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Commentary: Essential Programs and Services Model

Authors

Denison Gallaudet, Henry R. Sciofone, Thomas Scott, Robert B. Kautz, Roger Shaw, Mark Eastman, Richard A. Lyons, and Bob Hasson

C O M M E N T A R Y

To further discussion about the Essential Programs and Services (EPS) model for funding public education in Maine, we asked eight superintendents—representing districts across the state—to provide their views. We also asked each to discuss the needs of his district and whether additional state policy options were necessary to tackle the most pressing issues. The districts represented by these superintendents are a cross section of urban and rural high-receivers and low-receivers. Still, several commonalities emerge: the need for a state commitment that does not wax and wane with the business cycle; the urgency of professional development for new and experienced teachers; and, the importance of linking student outcomes with student assessment measures and student funding. In short, EPS is not seen as a solution to the state’s ongoing debate over public-education funding, but is recognized as a necessary first step.

A Commentary on the Essential Programs and Services Model

By Denison Gallaudet

Richmond is a rural community of three thousand inhabitants that has proudly supported a K-12 school system since its incorporation as a town in 1826. In terms of socioeconomic status, Richmond stands right at the median of all Maine towns. Our three schools educate approximately six hundred fifty students. The current senior class scored well into the top quartile of the 1999/2000 Maine Education Assessments (MEAs); over 85% have plans to go on to postsecondary education. As a property-poor town, Richmond is only able to expend—per-pupil—87 % of the statewide average despite a strong tax effort.



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A keenly felt priority of our school system is offsetting the corrosive effects of child poverty in our community. It is a lamentable fact that despite its current prosperity the United States has one of the highest child poverty rates among the developed nations. One in five children here is raised in poverty; in Finland the ratio is one in

forty. Richmond is typical in this regard, with 28% of our students receiving free and reduced lunch. The impact of child poverty on school performance is clearly visible on standardized tests like the MEAs and quite palpable in day-to-day classroom behaviors. Sadly, many of these students fall into the do-not-meet category of the MEAs. Thus, against the overarching goal of educating all students to high levels, the issue of child poverty is a critical one for a district like Richmond. The Essential Programs and

...against the overarching goal of educating all students to high levels, the issue of child poverty is a critical one for a district like Richmond.

Services (EPS) model takes preliminary steps toward addressing this issue. But as the report points out, this area needs much further research. From the perspective of our schools, what often seem lacking are

direct social services to the families and students in need. State and not-for-profit agencies appear to be inadequately funded in our area to meet the true need of those families in crisis. In my view, it is a mistake to assume that schools on their own can overcome the tremendous burden of child poverty in Maine.

A second critical priority for the Richmond schools is hiring new teachers who are well prepared in their academic fields. While MEA scores at Richmond compare favorably to other districts, substantial percentages of our students are nevertheless not meeting the Learning Results’ standards, particularly in math and science. To address this need in part, we undertook a search last year for an additional high school science teacher; this search produced only two qualified applicants. As in many schools, substantial

numbers of our faculty will be retiring in the coming years. The prospect of replacing these top professionals is a daunting one. "All children can learn at high levels" is an inspiring mission but an empty one if bright young people are not attracted to the profession in sufficient numbers. In many ways this issue is linked to the chronic underfunding of our state university system. Attending college in Maine is just too expensive for many young people. The EPS report does not address this problem at all. Appropriate policy responses would be to reduce the cost of college education in Maine, with perhaps special subsidies for those students choosing a teaching career in our state. Additionally, the highly regarded Extended Teacher Education Program at the University of Southern Maine could be expanded and replicated at other university campuses.

The primary mission of the EPS task force, of which I was a member, was to define for the legislature the true cost of educating all students in the new literacy defined by the Learning Results. In my view the effort has produced a good first approximation, but the present article somewhat dilutes the importance of this initial task by overstating the issue of equitable funding between districts. Among the ten lowest and ten highest spending districts—the measure of equity chosen—are many small and tuition-only districts whose costs are quite atypical. The dispersion between spending levels of K-12 districts—an apples-to-apples comparison—is not as extreme. The 1999/2000 pattern of spending has a normal distribution with a slight positive skew; its coefficient of variation is .18. Furthermore, ongoing studies of effective schools show that strong academic results can be achieved at spending levels some-

what below the average. Thus, equity might well be achieved by a funding scheme that raised low-wealth districts to within 90% of the EPS target. The financial impact of this approach would likely be quite manageable. In my judgment further study is needed to translate the EPS result into a workable and equitable per-pupil guarantee for purposes of General Purpose Aid. 🐉

COMMENTARY

Essential Programs and Services Model: Solution or Problem?

