

# MeASBO

The official publication of the Maine Association of School Business Officials  
Fall 2012



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# INSIDE MeASBO

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## President's Message

# Look for build your portfolio for certification

Hello again, Members !

I hope you are all having an awesome fall back to school ! As I write this we have had our September Meeting at CATC with good attendance. We were thrilled to honor Deb (Holland) Roberts of MSAD #52 as the very first MeASBO Certified School Business Official III. Congratulations to Deb for her hard work — you set an amazing example of excellence for all of us.

One of the great points Deb made during her acceptance, and by Scott Vaitones as he presented on how to assemble your certification portfolio, was what an amazing feeling of satisfaction and pride and confidence it gave them to realize how much they had accomplished.

With this letter and this issue of the magazine I would like to encourage all of you to take a look at yourselves as professionals and as leaders. Take a moment to acknowledge all that you are involved in. We all have different strengths and skills that we bring to our jobs, there is a wide, wide skill set in our profession. Often I think we under-value the commitment and complexity of what we each do everyday.



Kathy Warren

Take a moment this month to think about your own portfolio. Just get a binder and start to gather your transcripts & certificates. Get the index of certification areas set up and take a look at all that you do. The more of us that go through this process the stronger the Certification program will become. I am excited to see what we discover. I am sure many of you may show us that you have great depth in Accounting or Payroll or Technology. I know, as a result, that MeASBO will have the opportunity to grow and change

to honor and support, through expanded Professional Development, the needs of our members.

Thank you again to the Professional Development Committee for all you have done to create this opportunity for all of us. Thank you again to all of our members for all that you do to support kids in the State of Maine and to make responsible choices on behalf of Maine taxpayers every day. I am proud to work with all of you and I look forward to sharing that pride with others through our certification program.



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## Deb (Holland) Roberts Maine's first business manager to earn certification

Deborah (Holland) Roberts, business manager for MSAD #52, and chairman of Maine ASBO's Certification Committee, appropriately became the first member to receive certification through the organization's voluntary certification program on Sept. 28.

Roberts, who just was married July 7, received a five-year certificate at the highest certification level available: School Business Official III.

"I'm hoping this will challenge members and get them moving," Roberts said.

Scott Vaitones of RSU #13 and Certification Committee member, presented the official document at the MeASBO meeting.

The committee anticipates awarding certification to additional applicants this school year, Vaitones said.

Joining Roberts at the presentation were MSAD #52 Superintendent Dr. Henry Aliberti Jr. and Assistant Superintendent Becky Foley.



Deborah (Holland) , flanked by her assistant superintendent, Becky Foley, and Superintendent, Dr. Henry Aliberti Jr., receives MeASBO's first school business manager certification.

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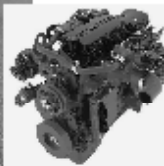
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## ASBO Int'l plans face-to-face engagement

PHOENIX, Ariz — ASBO International is hosting its Annual Meeting & Expo, featuring a wide range of seminars, workshops and keynote speakers, at the Phoenix Convention Center, Oct. 12-15.

Business managers may register through the association's web site: [www.asbointl.org](http://www.asbointl.org).

In a world that is increasingly "virtual," sometimes there is just no substitute for face-to-face conversation and engagement. That's what this conference is all about. More than 1,200 school business leaders will attend to advance their knowledge and skills to "make a difference for student education."

Keynote speakers will be Richard Gerver, author of the global best-selling book *Creating Tomorrow's Schools Today*; and Tom Flick, an authority on leadership, helping a list of clients that includes Microsoft, Starbucks and the Pentagon.

Attendees can design their own conference schedule to fit their professional development needs, along the areas of Educational Enterprise, Financial Resource Management, Human Resource Management, Facility Management, Property Acquisition and Management, Information Management, Ancillary Services, International Aspects, Leadership Development, Social Responsibility and Economic Recovery/Stimulus.

All sessions are aligned with ASBO International's School Business Management Professional Standards to highlight the areas of interest that most affect members as school business officials.

## Six Maine districts share \$25M

### Grant to help develop teacher, leader evaluation

AUGUSTA – Seventeen Maine schools in six districts will share a nearly \$25-million grant to build systems that recognize and reward great teachers and school leaders. The federal grant will be used to improve educator evaluation systems, reward effective teachers and principals, and provide greater professional opportunities.

RSU 16 (Poland area); RSU #19 (Newport); Millinocket; Bangor; MSAD #11 (Gardiner); and RSU #86 (Fort Fairfield) are sharing the windfall.

As of early October, the districts didn't know how much money they would receive.

Superintendent Patricia Hopkins of SAD #11 in Gardiner said, "We're waiting for the Department of Education to tell us how much money we're receiving and other details of the grant."

"We're excited about the opportunity to have some money to do professional development and to work with the teachers association to create an evaluation system that centers around student achievement and, potentially, pay for performance."

Superintendent Michael Wilhelm said RSU #16 in Poland, which combined schools from four communities, has formed study committees to create a

common evaluation system for teachers and to draft a compensation plan. This grant, he said, will provide resources to complete the work of those committees.


Will it affect the budget?

"Not a lot," Wilhelm said, "but in the end we'll have solutions that will help us with resources that we would need to spend money on."

Gov. Paul LePage said: "Both administrators and teachers want the same thing: fair and realistic measures for performance, professional development and help in improving teaching skills, and a system that rewards excellent teachers. This will allow more districts to engage in this work and, more importantly, help them develop models that other Maine school districts can adopt or adapt for their needs."


Already 18 schools in five districts across Maine are doing similar work through the Maine Schools for Excellence program, which is funded through an earlier Teacher Incentive Fund grant. Teachers and administrators work together in those districts to develop evaluation

*Continued on next page*



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## Tyler Tech Buys UniFund

Tyler Technologies, Inc. (NYSE: TYL) has acquired UniFund, L.L.C., which provides enterprise resource planning (ERP) solutions to schools and local governments. UniFund, located in Nashua, N.H., is also a reseller of Tyler's Infinite Visions school enterprise solution.

As a result of the transaction, UniFund's more than 250 BudgetSense® clients — located throughout the Northeast — have become Tyler customers and its approximately 30 employees will join Tyler. UniFund had total revenues of approximately \$5.5 million in 2011. UniFund's programs and services are being integrated into Tyler operations.

"Acquiring UniFund is a natural progression to unify our Infinite Visions brand, simplify our sales channel and leverage common practices across the country," said Brett Cate, president of Tyler's Local Government Division. "UniFund is widely known and well respected in the Northeast, and we intend to continue to deliver the level of service and expertise its clients expect."

