

Resolution Seeking Fair, Equitable, and Transparent Funding of Education in Maine

WHEREAS, the voters of Maine approved a citizen-initiated referendum in 2004 calling on the state to fund "55 percent of the cost of public education;" and

WHEREAS, in 2005, the Legislature enacted LD 1, which put a process in place whereby the state would "ramp up" to a 55 percent state share by steadily increasing state funding for schools, K-12, over four years; and

WHEREAS, postponements of increased funding under the LD1 ramp-up were since enacted, and the Governor has ordered additional cutbacks in general purpose aid to education as part of the supplemental budget and through additional curtailments; and

WHEREAS, contrary to the intent of the voters of Maine, these actions have resulted in a 15 percent reduction in state funding of the costs of public education; and

WHEREAS, local school boards and administrators are being forced to make local budget cuts in the midst of the school year, and on an emergency basis, to make up for reduced state contributions to the costs of local education; and

WHEREAS, Maine Department of Education officials have not provided clear answers to local schools concerning future levels of state funding of local education, and have sometimes provided information that differs from day-to-day depending upon which local official is seeking the information or which state official is providing it; and

WHEREAS, local school boards are now in the midst of preparing local school budgets for the next fiscal year without secure knowledge concerning the level of state funding on which they can reasonably rely; and

WHEREAS, the state currently relies upon a system of funding for so-called "Essential Programs and Services" for education that is so out of touch with the reality of required educational expenditures that more than 60 percent of Maine communities this year are obligated to provide local funding exceeding what is deemed "essential" under the model; and

WHEREAS, the state cutbacks and curtailments are forcing increases in local funding for education through the property tax to meet the financial needs of Maine schools; and

WHEREAS, the actions of the Governor and Legislature have caused a massive shift of the burden of funding of education from the progressive income tax, levied based upon ability to pay, to the regressive property tax, which does not account for a property owner's ability to pay, particularly if they are on a fixed income; and

WHEREAS, the undersigned school boards adopting this resolution represent approximately 20,000 of the students currently enrolled in Maine's public schools;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

The Governor and Legislature must adopt a fair, equitable and transparent model for the funding of public education in Maine which:

1. Meets the voters' expressed desire to fund 55 percent of the cost of public education, K-12, in Maine;
2. Relies more upon revenues generated by the progressive income tax and less upon those raised through the local property tax;
3. More clearly addresses, at a realistic level, what is "essential" for educational expenditures in our communities; and
4. Provides both the public and local education officials with reliable information concerning the state's contribution to local educational expenditures, thus avoiding the disruption and devastation of mid-year cutbacks and curtailments.

Cape Elizabeth School Board
by its Chair

Falmouth School Board
by its Chair

M.S.A.D. #51 School Board
by its Chair

Portland School Board
by its Chair

Scarborough School Board
by its Chair

South Portland School Board
by its Chair

Yarmouth School Board
by its Chair