By Henry R. Scipione

Since the days of our forefathers, the question of funding public schools in America has been an abyss within which a great many policymakers, educators and legislators have forever been lost. Dissertations, articles and commentaries have been devoted to the topic of funding public education. The professional careers of many have been sustained by their attempts to resolve some of the issues surrounding a fair and equitable public school funding formula. However, we in public education have fallen short of grasping the brass ring of educational funding. The debate continues and the answer is elusive. We have strived to define the problem, examine the options and propose the remedy—never with great success.

Determining a fair and equitable public school funding formula is laden with issues and problems. What is fair and how do we identify a fair funding formula? What does our money buy in terms of an educational program? What can a community afford? What is the responsibility of the state and what lies locally? What is the parallel between funding education and student learning? These questions are at the foundation of Maine's proposed Essential Program and Services (EPS) model.

From the onset of this commentary, let me confess I am a newcomer to Maine and admittedly a novice in understanding the evolution of the changes in the state's funding formula. My thoughts come from a public school background that includes experiences in Massachusetts, New Hampshire and most recently, Vermont. As I begin to peel back the layers of educational funding in Maine, I see similarities and differences inherent in this issue across four New England states.

Understanding the Silvernail and Bonney article has been a challenge for me from the perspective of understanding the ultimate implications to a community such as York. From a conceptual basis the notion of the EPS model makes policy



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and educational sense. That is, it determines the amount of resources needed to provide equitable educational opportunity and provide funding for each community to reach that level. This, indeed, is a reasonable approach to the problem. The EPS model is based on the premise that the three fundamental questions raised by Silvernail and Bonney are satisfactorily addressed. As identified by Silvernail and Bonney, we must determine what ends we are striving to achieve; what is the sufficient amount of resources needed to achieve those ends; and what is the equitable distribution of those resources.

Unlike most other states, Maine has stepped forward to align the EPS model to the expectations of student attainment of the Maine Learning Results. This is laudable because it makes a direct connection between school funding and student learning. The measurement of the success of this concept rests with the ability of the state and local community to determine assessment measures that fairly measure a student's ability to reach the standards set forward in the Maine Learning Results. Not an easy task. The development of a state/local comprehensive assessment of student progress is a topic for another commentary, not be to addressed here. Suffice it to say, however, that the ability to determine a fair and equitable student assessment program is as difficult as determining a fair and equitable funding formula. In concept it can be done, yet in practice it is nearly impossible. In both cases—student assessment and school funding—we reach for the proverbial brass ring but we accept the political and economic compromise.

Silvernail and Bonney's claim is that the EPS model will provide the minimum amount of resources and dollars schools should provide to each child. That is,

equity equals dollars behind each child. Under the EPS model every student in Maine will receive resources that will provide them equal opportunities for attaining the Maine Learning Results. I cannot argue the merits of that position. However, as Silvernail and Bonney claim, the EPS model recognizes the choice of a local community to extend beyond the adequacy level of funding. A local community can choose to provide additional funding to support their schools.

This choice is democratic and honors local control, yet it perpetuates the gap between communities. The notion that an adequacy model provides a level playing field for all children is flawed. The EPS model is supposed to be equitable and, as defined by Silvernail and Bonney, will provide equity for all students in Maine to reach a level of learning identified by the Maine Learning Results. Silvernail and Bonney state that the EPS model is not minimalist by design. That is, it supports the resources needed to provide all students an equitable opportunity to achieve the Learning Results. This is a wonderful goal; it connects equal opportunity to funding of resources. In concept it provides a fundamental commitment of equitable opportunity for every child in Maine. This, indeed, should be our commitment in education. However, what is fundamentally flawed is the notion that an EPS model will provide equal opportunity for all children.

Our democratic system allows local communities to support their own public schools. Their support is based on community standards, which determine the resources needed to provide their children with educational opportunities. Through an EPS model a statewide standard will be set. For many communities this will be a new bar raised higher than ever

before—a bar they will struggle to reach. For other communities this will be a bar to which they will never descend.