"This transaction is good for UniFund because we are now part of a larger company, and I believe that there are some bright new roles and opportunities that will develop for our people," said Roger Melanson, partner and co-founder of UniFund, L.L.C. "We will now be able to collaborate with Tyler to create an even stronger force in the marketplace. And with the Tyler brand standing behind our work, we can move forward much faster as a broader and more unified team."

## \$25M grant awarded

*Continued from previous page*

instruments for their staff members that will take students' academic growth and achievement into account and offer teachers a constant stream of feedback about their practice from peers, supervisors, students and parents.

Maine is one of two states and 33 school systems or non-profits to be approved for this new round of TIF grants, out of more than 120 applicants.

The work is closely aligned to the requirements of Gov. LePage's educator effectiveness bill, LD 1858, An Act To Ensure Effective Teaching and School Leadership, which passed in April. The bill requires school districts to develop or adopt high-quality teacher and leader evaluation systems. These systems are to be based on clear standards, incorporate multiple measures of effectiveness, including student achievement and growth, and are to be used to provide feedback for professional development.

"Systemic changes to standards, curricula, instructional practices and assessment will achieve little if efforts are not made to ensure that every learner has access to highly effective teachers and school leaders," said Education Commissioner Stephen Bowen. "Indeed, as the governor has said repeatedly, no other school-based factor is more important to learner outcomes than the effectiveness of teachers and school leaders. That's why this work is so important, and why it's so important that we get it right." •••

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## Health Care:

### Federal Appeals Court clears the road, MEASBT relents

By Mark Leslie  
and David Hamilton

**T**he long wait is over. After losing its case in the 1st Circuit Court of Appeals in Boston, the Maine Education Association Benefits Trust (MEABT) Board of Trustees voted Oct. 1 to stop its lawsuit aimed at derailing Maine's LD 1326, An Act To Allow School Administrative Units To Seek Less Expensive Health Insurance Alternatives.

Christine Burke, executive director of MEABT, told MeASBO of the board decision on Oct. 2.

At the heart of the conflict was the law's requirement that Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield, the trust's insurer, release claims history upon request. MEABT filed suit predominantly to withhold from school districts their own health insurance loss information, declaring the information was proprietary and releasing it would cause the trust immediate and irreparable harm.

Without this historic view of their losses, it is nearly

**Insurance carriers and brokers can now obtain the necessary information they need to use in their standard underwriting practice to determine plan design and cost options.**

impossible for districts to secure competitive health-insurance bids. The lack of information effectively created a monopoly for the MEABT and its selected insurance carrier.

In its decision, the federal court rejected MEABT arguments. Its opinion went even further, saying that providing loss data is common practice for all lines of insurance in Maine and that should include the teachers' union health plan.

Burke said, "Our opponents were informed that the appeal failed and within a couple of days we were getting

requests [for data]. Anthem has 21 days to comply.”

She said some schools have asked for five and some 10 years of data “which makes me chuckle. Because of consolidation they’re not the same districts that they were 10 years ago.”

The Maine state Bureau of Insurance has stated the industry standard is to release two years, “so probably Anthem will release that industry standard,” Burke said.

“Having that data will certainly make things more competitive,” said

Alan Kochis, director of business services for the Bangor School Department, one of several school units who were interveners in the court action.”


“It’s exciting to me,” said Connie Brown, superintendent of the Augusta School Department. “We have well over \$2 million tied into health insurance [annually]. I can’t imagine anyone with that kind of expense not doing their due diligence and finding out whether they’re getting a good deal in the marketplace — for employees as well as taxpayers who are paying the rates.

“Now, with the loss data, which is essential, we are able to do that.”

Indeed, Augusta has already changed its insurance coverage for its 32 administrators and “non-represented units” which includes central office and adult education staff.

The result: a \$35,000 savings per year.

Asked if she anticipated similar savings for the 220 teachers, Brown hedged. “It may turn out that MEABT is the best way to go,” she said. “But at least we can find out.”



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## Insurance factoids

- \$300 million a year in taxpayer money is spent on health insurance for teachers and other school staff.
- The Maine Education Association Benefits Trust has a monopoly on that business, insuring all but a handful of school districts in Maine.
  - Health insurance consumes up to 14 percent of school district budgets.
  - Two school districts estimate savings of between \$300,000 and \$400,000 if they could insure with someone other than the MEA Trust.
  - The MEA Trust has built a reserve of \$50 million despite being fully insured by Anthem, down \$30 million since it was announced the fund was so large.
  - The MEA teachers union received \$901,796 from the MEA Trust in 2010, up from \$516,405 in 2009, for administrative services fees. That’s a 74-percent increase in one year, for what?
  - Teachers will not be forced out of the MEA Trust because of L.D. 1326. If the Trust is named in the contract, it will have to be negotiated.

**What Now?**

What does the law mean to Maine school systems?

School units can now ask for their loss data and expect to receive the premium and loss data attributed to their district, as well as the cost of all large losses for the most recent two years. The districts can now put health insurance out to bid, and insurance carriers and brokers will have data to use as part of their standard underwriting practice to determine plan design and cost options.

One of the strengths of the MEABT's long-standing monopoly on data and health-care insurance has been that all school units pay the same rate throughout the state. However, it also means that high-cost districts have been subsidized by low-cost plan participants, a situation that low-cost districts have been unable to change.

With the passage of LD 1326,

**School officials expect MEABT to offer better plans at affordable pricing if it expects to retain the business.**

districts that go to market may be offered significant savings from other carriers, while those that remain with the MEABT plans may see their true costs more accurately reflected in the MEABT rates.

School officials expect MEABT to offer better plans at affordable pricing if it expects to retain the business. If units fear low introductory pricing by competitors, the beauty of competition means other carriers, or the MEABT plan, may vie for the business.

**Maine's Health Reform Law**

At the same time school units begin to explore the potential benefits of competition, Maine's new health-care reform is showing early positive results for private-sector employers.

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premium increases has slowed significantly and, for many, prices have actually decreased. For example, the number of small businesses (fewer than 50 employees) receiving a decrease in premiums tripled during the first six months under the new law, according to the Maine Bureau of Insurance.

ums, though the cost of the older person was four times greater. Similarly, the cost structure of hospitals in more rural areas tends to be higher than many of the urban hospitals — a factor that now is reflected in determining rates.

For large groups, such as school units, experience rating comes into play in addition to the factors of age and geography.

## **Groups of districts like the Penquis Superintendents Association with more than a dozen districts 'might see significant savings.'**

**— Alan Kochis  
Bangor School Department**

Two of the factors influencing cost are that the law now allows premiums to be calculated using age and geographic variables to reflect the disparity in health status and local hospital costs.

