

“Keep Your Eye on the Prize”

The time is right for an education reality check. Ask yourself, and answer honestly, if you believe that eleven years after passing landmark education reform legislation- *Learning Results* - that we have designed an education system that prepares ALL Maine students for college, career and citizenship. I don't believe we have and further contend that we have taken our eye off the prize. In doing so we are shortchanging our students and jeopardizing Maine's economic future.

After all these years and after expending an incredible amount of resources (financial and human), the quality of education in Maine still, unfortunately, depends largely on one's ZIP code. Equitable access to quality learning opportunities is elusive for many students. We know that the world has changed dramatically yet we still deliver “school” in a manner based on a century old model. The 21st century has brought with it a new world that requires new world skills...*21st century skills*. Schools must be organized differently to deliver those new skills.

Regardless of one's perspective, the reality is that Maine has demographic challenges to overcome. The number of students entering the workplace is expected to continue to decline. The number of retirees is expected to increase. We need to educate ALL Maine students to fill the jobs created by what the research tells us is a looming workforce crisis.

Ensuring that Maine students can compete in a “flattened” world is a moral imperative. No longer can we accept the fact or excuse that we do not have one of the highest performing education systems in the nation. Maine can no longer tolerate that about half of our students are either dropping out of school or do not meet the basic performance standards. Student performance in our state is stagnant at best and the latest test scores are cause for an all-hands-on-deck clarion call to do “school” differently. Further, we must dramatically increase the number of Maine youth and adults who enroll in and complete a two year Associates or four year Bachelors college degree program. We rank at the bottom in New England in this regard, while our neighboring states are focusing their efforts to increase the literacy of their citizens and attract newer and higher paying businesses.

The consequences of inaction are grave: our citizens, young and old, will feel the tremors as the promise of a sustainable prosperity eludes Maine once again. Education remains a great equalizer in this democracy.

The Coalition remains committed to the full implementation of the *system of Learning Results* because we believe that students embrace the challenge of high standards and rigor and they deserve the promise of a quality education. Each day, our students and teachers are in schools around this state trying their best to achieve the targets that keep moving. We need to regain focus, set a clear path forward and stick to it.

The Board of Directors of the Maine Coalition for Excellence in Education asks all citizens of Maine to join our ‘campaign for education’. Over the next two years we will ask stakeholders around the state to come together to find reasonable ways to assess achievement of the Maine *Learning Results*, to engage parents in their children's education, to advance best instructional practices and improve the way we recruit and retain quality teachers. These are a few of the key issues. By working together we can develop a blueprint for education that will inform the next administration and future policy makers on what must be done to ensure our students graduate with the necessary knowledge and skills for the 21st century. Building on a strong foundation of standards, we can achieve the vision that all Maine students graduate ready. We can, *if we keep our eye on the prize*.

Peter Geiger
MCEE Chair

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