Because the decision for funding education rests at the local level, the issues of the have and have nots will still be pervasive. Communities will still determine the level of programming, resources and funding they are willing to support beyond those defined in EPS. Communities, as well they should, will have the autonomy to make these decisions for their own children. For this reason the EPS model serves only to ensure a minimum, as it is intended. It addresses only minimum equity of educational opportunity. The problem of leveling the playing field, which we now face in Maine, will continue.

Is the EPS model the answer to the equitable opportunity commitment? I believe not. However, it is a positive and necessary step forward. It will attempt to ensure an equalized distribution of resources for learning but it will not eliminate the fact that some children have greater opportunities because of the communities in which they live. There will continue to be the tension among communities to provide the best for their children. There will be the competition of communities to provide more. The raising of the bar by the implementation of the EPS model will do just that; it will raise the bar for all communities. It will not level the playing field; it will raise the level of play. 🐉

COMMENTARY

Essential Programs and Services Equity, Adequacy, & Accountability

By Thomas Scott

The schools in Madawaska share a similar priority with those throughout the state of Maine: We must ensure that all our students achieve Maine's Learning Results and we must do so in a time of fiscal uncertainty. We define our priority as "creating a school system where all students achieve clearly stated and understood learning results." Success must be measured by how well all students do in relation to this standard. It is no longer good enough to have high scores on standardized tests based on some students doing very well while others fare poorly. Our schools must accept the responsibility of having all our students meet the standard. Our challenge is to provide educational equity for all our students.

Educationally, this requires a shift in the classroom paradigm from a concentration on what is taught to a concentration on what is learned. While this may appear to be a relatively simple shift, it actually requires rethinking the classroom dynamic. In Madawaska this rethinking has taken many forms. We have reorganized our faculty into cross-grade, cross-disciplinary instructional teams. These teams have assumed the responsibility of translating Maine's Learning Results into local learning standards and benchmarks. At our middle school and high school we have

moved to a block schedule. We see this as allowing more time within the class and the day to provide a variety of instructional delivery and assessment models. At our elementary school we have implemented a plan for literacy learning based on the Bangor Assessment of Reading.

The quest for equity in school funding has existed since the beginnings of public education in this country. For the first half of the twentieth century, per-pupil expenditure served as the measuring stick for educational equity. In recent years, policymakers and researchers have agreed that equal expenditures do not equate into equal educational opportunity for all students. This is especially true in a rural state where the costs of providing infrastructure and services can vary widely. For example, the per-pupil cost of fuel for our buildings and buses tends to be higher than in urban areas of the state simply because it costs as much to heat a building or to run a bus for a few pupils as it does for a large number.

Professional development costs can vary widely as well. For example, Madawaska and twelve other Maine school systems were recently involved in the Northeast Standards Consortium, a forum for helping schools move toward full adoption of the Learning Results. On a per-pupil basis, participation in the consortium cost Portland \$.95/pupil and cost Madawaska \$9.95/pupil, not including travel costs.

These examples illustrate that a funding system based on the number of students or the number of teachers does

a disservice to smaller and rural systems that have an equal or greater need to train staff and provide the required infrastructure for students. Unfortunately, no other measuring stick has garnered wide-spread support as the measure of equity. Equity in educational funding has been as elusive in Maine as in other states.

In a 1994 article in *Educational Policy*, Richard Rossmiller argued that rather than seeking equity, policymakers should shift their attention to providing what he terms as adequacy. That is, rather than measure by inputs per pupil, funding should be based on what is adequate to guarantee that all students accomplish specified outcomes. Presently, the state is considering the Essential Programs and Services (EPS) model, thoroughly discussed in Silvernail and Bonney's article, to address the school-funding dilemma. EPS is described as an adequacy model. The question we as

a state must answer is whether Maine can balance both adequacy in funding and equity for its children.

Silvernail and Bonney define the outcome of EPS as "all children are provided equitable opportunities to reach high levels of achievement." Through its research on class size and on service delivery models, the Essential Programs and Services committee has developed sound, defensible levels of staffing. Using weighted counts it also attempts to direct resources to those students most in need. Are the amounts described in committee's report enough? Are the staffing levels adequate?



An educator with thirty years experience in northern Maine, Thomas Scott has been superintendent of schools of the Madawaska School Department since 1993. Prior to that he served as an assistant superintendent, curriculum coordinator, principal and teacher in both Madawaska and MSAD #33.

Will there be sufficient resources for the intense professional development needed? There is no doubt that these and other questions will be debated before the plan is enacted. Suffice it to say that a real attempt has been made to provide adequacy for Maine's students.