A 60-year-old person costs about four times more to insure than a 20-year-old. Under the previous law, an insurance company could charge no more than 50-percent higher premi-

It is hard to know if there is a disparity in age from one school system to another since Anthem has kept the data secret. The two underwriting factors, plus the actual experience of unit experience, will quickly tell the tale.

The Bureau of Insurance also noted that individual rates increased this year by a mere 1.7 percent, the lowest increase in years. In addition, individuals under 30 have relatively affordable rates. The

monthly cost for a policy is \$233, with a \$2,000 deductible and 30-percent coinsurance (maximum out-of-pocket: \$4,000). This is less than half the monthly premium available just a year ago under the old law.

Defending the MEABT plan, Burke said, "We have 70,000 members. About 700 annually cost the plan more than \$25,000. About 30 cost more than \$100,000. This year we have had several with cancer that cost over \$1 million. That's a lot of health care.

"I would say [to superintendents], 'Do you know where some of those high-cost claimants are? Neither do I. I just know that because they're part of this group we can take care of everyone and we won't watch the premium skyrocket next year because you have one or two high-cost claimants.

"You can't say that when you have only 100 or 200 members."

Bangor's Kochis agreed that small school districts, working on their own, probably will not lower costs, but added that groups of districts like the Penquis Superintendents Association with more than a dozen districts "might see significant savings."

Yet, Augusta found savings with just one group of 32 employees.

The Augusta School Board has already changed its insurance coverage for its 32 administrators and "non-represented units" which includes central office and adult education staff, according to Brown.

The result: a \$35,000 savings per year.

"The board wanted to give people choice and more flexibility and to offer a plan comparable to the low-deductible plan they had though MEABT," Brown said. "They did. A high- and low-end plan through Aetna."

Asked if she anticipated similar savings for the 220 teachers, Brown hedged. "It may turn out that MEABT is the best way to go," she said. "But at least we can find out."

### **Where To Go from Here**

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already have requested their loss information. The next logical step will be for them to select a broker with whom to work, if the school board and administration wish to explore options.

A single broker rather than multiple brokers is preferred. It is efficient and ensures an apples-to-apples analysis and presentation of competing plans offered by insurance companies.

The broker should have a strong track record of servicing large groups (more than 50 employees) as there is more to the process than simply getting the best plan at the most reasonable price.

Once the plan has been selected, the broker will be responsible for supporting the school district and the participants through the enrollment process, as well as serving as its go-to resource should issues arise with claims.

With health insurance premiums approaching \$400 million to cover the state's teachers, staff and their families, there is an exceptional opportunity to provide high-quality access to health care at a lower cost. The most immediate change school units can make is how they choose to fund their health plans.

The health reimbursement arrangement (HRA) helps keep premiums low by having the school system carry a high deductible for which it can budget on a yearly basis. As a plan participant exceeds their individual deductible, the school reimburses the employee up to a pre-determined limit. Once the limit has been exceeded, the insurance company picks up the rest of the cost for the rest of the plan year.

Another arrangement is the health savings account (HSA), which is owned by the individual participant and is used to pay a high deductible with tax-free dollars and covers more benefits than a traditional health plan.

If the participant exhausts the account in a given year, the insurance company pays for the additional covered expenses. If the employee doesn't spend the money that has been set aside in the account, it rolls

over to the following year.

More importantly, the money in the account goes with them should they choose to leave their employer or retire. Those who have contributed and saved over several years may have tens of thousands of dollars they can spend on health-related expenses in the future. In 2009, the average health-care expenditure in the United States was \$232.

A collaborative process with local unions, a continual emphasis on wellness and appropriate utilization will certainly maximize the opportunity for savings

for both participants and school systems.

### **Heart Break Hill**

One of the storied markers of the Boston Marathon is Heart Break Hill, a nearly half-mile rise just six miles from the finish line.

The journey to implement Maine's LD 1326 seems like a marathon in which cramps and dehydration have been replaced by litigation and logistics.

*Continued on page 26*



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# ‘Cash in lieu’ buyouts a great idea with major savings — if done right

By Mark Leslie

Some say the time has come for Maine school districts, if not doing so already, to consider offering faculty and staff “health buyouts” or “cash in lieu of health insurance” which, when done effectively, can save hundreds of thousands of dollars a year.

Roger P. Kelley of Drummond Woodsum, who represents most Maine schools in contract negotiations, said about one-third of Maine’s schools offer what they call “cash in lieu of health insurance.”

But in New Hampshire most schools offer similar “health buyouts” and are saving substantially, according to Timothy Ruehr, business administrator for School Administrative Unit # 29 in Keene, N.H.

“Most bargaining groups have ‘bargained in’ health buyouts and those can be a big saver,” Ruehr said. “We’ve been very successful with having people take that plan.”

With a “health buyout” or “cash in lieu of health insurance,” the school district proposes to give the employee from \$1,000 to \$3,500 in additional salary each year “not to take our insurance,” Ruehr said. “We don’t allow them to *not* have health insurance and pay them money. They must show they have secured health care with their spouse or elsewhere and at the end of the year we give them a check for that health buyout number.”

What does this mean?

“If your district pays 85 percent of a family policy worth \$20,000, that’s a cost of \$17,500,” Ruehr said. “With the buyout, the cost goes down to \$3,500. That’s big.”

“If you make the buyout \$1,000 it has very little effect because the employee can’t afford to pay their spouse’s insurance coverage and put money in their pocket. But if you incentivize them and it makes sense to them, they’ll do it.”

The Yarmouth School Department saves quite a bit by offering cash in lieu of payments versus health coverage, said Herb Hopkins, Jr., director of business services.

Of Yarmouth’s 140 teachers — whose family plans are paid

fully by the school department — 21 take cash of \$3,000 a year, Hopkins said. He added, “If all took the family plan, it could save us up to \$320,000, but there is a mix of coverages.”

Of Yarmouth’s 30 ed techs, 13 accept \$2,100 in lieu of coverage, saving the department \$62,000. And of the 26 bus drivers, custodians and maintenance employees in their union — whose single-person coverage is paid in full — three accept \$2,100, saving the town about \$6,700, Hopkins said.

“It’s a great idea,” said Dave Hamilton, employee benefits agent for Clark Insurance. “Schools in Maine are doing it, but it’s dangerous to *compare* what New Hampshire and Maine are doing. What works there might not work here. What’s popular in one might not be in the other, for a whole host of reasons.”

