



**Testimony to the Joint Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
in Support of
LD 1422: An Act to Prepare Maine People for the Future Economy**

May 6, 2011

Senator Langley, Representative Richardson and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

I am Al Noyes, President of Walch Education and Printing and the Business Vice Chair of the Maine Coalition for Excellence in Education.

[The Coalition is a business education partnership. Since 1991, we have helped develop and promote policies aimed at improving educational performance in Maine's schools. Our Members come from broad and varied backgrounds in business and education, yet we all have one thing in common – a commitment to creating a high performing public education system in Maine. We hold firm to that commitment because we believe that Maine's prosperity and economic vitality depends on it. A quality education is both a moral and economic imperative.

In May 2010 we launched the Prepare Maine initiative. Since then we've developed an impressive cadre of Partners and Supporters, some of whom will be testifying here today. We are all part of what we like to think of as the 'education orchestra' – and your committee is one section of that orchestra. It is crucial for the sections of the orchestra to work together. Only by all of us – students, parents, educators, communities, businesses, policy leaders - working together are we going to create a system of education that truly spans early childhood, K-12, higher and adult education and workforce development.]

I am here today, as a citizen of this great State, as well as a businessperson, to ask for your support of LD 1422, or as I fondly refer to it as the Prepare Maine bill.

I strongly believe that Maine's future depends on how well we prepare our young people for the 21st century. I grew up in Maine, graduated from Falmouth High School in 1976, and finally was able to find an opportunity to get back here in 2005. Maine is a tremendous place, and a great place to raise kids, but I fear that unless we do something to improve the economy, there will be very few opportunities for my children, and yours, to come back. And a very important key to our economy is providing a world class education.

While our education system has much to be proud of, we trail the country and New England in several key metrics:

- Fewer than half of our 4th and 8th graders are proficient on national standards for math and reading.
- Only 80% of 9th graders earn a high school diploma
- 20 to 50% of our students who advance to higher education require remediation to take college freshman courses.
- Only 37% of Mainers have a two or four year college or technical degree, compared to 45% of New England.

These statistics are staggering and have a dramatic effect on Maine's economy. For example, the Alliance for Education estimates that the lost lifetime earning in Maine for the 3600 students who did not graduate in 2010 will be \$900 million. **Action MUST be taken to reduce Maine's high school drop out rate.**

At the post-secondary school level, millions of dollars are spent on remediation. Again, the Alliance for Education estimates that "if Maine high schools graduated all of their students ready for college, the state could save as much as \$7.7 million a year in community college remediation costs and lost earnings." **We MUST better prepare our students.**

Finally, consider that 80% of the current jobs in Maine require significant education and training beyond high school. **Where are these prospective employees going to come from?**

From my perspective at Walch, we have trouble identifying qualified Mainers to fill our positions. We currently have an opening for a marketing specialist. We need a web savvy person with a knowledge of direct response who can also produce sales materials. It shouldn't be hard, and wouldn't be elsewhere, I am sure. I have personally reviewed the qualification of close to 100 applicants. Less than five fit the bill. The problem is not the lack of jobs, the problem is finding qualified workers.

I have watched time and again, companies—big and small—move operations to New Hampshire or Massachusetts, in no small part due to their educated workforce. I have many peers who live in Maine and work elsewhere, and many others in a position to hire face the same struggle I have.

There is no doubt in my mind that the economic and civic urgency of investing in and improving our educational achievement levels and outcomes from early childhood to post-secondary is greater than ever in our history. **We cannot wait to prepare our students, we must do it today.**

The Prepare Maine bill provides a mechanism by which to remodel our system—both in the short and long term. In addition to establishing core priorities, benchmarks and intervention



strategies, this bill proposes a coordinated system so that students don't get caught in the choke points and fall behind, or worse yet, drop out. We can't wait until fourth grade to see if a student can read, just as we cannot wait until a student's senior year to determine if he or she is prepared to graduate. Our students deserve better and the future of our State requires it.

This bill will Prepare Maine for a stronger economy, better jobs and a brighter future. I ask you to support it.

Thank you.

Al Noyes,
President, Walch Education and Printing
Business Vice-Chair, Maine Coalition for Excellence