But is adequacy enough? Is it sufficient for the funding formula to provide "opportunities to reach high levels of achievement"? Inherent in any discussion of adequacy in funding is the need for accountability, which is an important piece of any public policy. The recipients of public funds should be held accountable for the use of those funds not only in the traditional sense of sound fiscal management, but also in that the funds have the effect of meeting the policy aims behind them.

Participation in the Northeast Standards Consortium has given our leadership direction in moving Madawaska to a standards-based system. At all levels it is important for us to know what our students know and are able to do. It is equally important that we provide a variety of models and opportunities for them to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. A teacher exhibition fair held last April allowed our staff to share best practices in instruction and assessment. Moreover, we are reworking our Teacher Performance Appraisal system to focus on performance standards and student learning. This requires a major commitment to the ongoing professional development of school staff, a fact not fully appreciated by policymakers.

We recognize that there is too much at stake here to leave it to chance. To that end we have developed a three-year technology plan to guide us as we bring to our students the challenges and opportunities of an interconnected world. We are also developing a plan to guide us in the

full integration of our curriculum and instruction. As we build these plans we continuously ask ourselves, "How will this improve student learning? How will we know?" Student learning must form the base of all we do, and, in Madawaska, success for all students is the benchmark.

In Rossmiller's model one must first define the level of performance expected of pupils and then identify the resources characteristic of programs in which all students achieve the outcomes. In Maine, student achievement of the Learning Results will be the basis of the former; Essential Programs and Services the latter. The EPS report describes the steps of an accountability system for those schools whose students do not meet the desired levels of performance. Thus, we have the required components of an adequacy model.

Finally, in a shared school-funding system there is a tension between local autonomy and state control. In Maine, which prides itself on being a local-control state, this tension becomes even more important. But sound policy must find the proper balance. If student achievement of the Learning Results is to lie at the heart of school funding then local autonomy should remain as long as that goal is being met. It is when the goals behind the policy are not met that state control must assert itself.

That said, it must be recognized that these goals will not be achieved overnight. We are giving ourselves five years to have

A state funding plan that does not meet the goal of 55% funding leaves our taxpayers picking up an undue share of attaining the state policy goal.

the system in place. To do so will take a major commitment on the part of our local staff and community. A similar commitment must be made at the state level. A state funding plan that does not meet the goal of 55% funding leaves our taxpayers picking up an undue share of attaining the state policy goal. As a low-receiver, Madawaska is less dependent on state funds than many other communities. However, the cost of state policy impacts both low-

and high-receivers. Without a fair distribution system that provides equity for taxpayers in both high- and low-receiving school districts, Essential Programs and Services cannot achieve its desired ends.

At the state and local levels, equity, adequacy, and accountability are necessary for our students to meet our priority of high achievement for all. Essential Programs and Services—in concert with Maine's Learning Results—is a good first step. It is imperative now that state policymakers focus on providing the resources and the will necessary to achieve these ends. 🐉

COMMENTARY

A Commentary on the 'Essential Programs and Services Model' Funding Approach

By Robert B. Kautz

The intent of the Essential Programs and Services (EPS) model is three-fold. First, there is a desire to have our children be able to compete economically in the world, and to have rich, fulfilling lives by being successful in achieving the knowledge and skills defined in Maine's Learning Results. Second is an intent to ensure that there is a sufficient amount of resources in every school district so that the Learning Results are achieved. Third, the intent of the EPS model is to provide the means so that there is an equitable distribution of resources. In summary, the new EPS model addresses how much is needed and how resources need to be distributed so that all children are ensured equitable opportunities to achieve Maine's Learning Results. For too long there have been great disparities between school districts, which have resulted in unequal outcomes for Maine's students.

In our school district, our vision is "to create educational settings where every child masters the learning results we have defined." To achieve this vision, we realize the need for sustained and focused professional development and programs, resources, and services to meet a diverse student population. Our enrollment

includes a high percentage of students who are receiving free and reduced lunches, special education, Title I services, and services for English as a Second Language. We also have a large number of students who are enrolled in advanced placement programs and who intend to pursue higher education. We truly have a diverse population of students. This diversity is our strength, and it is our challenge to provide each student with a program that is adequate for meeting their needs; to provide teachers with the necessary support to help each child master the Learning Results; and to have facilities that create environments conducive to learning. All of this requires sufficient resources, which come from the state and from our local community. What our community can contribute is limited by its economic conditions.