## Caviats

Kelley warned “there are a number of pitfalls,” but added, “Once you get through them, it can save a substantial amount of money.”

For the employee, he said, “Lots of times the ‘cash in lieu’ is a bigger raise than they get on their paycheck.”

The pitfalls:

- “If you offer it for everybody, some of them never had insurance at all, so you’re offering them free money.” Therefore the need to ensure that employees opting out of the school insurance are indeed insured elsewhere;
- when both spouses work for the school district;
- when one works for the school and the other for the same municipality, which would cost the town rather than save;
- couples trying to double dip;
- uninsured employees who buy an insurance for a brief time only so they can ask for the “cash in lieu.”

Kelley said the idea of “cash in lieu” has been in Maine around 15 years.

“Cash in lieu is just that — cash — so it is not in the form of a nontaxable item like health insurance,” Kelley said.

Likewise, New Hampshire’s ‘health buyout’ is part of end-of-the-year salary.

Why aren’t more Maine schools offering this incentive?

Kelley said, “Well, a number of schools do do it. The key is that it has to save the employer [school district] money. If it doesn’t, the program can’t work.”

Hamilton said, “We see [health buyouts] in the private sector. There are a lot of reasons. It will prevent people from having double coverage. If someone has access to a plan that perhaps is more suited to their needs, they’ll take the money and take their chances with perhaps a higher deductible plan, but they can fill that void with the additional compensation.”

In the end, each district must determine that factor according to its unique situation. But, according to some closely involved, it is a conversation worth having. •••

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# Outsourcing



## At Dover, contracting out grounds maintenance a new wrinkle in savings

By Mark Jeslie

Three years into the Dover School Department's contract for grounds and facilities maintenance, Business Administrator Michael Limanni is so content with the service that he is asking for a three-year contract extension.

"They've exceeded our expectations," Limanni said of UNICCO, a branch of UGL Services, an international facilities and real-estate services company. "I can't tell you how glad I am that they were in place when I got here."

Limanni is so sold on the value of outsourcing that Dover's schools are also contracting out transportation, food services, and a portion of their special education program (*see sidebar*). But he makes a distinction from the common perception.

"The misconception is that if you're outsourcing, you have no say in how the operation works," Limanni said. "It should be, like in any business, a partnership that provides

the school district with increased expertise and improved services, sharpened by market-driven competition, and by an expanded network of resources to draw from. And that is so important."

At Dover, grounds and facilities maintenance is no small task. The city's 4,100 students attend three elementary schools, one middle school and one high school — all on separate properties and each with its own athletic fields from football to baseball, soccer, lacrosse and field hockey as well as other grounds.

Of the department's \$53-million annual budget, the contract for grounds and facilities management is nearly \$2.6 million.

UNICCO's senior area manager, Tim Knowles, said he has a 42-person staff in Dover, maintaining eight athletic fields, their bleachers, stadiums and tracks, plus all the open space from trees to shrubs to flower beds and rain gardens and vegetable gardens as well as the buildings.

### The Money End of It

Asked the difference between the current cost, and the cost compared to the pre-UNICCO days, Limanni said, "The savings is built in from the quality provided alone. Our buildings will last longer, and the students will take more pride in their surroundings. While costs have increased slightly over the last four years with UNICCO, the quality has made up for it."

When considering outsourcing, Knowles said, the school district "is looking at a fixed cost and it will not migrate," whether the contract is fixed-cost, cost plus, or management-only.

The quality of work and "a fine line of value-added services" are crucial to the decision of whether to outsource, Limanni said. "When outsourcing, financial savings is not the most important thing. If you're saving money but getting less quality, you're hurting yourself because no one will support it."

"The most important factor for me to consider, is improved service. That has a lot to do with the outside company's management and ability to communicate well. Once they get a foot in the door, they have to hit the floor running with a strong internal and external marketing program. They will work hand-in-hand with the administrative staff, the principals of each building. That's so important because if the principals feel they're part of the solution to problems, they will most likely be on board with the decision..."


"The other part of all this, is the network of professional services that these companies can provide. These are services that we would often have to outsource anyway — and for really high prices. For Dover, UNICCO provides (through their network) staff who can do cabling, electric and plumbing, energy consumption analysis, and testing different items like boilers. Your normal facilities director would not have the capability or the resources to meet all of these needs."

The New England Patriots are a UNICCO client, Limanni said, "so we get

to benefit from the expertise and innovation that can only be generated from the millions spent on a place like Gillette Stadium. They've done all the research and know the best products. We would never be able to do that in-house."


Knowles, who holds a four-year degree in facilities engineering from Massachusetts Maritime and has overseen higher-education accounts from Ohio to Suffolk University in Boston, said Dover's previous school superintendent indicated outsourcing to UNICCO led to some direct savings, bolstered by "a lot of intangible savings."

Outsourcing grounds and facilities management, Knowles said, "allows schools to focus in on what their core business is. We have strengths: systems, everything from work-order management to policies, work-order flow processes. We handle all of the HR functions, workers' comp and liability issues. And we have vast in-house experience in many areas."



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“We have a pandemic flu plan, for instance, that is customized for each facility. If we got hit tomorrow with HRN2 flu, we carry sanitizers that would address that situation. On top of that, we would be able to tap into local resources. We have trained custodial staff nearby at Liberty Mutual and 65 trained employees at the University of New Hampshire.

“So, worst-case scenario, if we had a major issue this morning, my team would be complimented by another 30 people, and would be addressing everything by tonight.”

In New England, UNICCO also contracts out with two other New Hampshire school systems, several private k-12 schools, Harvard and Leslie universities, Wentworth Institute of Technology and a number of other schools.

### **The Union Struggle**

But adding grounds and facilities maintenance to Dover’s outsourcing services did not come easily.

“I’m glad it was all done before I arrived,” Limanni said, adding that the opposition was furious, especially from the union.

The union, he said, mailed flyers to residents, saying this was a short-sighted solution during a fiscal crisis; it would end up costing more in the long run; overall quality would suffer; and parents would have strangers hanging around their children.

“They made out like they [UNICCO employees] were boogeymen, coming in from another country. Those were their three main objections in trying to tell the taxpayers, ‘This is not what you want.’”

Yet, he said, the union has been replaced and “those are actually the three areas in which we’ve had the most improvement.”

Before outsourcing maintenance, Dover’s previous superintendent wrote that the staff at that time was “overpaid and under-producing.”

“When you walk in the door and see cobwebs and dirty walk-off mats and the janitor is making \$19 to \$20 an hour and he’s difficult for the administration to manage—” Knowles said, making a change is an arguably easy decision.

