break the Anthem monopoly

- A suggestion that the State align with other states our size and advocate with the Feds that ARRA funds be given as block grants to the States and locals to be used where they would see the need without so many strings.
- A suggestion that the work of a state wide committee that made recommendations for tightening up SPED eligibility etc., be revisited
- A suggestion that the State do bids for assorted energy sources, as well as asbestos abatement, so that local districts could see if they were more competitive than what a district could do on its own.
- A suggestion that there be a statewide collective bargaining agreement with the MEA, as long as it was linked to student performance.
- A concern that Professional Development would suffer in the face of financial issues. It was a concern that imbedded, regular staff development would disappear being replaced by 2 or 3 days of 1 time “experts”
- A suggestion that districts look to the experts on staff and make them available to neighboring districts. Also, why NEASC, when there are neighbors that could come in and provide appropriate feedback on programs.
- EPS needs to be reflective of resident teachers that provide mentoring/support for their colleagues as the primary focus of their jobs.
- The need to recognize that the Student – Teacher ratios in the EPS formula, are not class sizes. Many talked of classes of 25, 26, and more.
- Regionalizing AP offerings and SPED programs. Virtual HS.
- Maine as a State developing a State Virtual High School
- Cost of the Maine Math and Science HS?
- Districts that tuition to 60/40 academies with contracts at a fixed rate suffer at the K-8 level more, when there is a curtailment. Interstate compacts?

### **York (did not repeat any items already offered)**

- Curtailment, make sure the MEA is on board, the reality of the curtailment

### **Washington**

- Closing schools with referendum is cumbersome
- Removal of the Budget Validation Referendum
- Freeze valuation on last year’s levels to get us through the next few years; valuations especially rising if property/municipality is on the water
- Different ways to reorganize that currently are not on the table, i.e. combine transportation across district lines; declining enrollment in HS, teaching position share rather than eliminate (*Currently permissible through ILA’s and/or new regional collaborative law*)
- Maintenance of effort