

Maine Students Can't Wait

The Maine Coalition for Excellence in Education urges Governor Baldacci, the Department of Education and the Maine Legislature to ‘**stay the course**’ with the implementation of Maine’s *Learning Results*. Where people have taken it seriously, Learning Results are working. Granted, it is difficult work, particularly as we get closer to full implementation. But, we cannot waver in our commitment. ***Maine students deserve nothing less than the promise of Learning Results – they can’t wait any longer.***

We believe the delays in the deadline for implementing *Learning Results* are part of the reason that Maine’s education performance, as measured by NAEP results, has declined relative to the performance of other states in the past few years.

The Coalition, a statewide business education partnership founded in 1991, has been steadfast in its commitment to *Learning Results* because members believe that the future success of our children and the economic vitality of our state depend on a high performing public education system. *Learning Results* have always been about **ALL Maine children**, regardless of their residency, having the same opportunity to achieve at high levels. We must not lose sight of the original intent of this landmark legislation and the future it promises our citizens. The world has changed dramatically since the *Learning Results* were passed. We have to understand that Maine is competing globally and we need to be serious about raising standards, ensuring results, and holding ourselves accountable for those results in order to be competitive with other countries. This makes it even more imperative that we have the **courage to continue** with the promise to our citizens.

Signed into law in 1997, the “Act to Initiate School Reform in Maine” showed that Maine was leading the United States’ movement for effective, systemic school reform that called for creating conditions in schools where high expectations could be met. It was clearly articulated that the system of *Learning Results* would explicitly state what students should know and be able to do, promote assessment of student learning, reinforce accountability and encourage equity. Do we want anything less for MAINE students? Our answer is no. ***Maine students deserve nothing less than the promise of Learning Results – they can’t wait any longer.***

There are a number of proposals being put forth that we believe are detrimental to the successful implementation of the *Learning Results*. Those proposals, if allowed to move forward, could devastate the important work that has been done in school districts statewide. That work reflects ten years of exemplary effort by Maine educators and a tremendous amount of time and money committed to a visionary and unprecedented school reform effort. What can be done?

First, we believe the proposed **moratorium on local assessments is misguided**. What evidence is there to justify such a decision? Anecdotal reports from the SAU visits lead us to believe that many districts are moving forward successfully. We urge districts to continue to focus on **implementing aligned assessments** and using the information from the assessments to **improve instruction** to ensure that ALL students perform at their highest potential.

For the districts having difficulty in implementing the system of *Learning Results*, we urge the Department of Education to provide **immediate and targeted technical assistance**. In order to effectively help schools and districts, the Governor and the Legislature must provide the Department of Education with the means to support and hold accountable all districts.

The inconsistency throughout the state defeats the purpose and intent of an education with common meaning for ALL Maine students. We are shortchanging some of our students if we allow this to continue. We stand by the guiding principle that students from Calais and Buxton deserve the right to the same quality of education as those students in Cumberland and Bangor. Calling for a moratorium, in our view, further exacerbates the inequitable situation some of our students are currently experiencing.

Additionally, we see the delay in the revisions of **Chapters 125 and 127** and in the release of the **Teacher Workload Task Force Report and SAU Review** data as an impediment to districts' ability to move forward with the implementation of the system of *Learning Results*.

The Coalition supported Commission Gendron's call last year for "mid course corrections" of the assessment system – **a simplification of the process** - not an abandonment. As we have stated before in testimony to the Education and Cultural Affairs committee, we recognize the shortcomings of the LAS as developed this far. The promised assessment support, an overly optimistic understanding of what districts are able to do and inconsistent guidance in the field are challenges to overcome. However, we all have a moral obligation to put the needs of our students first and ensure that they are prepared for a rapidly changing world. Addressing the challenges head-on is the appropriate plan of action.

Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs committee and the Department of Education have stated that they remain committed to the implementation of the system of *Learning Results*. Unfortunately, we believe the message being "heard" in the education community is that "*Learning Results* are over". We seek reaffirmation of **unity of purpose** from Leadership to follow through with the promise made a decade ago. ***Maine students must not wait any longer.***

Finally, we believe that a diploma from a Maine high school should mean that the students are ready for **college, career and citizenship in the 21st century**, and therefore we urge Governor Baldacci, Commissioner Gendron and the 122nd Legislature to do the following:

1. Fulfill the requirements of LD 1424 – An Act to Simplify the Implementation of Maine Learning Results; *corrected from original released document*
2. Establish interim targets for the class of 2008 and a clear deadline of the earliest possible date thereafter (we urge 2010) for all regular education students to graduate with a diploma by meeting the LR standards in Math and ELA;
3. Recommit to a single diploma requirement, based on *Learning Results*, for all students (other than those provided for under special education) at the earliest possible date and establish rigorous high school core curriculum requirements in statute and rules consistent with the standards of *Learning Results*;
4. Recognize the districts that have had success and provide technical assistance for districts needing support;
5. Ensure the Department of Education has the resources to do the work;
6. Extend the student learning year and the teacher work year with commensurate compensation to accommodate the need for **more time** to accomplish the work at hand;
7. Use the *Learning Results* Review to reinforce the rigor needed in our statewide standards;
8. ***Stay the course... Maine students can't wait.***

The Maine Coalition for Excellence in Education statewide partnership of individuals from business, education, government and the community who are committed to continuous improvement in the way we prepare our children for the future. The Coalition's work is focused on the implementation of Maine's Learning Results through Success Begins with Education, a plan that assures that all Maine children will leave high school with the confidence and skills necessary to lead satisfying and productive lives. Peter Geiger is the Chair.

SUCCESS BEGINS WITH EDUCATION