In the end, UNICCO retained one-third of the previous maintenance staff and hired the other two-thirds from Dover and neighboring towns.

“We have a full medical and dental insurance and 401K,” Knowles said. “The wages aren’t quite as good as what Dover was paying, but they are very competitive and I would say generous as well.”

“Quality, to me, is super-important,” Limanni said. “Even if I only end up breaking even on the price. I’m not looking for huge savings necessarily — unless the RFP actually called for it. Regardless of any savings reaped, the quality must be matched or improved.”

### **Privatizing Vs Government-run**

Limanni also pointed to “the way governments operate” as a reason to privatize where possible.

“If you can do it yourself really well, don’t privatize,” he said, “but I think that these [maintenance, food, transportation] are the areas that get neglected the most when it comes to budgets.

“When you leave it to a board to decide between funding a costly curriculum change or replacing your buses, they usually go with the curriculum. They don’t always think logically that if you don’t rotate and fix the buses, it will come back to haunt them. At that point it’s too late, they would be looking at some painful debt financing, or scrapping the whole program at a major loss to the taxpayer.

“A professional company has no choice; they must invest in maintaining their assets efficiently; that’s their business.”

Limanni added, “There are always things we are going to do well, but given the nature of our business, I suggest privatizing the things we don’t.” ...



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# Special ed: Another outsourcing possibility for schools

By Mark Leslie

**S**chool systems scrutinizing ways to minimize costs while maximizing benefits might want to inspect special education — a key driver to skyrocketing education costs. The Dover, N.H., School Department has taken the look — and the plunge. Well, partially.

While Business Administrator Michael Limanni feels the real savings — and in the case of special-ed, revenue — might be going “all in,” this fall Dover will go partway in, outsourcing the management of its special-ed program.

“I would have preferred to outsource that whole program to a company that specializes in special ed,” Limanni said. “There are companies that do special ed. There are learning

centers, adult education firms that specialize in certain areas. If you bring in a company like that, you get to be part of their network.”

Dover has an alternative school that treats a lot of behavioral issues and some physical disabilities,” he said.

This year, Limanni said, “we will outsource the management to a company that will provide a director and that’s all. I assure you that did not save us any money.

“What we’re hoping to do is provide more opportunities for that program so we send fewer cases out of district.”

The difference per pupil is significant. “With all the parental choice that is available now, you have parents saying their kids are not getting what they need at your school district; you need to send them out. So the per-pupil cost goes from \$15,000 or \$16,000 a year to \$36,000 or

\$40,000,” Laminni said.

What Dover hopes to accomplish is bring those students back into a better program and offer services that other school districts don’t have.

The result? Neighboring cities will say, “Instead of sending our kids to Program X, we’re going to send them to Dover.”

Then, Limanni said, “we will get that \$36,000 or \$40,000, keep the department from hemorrhaging that tuition expense and recoup some of it so that we actually have a net gain.”

Regarding outsourcing in general, Limanni said: “You always want to look at areas where you can’t do better yourself, which is providing these new types of services that there is demand for that you end up shipping out of district.” •••

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# FairPoint meets MSLN's need for speed

By Jeff Nevins

In the true spirit of Maine's motto, "Dirigo" — a Latin term meaning "I lead" — the state has implemented one of the first state-wide networks in the country to provide Internet connections for all schools and libraries. And halfway through its five-year contract with FairPoint Communications, Maine's report card is an "A."

FairPoint reported "no problems, no complaints" as the state met its objective: to create a network that provides students and library users with Internet connections to like-minded schools, libraries, colleges and content providers, no matter where they live. FairPoint laid 1.5 million feet of new high-speed fiber and connected approximately 800 Maine schools and libraries as well as 126 Central Offices with the added bandwidth and Ethernet-based services they needed.

The network also provides dedicated bandwidth that is able to support multiple users and bandwidth-intensive applications like video conferencing and e-learning.

### The History of the Matter

The entire process was set in motion in 1996 when the Maine Public Utilities Commission created the Maine School and Library Network (MSLN), a consortium of schools and libraries through which participants acquire Internet access, local loop circuits and other related services. The MSLN is funded by a federal E-Rate program that covers approximately 70 percent and a surcharge on telecommunications services.

In a 2009 report prepared by the University of Maine System Information Technology Services on the future of the MSLN, researchers



*FairPoint technicians at work connecting Maine's schools and libraries*

concluded that the bandwidth available through the MSLN was close to its limits. The network had been in operation for more than 13 years and the number of computers in schools and libraries had grown at an incredible pace.

The challenges facing the MSLN reflect the surging global demand for bandwidth, driven by the explosion of Internet use and the growth in video-on-demand, distance learning, telemedicine and 3G and 4G wireless data use. The "need for speed" is expanding so fast that data traffic has increased an average of 60 percent per year since 2005 and is expected to grow more than 40 percent next year and triple again by 2015.

The Maine Learning Technology Initiative (MLTI) made Maine the first state to seize the potential of technology to

transform teaching and learning in classrooms by bringing more laptops into the schools.

But this, in turn, added more load on the network. Additional demand for bandwidth came from the growing number of video-based applications that have become available to enhance classroom learning opportunities.

In many cases the demand for bandwidth far outweighed available capacity. Despite efforts to integrate Internet resources into their classrooms, many teachers were so discouraged by sluggish response times that they chose not to use Internet resources at all. Some school districts' use actually declined.

In addition to the need for

increased bandwidth capacity, many schools recognized the need for greater capacity between the buildings in their district.

The Department of Education and the Maine State Library began exploring how to deliver more bandwidth on the network and discussing how to provide 100-Mbps capacity to all schools and libraries.

The solution was to maintain the successful components of the MSLN — one network with ubiquitous access and on-ramp pricing — with the newly available advanced technologies in the region.

Acting on behalf of NetworkMaine, the University of Maine System (UMS) issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the provision of data transport services to provide regional transport services to approximately 800 schools and library locations.

FairPoint Communication's sales and sales engineering teams drafted a proposal that offered a number of options for UMS to consider, including greatly increased bandwidth for all the sites.

"Our network gave FairPoint a dis-

tinct competitive advantage in securing the contract," said Karen Romano, FairPoint's vice president of government, education and research sales. "No one else could offer the MSLN the power of this 21<sup>st</sup>-century technologically advanced network. We also had the advantage of being able to offer a statewide network solution, convenient network access, 24x7 support and a team dedicated to serving the MSLN."

Subsequently, FairPoint was awarded a five-year contract worth \$25.8 million to support the needs of more than 600 locations of the MSLN.