Our community makes a good effort to support its schools and does so with a property tax base that is low in comparison to other communities. Additionally, our community carries the costs of being a service center for the geographic area. The 1998 median family income of our community is reported to be \$30,035, with a per-pupil evaluation of \$190,779 (this is lower than the state mean) and a mill rate of 10.16 (which is higher than the state average).

For all children to master Maine's Learning Results, we need to respect the reality that all children will require instructional programs and resources that will be personalized for their success. Additionally, the time each child will need will also vary. Success for all can only be realized when the educational opportunities respond to the needs of the children. In a

community as diverse as ours, responding to the wide range of needs that our children present does become a challenge.

The Essential Programs and Services model begins to address these challenges. The model is based upon research of best practices and what works. It defines which number and what types of school personnel, services and resources are needed to adequately ensure equitable opportunity. More important, especially for a community such as ours, it recognizes that specialized student populations do require additional programs and services beyond that needed for the "regular" pupil. The model does provide a distribution of state resources to local schools that is more rational and responsive to the needs and challenges that make Maine's communities different from each other. This change of method in distributing state aid does help our community, and we know that the funds we receive are determined in a rational manner. We can use this to assess whether we are allocating resources in the most appropriate and effective manner possible. The model will help us show our public where we are and what we need to be able to achieve our desired results. This is a real improvement and a help for us, but even more needs to be done.

Tax policy needs to be addressed.

The ability of school districts to raise local funds is greatly affected by the income of the community members and the property tax valuation base. The lower the property valuation and income, the more of a struggle the community faces in adequately resourcing its schools. Combine that with the reality that state revenues,

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under our current tax policy, experience dramatic swings as the economy changes. A fairer and more appropriate tax policy needs to be developed that will assure a level of dollars needed to fully fund the EPS model. Without this, unfair variance between communities will continue to exist, and students will not have equitable and appropriate learning opportunities.

Another area that needs to be addressed is the issue of time. The Essential Programs and Services model reflects the current school calendar and the current work year for the educational staff. However, students require different amounts of time to be successful. Time can be the length of the school day, school year, or the number of years necessary for success. For all students to master the Learning Results, the instructional learning time will need to fit their changing situations. The professional staff who provide the instruction and the opportunities to learn also need more time. This added time is necessary for planning the instruction and learning, conducting assessments that will inform the teaching, personalizing the learning opportunities for students, communicating with parents and students, and also causing personal, professional and school improvement. The model does not address this need for expanded school learning time and professional time for program

A fairer and more appropriate tax policy needs to be developed that will assure a level of dollars needed to fully fund the Essential Programs and Services model. Without this, unfair variance between communities will continue to exist...

and student improvement. The resources necessary to provide more time need to be considered and recognized.

Our schools are improving. The Essential Programs and Services model will contribute and assist us with improved student achievement. The adequacy of resources can be better understood. The EPS model is an important next step in ensuring that all children will master the Learning Results. It needs to be put in place sooner rather than later.

We also need to address tax policy and time. Our children cannot wait for us. As each year goes by while we debate these issues, we are not fulfilling our expressed intent to have all children be successful. Whose child should be

the one that our system of education has failed? The answer is no one's. We need to act now. 🐸

COMMENTARY

A Commentary on Essential Programs and Services

By Roger Shaw

Despite state and federal efforts to narrow the funding gap that exists between wealthy and poor school districts in Maine, the fact remains that some schools in Maine spend an annual average of nearly \$8,000 per student while others spend half that amount. The factors that most often create this disparity are generally based on population, property valuations and economic vitality. Maine lawmakers have attempted to distribute funding in an equitable way, but due to various factors have been only moderately successful in doing so. If we truly believe that a high-quality public education is necessary and available for every child and is good for the future of our state, greater and more persistent efforts to ensure adequacy of resources to do the job well in all Maine schools must move forward.

In the morass of trying to achieve educational equity in Maine, a renewed commitment to the moral principal of fairness must motivate decisionmakers without regard to socioeconomic status, geographic isolation or shifts in populations. Our society seems to promote the concept that individuals should act in their own best interest without regard to what is right and fair for others. In reviewing the Essential Programs and Services (EPS) funding model, it is readily apparent that the focus on providing adequate financial resources to enable all

students to meet predetermined standards (Maine Learning Results) will greatly improve the opportunities for all children in Maine.

