

BUDGET & EDUCATION

(3/07) In every Session, the Governor's proposed Budget dominates a large part of the conversation. This year, Gov. Baldacci has tied his proposals for school redistricting & reform to his \$6.4 billion biennial budget for 2007-9 in **LD499**. Tying it to the budget considerably ups the ante for finding reforms acceptable to both the House & Senate, not to mention a riled up education community and the rest of us. By the time you are reading this, the Legislature may have already acted. Democrats are trying to give themselves the option of passing the budget by a simple majority, and if they do it soon, it can take effect around the same time as a later budget passed by a super-majority. Anyway, click [here](#) for more on the education proposals:

NOW on Education

NOW's positions on budget issues in education include making it a generous piece of the pie; and, putting children first, teachers & caregivers second, and (well-if-we-have-to-cut-something-or-someone) on up the line to top administrators. As I write in mid-February and early March, 2007, the question is not whether to consolidate, but how. This is partly driven by everyone's desire to smartly "chart Maine's future."

For NOW and others who highly value K-12, consolidation is only partly a "smart economics" question. Even more, it is a "first, do no harm (or as little as possible)" question. So, NOW urges everyone to figure out which education

functions can best be centralized (financial management? buying fuel? transportation? technology programs?), and which should remain local (community relations? school culture? community support services?).

Just a few other issues on the table are student teacher ratios, cutting teacher positions (by attrition mostly or totally?), school choice, and, of course, how much will be lost from local control. On 2/27/07, Education Commissioner Susan Gendron withdrew her request to change the student-teacher ratio as part of the administration's proposal. But, there are several proposals.

K-12 Proposals

Currently, there are 290 school units, served by 152 School Administrative Districts (SADs). Here are some proposals afoot:

- Generally, the Governor's bill **LD499 Part MM** would (among other things) create 26 school regions by consolidating Maine's 152 SADs, in hopes of saving \$250 million over 3 years. The Education Committee starts here, and is likely to eventually craft its own bill from the 6 or more other plans, and ideas from citizen testimony. Other plans include:

- LD804 (Part C)** The Maine Service Centers proposal, sponsored by Senate President Beth Edmonds (D), would create 26 planning alliances, allowing local representatives to design and implement each system by July 2009. **LD804 To Ensure Responsible Government Spending, Investment and Educational Efficiency** has several

goals. Pres. Edmonds is also a Co-sponsor of LD464.

•**LD464** The Maine Children's Alliance Proposal, sponsored by Sen. Elizabeth Mitchell (D) calls for 26 planning alliances, as well as a statewide calendar to promote efficiencies. Co-sponsors include Pres. Edmonds.

•**LD835** Rep. Kim Silsby (D) would allow local SADs to create alliances, with a state commission to ensure timelines are met. Co-sponsors include Sen. Mitchell.

•**LD947** The State Board of Education option, sponsored by Sen. Peggy Rotundo (D), creates a panel to redraw school unit boundaries.

•**LD853** Sen. Peter Mills (R) proposes consolidating certain business functions in regional cooperatives. Regional Boards would have local unit representation.

•**LD370** Sen. Karl Turner (R) would create a panel to redraw SAD boundaries with 2000-2200 students in each unit.

IT WILL BE A GREAT DAY WHEN OUR SCHOOLS GET ALL THE MONEY THEY NEED AND THE AIR FORCE HAS TO HOLD A BAKE SALE TO BUY A BOMBER.

MORE EDUCATION ISSUES

Reminder: Listing here indicates neither support nor opposition to LDs.

REFERENDUM – Opportunity Maine has succeeded in collecting enough signatures to force a referendum, in the absence of Legislative action, proposing

that higher education students be given tax credits equal to their student loans if they agree to live and work in Maine after graduation.

LD20 (Rep. Paulette Beaudoin) This resolve directs the Department of Education to adopt rules prohibiting the use of **carpeting** as flooring for newly constructed school facilities and to require the replacement of floor coverings in renovation of existing school facilities with flooring other than carpeting.

LD272 (Rep. Marley) Create Charter Programs within Existing Schools.

LD317 (Sen. Dow, Co-sponsors include Rep. Pingree, Sen. Savage) This bill expands the opportunity of **preschool children with disabilities** to continue to have free, appropriate public education provided through the Child Development Services System. This bill extends the window of eligibility by 2 months, allowing children who reach 5 years of age between July 1st and October 15th, instead of the current September 1st and October 15th, to continue with the Child Development Services System.

LD346 (Rep. Cressey) Increase the State's share of Education Funding to 60% (from 55%).

LD368 (Rep. Harlow, Co-sponsors Reps Makas, McFadden, Norton, Sen. Mills) This bill provides an income tax deduction for contributions made by

employers to a Coverdell education savings account of a child of an employee.

LD448 (Sen. Kevin Raye) Beginning in fiscal year 2007-08, the regional adjustment provided to school administrative units under the Essential Programs and Services Funding Act must be based on the regional differences in teacher salary costs or the regional differences in teacher housing costs within labor market areas in the State, whichever provides a greater regional adjustment to the school administrative unit.

LD453 (Rep. Duprey) This bill allows sectarian schools to be eligible for the receipt of public funds for tuition purposes, with the tuition discounted pro rata for the portion of the sectarian school's curriculum that is **religion instruction**.

LD482 (Rep. Wendy Pieh) Resolve, To Conduct an Objective and Independent Review of Essential Programs and Services

LD484 (Rep. Timothy Carter) This bill seeks to adjust the school funding formula to require the unorganized territories to pay their full and fair share of educating students from the unorganized territories in kindergarten to grade 12.

UM/ COLLEGE

LD304 (Rep. Rector) The funds provided by this bond issue, in the amount of \$40,000,000, will be used for capital projects for the University of Maine System and the Maine Community College System.

LD315 (Sen. Schneider, Co-sponsors include Rep. Cain, Sen. Mitchell, Sen. Martin) The funds provided by this bond issue, in the amount of \$62,000,000, will be used to modernize and improve the teaching laboratories, libraries and general classrooms in the University of Maine System.

LD538 (Rep. Bliss) The funds provided by this bond issue, in the amount of \$2,000,000, will be used to promote increased research and development collaboration between the environmental and energy technology sector of the State and the University of Maine System.