

January 30, 2007

Dear Members of the 123rd Maine Legislature:

On January 18, 2007 several members of the Maine Coalition for Excellence in Education Board of Directors met to analyze and synthesize numerous **proposals for regionalizing school districts**. Like the Coalition itself, the working group was comprised of both **experienced business and education administration leaders**.

There was consensus in the group that regional consolidation of school districts is absolutely necessary. Administering and maintaining 286 districts is simply unsustainable given the economic environment in Maine. Educational resources need to be used in a more effective way that produces better student learning.

Fortunately, there seems to be a great deal of energy and political will to tackle the issue as evidenced by the number of regionalization proposals going before the Legislature. Including Governor Baldacci's proposal, we are aware of eight different proposals. We applaud the Governor and the others for proposing bold action on such an emotional issue but are concerned that political passion will rule and we may end up with no viable plan for improving student performance.

The emerging conversations center on reducing taxes through district regionalization which the Coalition supports. However, we propose that the **principal objective of any regional consolidation plan should be improved student performance**. We support the call for a more efficient use of resources and effective governance for Maine schools insofar as the decisions are based on both the **educational impact and economics**. Fewer, better structured and resourced districts will improve coordination, communication and result in a more defined common purpose that will improve learning for all students.

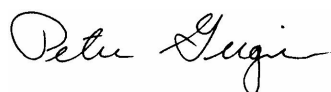
The tremendous energy around this subject provides **an opportunity for the 123rd Legislature** to take the **best thinking** of all the proposals, **meld them** into a comprehensive and workable plan that makes both **educational and economic sense**. The Maine Coalition for Excellence in Education believes that such a plan is achievable and stands ready to assist in both the design and implementation. As we said to you last year – *Maine students can't wait*. Their need for improved education results is now as they undertake further schooling or enter the workforce.

We urge you to evaluate the proposals and define your own plan through the lens of these guiding principles – failure to meet each criterion would deem the proposal flawed and not appropriate for Maine:

1. Ensures the best educational results for Maine students – including full implementation of Maine's Learning Results.
2. Requires the efficient use of Maine's limited resources in order to achieve #1.
3. Ensures accountability for student achievement and savings with specific targets & consequences for not meeting the targets.
4. Assures EQUITY for all Maine students.
5. Mandates district consolidation and with a rational strategy to guide the process.
6. Provides the necessary resources to support the consolidation process across the state.
7. Ensures appropriate balance between State and Local authority to produce improved results for all Maine students.
8. Assures best practices employed at all levels in all components of the new school district organizations.

We strongly believe a well designed and implemented plan for consolidation of administration can provide more effective educational leadership and more productive use of public dollars for education. The plan will be a wise investment in Maine's citizens and its economic future.

Best regards,



Peter Geiger,
MCEE Chair