Having lived and worked in one of the most economically challenged communities (pupil/property valuation) in the state, I can attest to the fact that a school tax commitment well above the state average does not always alleviate funding inequities. Many school districts in Maine share the same property-poor status; consequently, the gap in per-pupil expenditures continues to widen. Essential Programs and Services funding will allow school districts to adequately address what is needed to ensure that all students can achieve the Learning Results standards regardless of geographic location or economic status.

The most defining element of EPS may be that the approximate cost (\$150 million) is not seen as being politically palatable. While increased expenditures are difficult to justify to the taxpayer, the price tag poignantly attests to the fact that many school districts in Maine do not currently have the capacity to generate resources to adequately provide an education that will allow its students to achieve at acceptable levels. The greatest obstacle to equitable education funding may be that when change is proposed, there are

always winners and losers. In order for equitable (adequate) funding to foster opportunities for all students, a proposal that is politically acceptable and educationally defensible must be forthcoming. The commitment and courage to challenge existing paradigms and develop public policy based on what's right rather than on what's expedient must be primary.

From my perspective, the EPS model provides some light at the end of the tunnel of inadequacy.

There are several urgent priorities that exist in the small school district I represent. Recruiting and retaining quality teachers and administrators has emerged as one of the most difficult challenges all schools in Maine face. The considerable variation in salary scales that exists between school districts makes it impossible to remain competitive when hiring due to inadequate financial resources. Another challenge faced by school districts with a general population that is more socioeconomically challenged is a tendency to have higher percentages of children requiring special services than middle- to upper-socioeconomic populations. This often results in higher costs that undermine existing

The considerable variation in salary scales that exists between school districts makes it impossible to remain competitive when hiring due to inadequate financial resources.

programs and services by siphoning critical dollars away from the essentials.

Redress of inequities requires recognition that inequities exist and a commitment to the enactment of laws/policies that provide corrective action. Equitable distribution of General Purpose Aid to Maine schools has been at the center of public debate for over a decade, and the impact of funding disparities on student academic success is well documented both locally and nationally. When inequities in educational

opportunities are legitimized by public policy, an educational caste system soon develops. There seems to be sufficient anecdotal evidence to suggest that Maine is dangerously close. Even the most callous in our society would not consider allowing Little League baseball to be played with the magnitude of inequities that seem to exist in our public education system. The EPS model would address these and many other concerns as a funding mechanism that focuses on the real educational needs of students. Local communities should have the freedom to provide additionally for their children as they deem appropriate. However, no community should have to make a choice as to which of the Learning Results standards their children will not meet because of inadequate funding. The EPS model appears to provide the best hope for equitable educational opportunity for all children in Maine, regardless of where they reside or the relative wealth of their community.



Roger Shaw has spent his entire thirty-three-year career in education in MSAD #42 (Mars Hill and Blaine). He has served as a teacher, assistant high school principal, athletic director, high school principal and currently, as superintendent of schools. Shaw has a master's degree and certificate of advanced study in education administration from the University of Southern Maine. In addition to his professional experiences in MSAD #42, he has also served on various state and national education committees.

In conclusion, the desire to live the “American Education Dream” seems to promote the notion that anything can be made better by spending more money or by demanding more accountability. Perhaps it is time to consider the quality of what transpires in public education in Maine through a lens of public policy that would provide adequate resources to every school district for the benefit of each child in Maine. The value of real estate is generally established by three important criteria: location, location, location. I find it alarming that any child in Maine should have their educational opportunity so easily explained away. 🐟

COMMENTARY

Essential Programs and Services: Good Medicine for Maine?

By Mark Eastman

David Silvernail and Weston Bonney make a compelling case for the adoption of an Essential Programs and Services (EPS) model to provide an adequate or suitable level of funding for Maine’s public schools. The real question, however, is whether this approach is a new miracle cure fresh from the research laboratory or whether it is just another funding fad that will end up in the back of the medicine cabinet. Is there any public policy initiative that really addresses the funding disparities between Madawaska and East

Corinth or Cape Elizabeth and Bridgewater? Is it possible to ensure that the young people in Machias will have the same access to educational services as those in York?