#### FairPoint's Network Solution

Since April 2008, FairPoint has invested more than \$182 million in communications infrastructure and technology to bring broadband to northern New England, including installing more than 3,100 miles of new fiber across the region.

That investment in the network is essential to meeting the future demand for high-speed bandwidth while also paving the way for FairPoint to meet the growing needs of the MSLN.

Through its next-generation, fiber-based core network, FairPoint was able to pro-

vide the libraries and schools with the added bandwidth and Ethernet-based services they needed.

Getting the network built was a major undertaking for everyone involved. FairPoint had to find the human resources to provide more than 600 locations in a very short time and make sure the necessary operations administration and maintenance functions were in place to engineer, order, provision, install and maintain the network.

The project included modifications to systems, testing and provisioning through the Network Operations Center (NOC), processing orders, delivering and installing new equipment in many locations, along with construction of 1.5 million feet of new fiber. Most of the fiber was built in eastern Maine, with more than 500,000 feet going to 89 locations in the Ellsworth, Calais and Machias areas.

Before the site-specific work could be done, FairPoint engineers visited each school and library for a site survey to determine what equipment was needed. Central Offices (COs) had new equipment installed, and 126 of the COs were equipped, tested and turned-up to handle the increased traffic of the MSLN.

#### A Satisfied Customer

Seth Thompson, technical director for Regional School Union (RSU) #5 in Freeport, explained what the new MSLN meant to his school system. "The new circuit is tremendous," he said. "We just did not have the bandwidth we needed and students and teachers were getting frustrated."

RSU #5 participates in the Maine Learning Technology Initiative (MLTI) and had expanded its student laptop program from the 7th and 8th grade into the high school where every student is provided a laptop for school-related use.

Thompson explained that teachers had been using the laptops in the classroom, but with the traffic gener-

*Continued on page 27*



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## Member Profile

# Scott Eldridge jumps right in to every new challenge — at RSU #4 and in life

By Mark Leslie

Many golfers come armed with tales that impacted their lives while on a golf course. For Scott Eldridge — whose daughter Korynne was born on Jack Nicklaus' birthday and whose son Blake was born on Arnold Palmer's birthday — it is appropriate that he had a career-changing moment in July 2010 while playing Springbrook Golf Club in Leeds with RSU #4 Superintendent of Schools James Hodgkin.

With 13 years experience in private business and 11 years as a special-education teacher, Eldridge listened closely when Hodgkin mentioned an opening for school business manager in his district.

Eldridge had just earned a master's degree in education administration, envisioned a new career as a school superintendent, and this position fit like a glove — even a taut golf glove.

The 1974 Belfast High School and 1978 University of Maine-Orono graduate may have credentials unique among his school business colleagues.

After obtaining a bachelor's degree in business from UMO, Eldridge went to work with the Maine Bureau of Taxation for three years, then worked five years as a KeyBank branch manager in Wiscasset, Mechanic Falls and Lisbon Falls before taking a post as an operations manager then a senior manager at FedEx in Bangor and Augusta.

Working 90-hour weeks and missing out on family activities with wife Katherine (a Winthrop school teacher) and the children, led to a major change in life, he decided to earn certification as a teacher because he "always related well to children, enjoyed his coaching and teaching skills that led to

his belief of being firm but fair." That led to special-ed K-8 positions in Winthrop for 10 years and Gardiner for one year.

But at that point, Eldridge said, "I was disillusioned with the amount of paperwork and how teaching priorities have changed, especially in special ed. It seemed to me that education became more of a service for parents as opposed

to how we educate the children. They needed more than just a daycare. When you needed to hold students accountable, it was difficult to get parents to have your back.

"I believe if you don't like something, don't complain. Get out and do something different."

Now, Eldridge faces a new set of paperwork burdens, but at least they are "part of the job of business" — not meaningless or



Scott Eldridge, left, and Superintendent James Hodgkin work closely getting RSU #4 budget matters and elsewhere.

peripheral.

Unlike teaching children, Eldridge faces a varied swath of challenges where "you have to do a lot of digging and research to see where you can find savings. You cannot be not be complacent."

"Scott has a solid background in terms of finances and, as a school teacher for quite awhile, he understands the school side. It's a unique combination and it has worked well," said Hodgkin. "Certainly his banking background has been very beneficial.

"His job is probably simpler than what he did before. He's right on top of everything."

Eldridge may or may not agree.

Constrained by vast federal and state rules and regulations, tax dollars and even the communities — and not

being able to generate new revenues, Eldridge said, “Sometimes you have one hand tied behind your back before you even start.”

But start, he did.

With a central office of a payroll specialist, an accounts payable specialist and himself — all cross-trained in a team effort to handle everything from Human Resources

education,” he added. “That is, education is a non-profit business, so to speak, and you have to understand that efficiencies are not necessarily important up front because the long-range goal is these kids. You don’t know what productivity you’ve accomplished right now. It may be another 10 to 15 years from now, when they are independent citizens, before you can gauge their productivity. You hope they

The year before Eldridge arrived, the consolidation had led to approximately 20 positions being eliminated within the district because of duplication.

The Wales Elementary School was closed, saving about \$200,000 a year.

“The school board and superintendent were very proactive to get these things done ahead of time,” Eldridge said, adding that same proactive bent helped ease the pain from the “financial cliff” that devastated so many school systems when the federal jobs bill and other funding ended abruptly.

Eldridge said that when he arrived, every school lunch program had its own checkbook.

“We, in the last year, centralized everything,” he said. “Now we’re getting a better idea of where things stand and how to move forward.”

And with that better grasp of matters has come savings. To wit:

- Realizing a “significant savings” changing the telephone service.
- RSU #4 entered into a buying alliance with the towns in buying oil, diesel and gasoline. The result: a \$40,000 to \$50,000 savings.
- The success of that buying alliance has led RSU #4 to explore a similar arrangement concerning food services.

“Food service has a source of concern in the district,” Eldridge said. “It’s not making money; not even breaking even. You can make something break even if you remove salaries and benefits from the general budget.

“We’re not in the food service business. We’re not in the transportation business. We’re in the education business, but those other things have an impact on education.”

All aspects of operating a school district are being reviewed, he said, from outsourcing transportation to minor expenses, like payphones and light bulbs.

Removing payphones in all the schools eliminated \$300 a year in costs. And buying more efficient lighting is more expensive up front

**Scott has a solid background in terms of finances and as a school teacher for quite awhile he understands the school side. It’s a unique combination and it has worked well.**

**— James Hodgkin, RSU #4 superintendent**

to food services — Eldridge oversees a \$17-million budget. This is a great staff and without them, the first year he would have more than his share of issues.