As superintendent of the Oxford Hills School District, which serves eight towns in western Maine, I am reminded daily about the challenges of maintaining equitable programming in my nine elementary schools. Access to educational services is subject to a number of variables, several of which are beyond the control of the state or local school districts. Disparities begin before a child enters school with the choice of pre-school programs, cultural exposure and involvement from parents including early reading, travel and music or art lessons. Parents who expose children to quality literature, music and other experiences provide an additional dimension to traditional school curriculum which clearly affects the readiness of a child for public school. These differences in cultural and creative experiences continue through the school years and are often found in music, art, dance, travel and other cultural activities. There is little that any public policy will be able to do to address an

...as recent experience informs us, this model does not go far enough; each economic blip and downturn will create legislative wrangling over resources. Education will once again be at the bottom of legislative priorities, competing with other well-intentioned but less-critical initiatives.

auxiliary curriculum that provides the depth and breadth of educational experiences that are not inherent in a “foundation program.” Some of these disparities may be enhanced by location but most are

related to parental priorities, aspirations and involvement in their child’s life.

The Oxford Hills School District is focused on initiatives that characterize most good school districts, implementing quality curriculum that includes the Maine Learning Results and national standards that prepare students to pursue post-secondary education or work. The struggles we face include developing a quality

assessment system to verify our work, attracting and retaining quality staff, developing current staff, and supporting a quality technical infrastructure that supports student and staff learning. One of the most compelling problems in attempting to address these issues is the availability of adequate resources to support these policies and practices.

The EPS model attempts to define key outcomes and support a level of funding that provides the services and resources to



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develop adequate education for all Maine children, regardless of their location or the property wealth of their community. This approach has been recommended before—by the Rosser Commission and others—but it has always fallen short because of the increase in resources necessary to fully fund the model. Previous studies have indicated that up to a 25% increase in funding would be necessary to implement this approach, which is a significant obstacle to implementation.

All that aside, the EPS model represents an excellent first step to the implementation of an outcomes-based funding model for all Maine schools. This approach has the potential to provide a viable program of educational services to all our children. However, as recent experience informs us, this model does not go far enough; each economic blip and downturn will create legislative wrangling over resources. Education will once again be at the bottom of legislative priorities, competing with other well-intentioned but less-critical initiatives.

From a policy perspective, the only answer to this dilemma is to pass a constitutional amendment giving the state the authority and responsibility for the education of its citizens. This constitutional mandate will not be subject to biennial legislative priorities but will establish a powerful basis for decisionmaking in good times and in bad.

The development of a constitutional amendment is not the only step to ending the printout politics and distribution dilemmas that have faced legislators over the last few years. A responsible and fair system of taxation must be developed to address the taxpayer inequities that impact retirees or individuals who have property far in excess of their income. Circuit breakers for taxpayers with these issues are necessary to

protect the importance of home ownership. The mandates mania that has characterized the federal government must be a key area for policy efforts. Most of these well-intentioned efforts are not supported by the resources to implement them. Any federal dollars come with a plethora of regulations and a mountain of paperwork.

If we are to maintain our education system as one of the best in the world and extend this level of achievement to all Maine children, we must ensure that adequate education is not an accident of geography but rather the outcome of a sound public policy that supports all Maine students wherever they live. The EPS model, coupled with a constitutional amendment and realistic tax policy, is good medicine for Maine. 🐉

COMMENTARY

A Commentary on Essential Programs and Services

By Richard A. Lyons

Essential Programs and Services (EPS) is a significant public policy initiative. The well-defined approach to school funding provides a futuristic framework embedded with research and establishes a standardized template for all public schools in the state of Maine. For this initiative to have sustainable positive outcomes, it must immediately be identified as a number one priority with the governor and Maine legislature. The governor and Maine legislature must articulate an action

plan that incrementally implements EPS that supports the attainment of Maine's Learning Results for all children. Absent such a commitment, the EPS and Learning Results will become just another one of those fads that did not come to fruition.

The adequacy model of EPS has already had a positive influence in Maine School Administrative District (MSAD) #22. The articulated desired resources and services have served as a template for funding initiatives to support educational opportunities for the 2,300 or so students in Hampden, Newburgh and Winterport. The school district has exceptionally strong convictions toward educational excellence and the academic standards for student outcomes are aggressive. These expectations dovetail nicely with the philosophy of "high performing schools" referenced in the research that assisted in the formulation of EPS.

MSAD #22 has attained specific benchmarks to align with the parameters associated with EPS. However, there remains district priorities to further advance educational initiatives that will positively influence student learning.

First, the district will continue to work diligently to have the K-5 and 6-8 classroom teacher-student ratio become more favorable.