What strengths did Eldridge bring to RUS #4, which educates 1,500 students at two schools in Litchfield, two in Sabattus and Oak Hill High School in Wales?

“A diverse background,” he said. “Having been a teacher and a business manager working out in the business world, I think I’ve got a good balance of the educational and financial aspects of the job.

“Your view is much broader with

make a difference in society.

“That’s the perspective that being a teacher brings. You understand that kids are not commodities.”

And while school business is a far cry from FedEx, where daily “efficiency numbers” were either met or not, Eldridge and his peers everywhere do need to find efficiencies in order to maximize dwindling education funding.

#### **Delicately Trimming the Budget**

From job duplication to phone services, buying alliances and closing down a school, Eldridge, Hodgkins, and other RSU #4 leaders and the school board are investigating every avenue to trim costs.



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to continually revisit all aspects of the operation,” Eldridge said. “And you can’t do it alone. You have to run those ideas by everybody — the superintendent, the director of operations, principals, staff. That way you’re operating it as a business.”

### The Job

It is this aspect of the job that most excites Eldridge, he said, adding, “It’s a challenge with less resources. We’re in a business that doesn’t earn revenues, doesn’t produce a visible product. It’s based on what taxpayers are willing to give, so it’s going to be very challenging as the cost of doing business goes up.

“Sometimes you can get down on it, but the reality is, you have to find ways to persevere and make it work.”

Attitude is crucial.

Superintendent Hodgkin said, “Scott’s personality is very helpful, too. In this economy it’s easy to get cranky, but he is very personable and we run a very fun and pleasant central office.”

The success of the teachers is what drives this philosophy.

“One thing we have to remind ourselves of is what we do,” Eldridge said. “We’re the support staff for education. Anything we can do to make things as transparent as possible to support the staff, to make sure what we do has an optimum impact on them, so they don’t have to call down here and ask about things like payroll and supplies. The biggest thing we can do is support the teachers.”

To better do that, Eldridge has joined the Maine Association of School Business Officials (MeASBO) and this year serves on the Executive Committee.

“Primarily, for me, MeASBO is a great resource,” he said. “You’ve got so many people with different backgrounds to draw from. If you have questions somebody can draw from past experiences to help you.”

His involvement, he said, is for two reasons.

“First, I have such a varied back-



Scott Eldridge

ground in business and finance outside of the educational environment, so I can bring a unique perspective. Second, to see how I can make a difference to help others within this organization.”

For a man whose hobbies of golf and coin collecting are as disparate as his

**“I believe if you don’t like something, don’t complain. Get out and do something different.”**  
— Scott Eldridge

careers in special-ed teaching and business management, those contributions are expected to soon be self-evident.

“Scott’s enthusiastic about learning about the career and the industry of education,” said MeASBO President Kathy Warren. “He has that good and varied operations background that school business managers come from where you’ve done logistical and financial things and they apply well in this job.

“He’s very inquisitive and has worked hard to learn about what’s going on in the business and to build relationships; and that’s how you do the job well. We love people who come in and join right in.” •••



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# At Benchmark, it's all in the family

Hands-on management remains a hallmark after decades of service

By Mark Leslie

In 1959, living in Italy where jobs were rare, Antonio and Maria Bifulco made a brilliant decision. Maria would return to her native United States and claim her citizenship, earn enough money to send for Antonio and their baby, Leo, then start a new life.

Without that decision, we would be minus one great American success story and the Bifulco business, Benchmark Cleaning & Supplies, would not exist today. And without Benchmark, several school districts across southern and central Maine would be paying a lot more for their custodial services.

Paul Roney, facilities manager at Thornton Academy in Saco, did not have the figures for the entire school campus but said he added the Emery Locke Building to Benchmark's duties last year and "we saved \$10,000 on that building alone. We're adding another building this fall."

While at the Gorham School Department, Roney said he saved \$200,000 a year when they started with Benchmark in the late 1990s.

Dan O'Shea, business manager for the Falmouth School Department where Benchmark was contracted to clean the high school when it opened in 2001, estimated "\$75,000 in savings a year just on paper. That doesn't even count the other 'soft' costs, which is managing personnel and personnel issues like finding substitutes for people out of work, handling workers' comp, you name it... Overall, it's gone well here."

While Antonio and Maria Bifulco are now retired and living in Portland



Benchmark founder Antonio, flanked by son Leo, right, and grandson Andrew.

and Florida, their son Leo and grandson Andrew are carrying on the business and flourishing.

Their niche: strictly cleaning the buildings while schools normally keep their own maintenance staff.

Since transitioning from doing custodial work for such corporations as UNUM and General Electric to specializing mostly in schools in 2000, their portfolio now includes Bath, Winthrop, Gorham, Thornton Academy, Falmouth High School and The Rowe School at Yarmouth — 22 buildings in all.

And they are continuing to look to expand, but only when they can help.

"For us, when school districts come to us and tell us their problems and what they're looking for, if we can't provide significant savings we let them know," said Andrew, 27, Benchmark's vice president. "Our objective is to save money for schools so they can reinvest it in education

for the students.

"Obviously we want to grow as a company, but it's more to provide savings and alternatives that can be successful for schools."

Leo Bifulco, who took over the family business after graduating from college, added, "School buildings are probably the largest investment a district makes. It's a huge investment and to keep them running as efficiently as you can and maintaining them takes a lot of time and effort. If you're spending time managing people instead of facilities, you tend to lose focus."

Roney agreed, saying that if custodial duties are handled in-house "and a custodian misses work you don't have someone in the wings ready to step in; but they [Benchmark] do."

By outsourcing, Roney said, "You're not worried about vacations

and so forth because they cover all that stuff.”

Paul Kelly, Thornton Academy’s business manager, said, “We tried one company and it didn’t work out. So we went with tried and true: Leo.

“Leo’s a hands-on guy. If we have an issue he shows up.”

O’Shea added, “It’s fortunate that Leo’s a Falmouth resident. We take advantage of that.”

“Yes,” said Andrew, “we as owners are extremely hands-on, so you’re getting people at the top of the company coming in and making sure everything is up to standards.

“We take pride in that. We’re at every school twice a day in Southern Maine. Once when the night crew starts and at the end of the night, making sure everything was done properly, offering suggestions on detail things or other work they need to do.”

As managers, both Leo and Andrew have all the bases covered. Leo’s college degree from Northeastern University is in marketing and finance. Andrew, a 2010 graduate of Arizona State, earned his degree in business and communications.