Over the last few years positive gains have been attained and it is the intent in subsequent years to meet



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the K-8 levels as defined in Essential Programs and Services. The district's 9-12 level nearly reflects the desired ratio.

The area of "weighting for specialized student populations," and particularly special needs children, is certainly a priority for MSAD #22. The federal government has failed to fulfill its financial commitment to fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). At the state level, the school unit's program costs have been severely hampered by the inclusion of the program reduction method. This cost containment effort has been operational since fiscal year 1994. These two components have significantly and adversely impacted the fiscal purse strings of all Maine schools. There must be immediate relief as expenses are increasing and the number of special needs children is escalating.

Similar to many school districts, MSAD #22 has been experiencing a fairly significant turnover of faculty the last two to three years. It is envisioned that this trend will continue and mirror the national statistics of nearly 50% turnover of faculty within the next ten years. Because a large number of new faculty will be arriving in MSAD #22, "professional development" initiatives have and will continue to be a high priority. The district's current general funding level is woefully inadequate and has to be supplemented with "soft money" from federal and state grants. This fiscal trend has to be corrected for our new hires and their subsequent success rests to a large degree

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with the district's and individual's professional development initiatives.

The final priority for MSAD #22 identified with the EPS model is that of student assessment, certainly linked to the professional development priority previously noted. Our district has spent an inordinate amount of time measuring student outcomes, analyzing those outcomes, and developing action plans to enhance subsequent instruction and student performance.

This practice is expanding with the formulation of the district's comprehensive assessment system. The successful integration of the "specialized services" in the area of student assessment will serve MSAD #22 well.

The EPS model along with Maine's Learning Results has the potential to create an exemplary educational platform that will enhance student learning opportunities. The EPS initiative must be immediately embraced by all public policy officials who have a direct or indirect influence on its implementation. In order to reap the benefits of this initiative an irrevocable philosophical and financial commitment must be embraced that will continue the "phase in" approach and bring about full implementation by fiscal year 2007. 🐉

COMMENTARY

A Commentary on the Essential Programs and Services Model

By Bob Hasson

MSAD #51—Cumberland/North Yarmouth—serves approximately 2,500 students, and has a mission to guide all students as they acquire enthusiasm for learning, assume responsibility for their education, achieve academic excellence, and discover and attain their personal best. The district has a long history of focusing on achievement for all students.

For MSAD #51, the most compelling aspect of Essential Programs and Services (EPS) is its support for the implementation of the Learning Results. The task of determining how to move to a standards-based school system is reflected in EPS, and for the first time, combines the idea of ade-



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quacy with a standards-based system of learning

However, EPS will fall short of its intended objectives if several related issues are not considered. For example, over the past eight years MSAD #51 has experienced an enrollment increase of 40%. As a result, we need more space and we need to attract and retain the most qualified teachers possible for a standards-based school system.

However, once we have additional space and teachers, our first priority is professional development. Here it is critical that EPS reflect what it will take to adequately fund all schools in Maine so that the professional development all teachers need is available to meet the learning needs of all students. Current statewide expenditures do not begin to reflect the level of resources needed to meet the needs of all teachers. Indeed, we will find ourselves in a crisis if EPS uses current professional development costs as future funding targets.

Professional development activities allowed through EPS need to include the induction of new teachers, the development of a comprehensive assessment system, the movement from disciplinary to multidisciplinary to, ultimately, transdisciplinary curriculum development, and continuous improvement of all instruction. All of these professional development efforts require enormous amounts of time so that they are rigorous, real and renewing.

In addition to professional development there are some other policy responses to consider, such as a serious comprehensive look at Maine tax policy, the development of an integrated approach to supporting children and families, state-funded support for three- to five-year-old education programs and the

incentives for groups of school districts to regionalize around common teaching and learning goals.

For example, the integrated approach to meeting the needs of children and families would help MSAD #51 by creating a process that was seamless to support children as they develop and learn. Currently, there are too few services for children and families, and those services are fragmented and lack coordination. State support for three- to five-year-old children would benefit our students in many areas, including language and mathematical literacy and reaching a proficient level in a classical or foreign language. Further, incentives to regionalize would encourage districts to share what they are learning about standards and reduce the inefficiency of every district figuring out everything in isolation.

In conclusion, in order for Maine to be an attractive place for people to live we must increase everyone's opportunities by way of education and economic development. EPS will help to provide the support for all Maine children to meet or exceed the Learning Results. Together, they represent a good foundation for Maine's students to become the most educated in the world. 🐟

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