And both have toiled for the business since an early age. Leo started doing the books for his father when he was in high school. Andrew began working summers the day after his 15<sup>th</sup> birthday. Their days begin early and end at 10:30 or 11 p.m. — keeping work quality high and their customers happy.

In each building, Benchmark has a supervisor who manages the cleaners on a daily basis. But Leo or Andrew make regular visits to ensure the districts’ needs and goals are being met.

### Advantages

Asked the advantages of outsourcing custodial duties, Leo pointed to three factors:

- Cost savings. “Definitely there is a savings to outsourcing. It varies from district to district, depending on their own cost structure.”

- “In most districts we’ve taken over there’s been an improvement in quality because the current custodians tend to have the attitude ‘this is how I was trained, how I’ve done things for years and I’m not changing.’ We keep up on new technologies and procedures so we are more productive. Being that way, we are able to keep quality at a higher level.”

- School facilities directors “get to spend more time managing their buildings versus dealing with employee issues.

“In all districts the biggest issue they have is spending over 50 percent of their time dealing with employee issues: missing time, writing up people, dealing with complaints, etc., where they should be managing the buildings.”

“It takes a lot out of the facility director’s hair,” Andrew added, “because he only has to deal with me or my father or the building supervisor instead of all the people on the cleaning crew.”

Andrew pointed to one major misconception among business managers and facility directors. That is, “if they outsource they won’t have control over who’s in the building or the flexibility they need to meet the changes that occur regularly. In actuality, we provide greater ease in managing disciplinary and scheduling issues.”

Another misconception, Andrew said, revolves around jobs.

“When the issue of outsourcing comes up in a lot of districts,” he said, “we’re painted as just wanting to take away jobs from staff currently in place. That’s just not the case. We want to provide successful alternatives. There have been a couple of times where districts come to us and we say we can’t considerably help you enough to make it worth it for you.”

### Red Tape and Dollars

A lot of problems with school districts’ maintenance staffs and having union crews, Andrew said, is that “there’s a lot of bureaucratic red tape in getting things done. With us, if there is an issue, there’s not as much red tape to get it solved.”

He gave an example of a two-story elementary school, with a custodian handling each floor. The stairwells, he said, were never getting cleaned. The district asked the first-floor custodian to do the stairwells. He filed a grievance, declaring that it wasn’t in his job description.

It then asked the second-floor custodian, with the same result.

In many cases, Andrew added, performance is not the issue, but finances.

“You’re paying people on their years experience, not their performance. A lot start at \$14 an hour with full benefits, which is a lot for cleaning a school... In some cases, custodians can earn more than teachers.

“Our employees get raises and vacation based on performance. If they’re not performing to our standards, we don’t have to go through bureaucratic red tape to get rid of them.”

Typically, he said, in the smaller districts much depends on benefit packages.

“That’s where a lot of schools and districts are spending their money and where we can provide the savings,” Andrew said. “Think of the savings schools could have if they outsourced and didn’t have to pay those benefit packages. There are programs they could keep.”

### Corporate Versus Schools

Andrew noted that some corporate cleaners are drifting into the school cleaning business, but said, “Cleaning schools is a completely different animal from commercial cleaning.”

How?

“The buildings are constantly in use. And you have to work with a schedule and work around it,” he said. “Communication is huge between faculty and the cleaning crew and supervisors. Not only is the building being used when the students are there, but for events and activities. The job involves constantly working around people and finding a system that works.

“That’s why team cleaning is so successful for us. Because we have all our workers working specific areas. It’s a challenge.”

But, as Antonio, 80, enjoys his retirement, he can rest assured that the three-generation business — 60 employees strong — will continue to meet those challenges. •••

## School-choice group meeting

A legislatively created group has started meeting to work on a publicly funded school choice model that would allow for students to attend public school in districts other than their own.

The group was an outgrowth of legislation proposed by Gov. Paul LePage earlier this year that would allow for students to attend public school in districts other than the one in which

they live. The Legislature sidestepped that issue by creating the stakeholder group – made up of representation from principal, superintendent, school board and teacher groups, as well as others appointed by the Governor.

The group is responsible for developing a model that will allow for public school choice, while addressing important aspects such as: funding, educating low-income students and those requiring special services, and transportation.

The group has largely reviewed the three Maine state statutes currently in place that center on school choice – one of which is the superintendents agreement. This statute enables superintendents to approve the transfer of a student from one unit to another.

### MeASBO meetings

**ASBO International**  
**Oct. 10-12** — 2013 Annual ASBO International meeting in Phoenix, Ariz.

**Maine ASBO**  
**Nov. 16** — Freeport area (location TBA).  
**Jan. 18** — Capital Area Technical Center, Augusta.  
**March 8** — United Technologies Center, Bangor.  
**May 3** — Green Ladle, Lewiston High School.

## FairPoint

*Continued from page 21*

ated by more than 500 laptops in the school, the old network was slow and it was hard to access the Internet. He said the old system “crawled” and was so slow that some teachers stopped using the laptops

in class, but now the school’s circuit can handle the added capacity easily and Internet access is extremely fast.

“For us, easy and fast access is the key,” Thompson said. “The new network has removed the barrier to using new technology in the classroom.

The upgrade FairPoint did to the MSLN has made a significant difference in our school system.” •••

*Jeff Nevins handles public relations for FairPoint in Maine and New Hampshire.*

## Health insurance law wins

*Continued from page 13*

Should a school district choose to go with a new plan, its retirees must come with it until they transition to Medicare, presuming they are eligible for the federal program. Currently, the Maine Public Employees Retirement System (MePERS) automatically deducts retiree payments (55 percent of the total premium) to pay their portion of the health coverage.

It was recently learned that MePERS is not obligated to do so, nor does it have the funds to make the necessary programming changes to its system to accommodate the potential of multiple carriers. MePERS is working with the LePage Administration and others to rectify this last piece.

Maine schools and the citizens who fund them are now positioned to further control the rising cost of health care. As the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act is phased in and the last key aspects of the Maine reform take hold, Maine should begin to look more like the rest of the nation and shed its status as one of the highest-cost states in the nation.

*David Hamilton is a senior member of the Clark Insurance Employee Benefits Group. Contact at: dhamilton@clarkinsurance.com / 207-523-2294.*

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It is time to renew your membership to MeASBO for 2012-13. The membership fees have remained the same and continue to be a bargain. MeASBO is an affiliate of ASBO International and Tri-State ASBO. MeASBO provides members informative meetings with timely topics, a magazine published twice a year, and the opportunity to meet and discuss issues with peers. Contribute to the continued success of the MeASBO by sending in your membership today.

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MeASBO encourages all of its members to participate in the publication. It welcomes their thoughts and opinions.

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