

MeASBO

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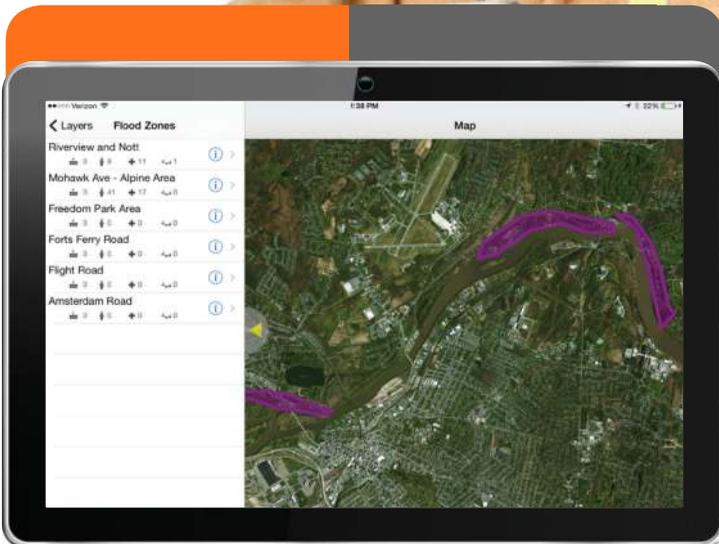
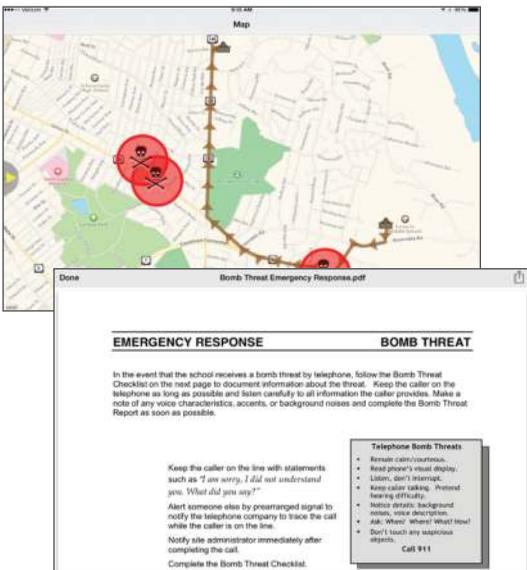
Let them *NOT* eat cake

Lunch Program
Embattled

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No pickles in the salad
Cut salt, ketchup and sugar
Only 12 ounces of milk



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

A testament to business managers

It is with great pleasure that I take over the helm as your next president. Although I was in line for the position three years ago, a very serious health condition required me to step down and put everything else in my life on hold. Life has some very valuable lessons to teach us, and they are not all easy.

You are an amazing group. Every day we bear witness to the fact that many people have no idea how much we as business managers take care of to keep the school systems running smoothly.

Many of the things we do are in the background, and they appear to get done "all by themselves;" this is a testament to how well we do our jobs. We are called upon to help make some very tough decisions. My former superintendent had many sayings, but my favorite was "No good deed goes unpunished," to express the backlash often felt when what we do is right, but unpopular.

I look forward to working with the Executive and



Stacie Field

Professional Development committees to continue to bring you timely topics of discussion and enriching professional development opportunities.

I continue to be impressed with all of our committees and their dedication to our organization. They truly care about MeASBO, and making sure that members receive the current information necessary for us to perform our work at the level stakeholders have come to expect from us.

I personally have a very busy and exciting year coming up. In addition to serving as your president, my youngest daughter is a senior in high school, I will be completing a leadership and organizational studies program at USM (something else I had to put on hold in 2011), and I have a new superintendent leading RSU #73.

Summer is an extremely busy time for us. I hope you all were able to take some time off, recharge and relax. I look forward to seeing you in the coming year.



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Blessing spells out the goods, the bads, the yes's and no's of interviewing, hiring

“Leave a paper trail!” was shouted from the mountaintops when Linda Blessing of Career Management Associates (CMA) in Portland addressed Maine ASBO members June 6 about employee hiring and interviewing.

While it's instrumental to know a candidate's specific knowledge and skills giving them the ability to perform the essential functions, Blessing said the school should develop a “selection model” to guide them for the job interview. The model should include what works for the school, what is needed for this position, the necessary skills and cultural fit.

But what is most important?

“Write it down!” she said.

Doing so can pre-empt and prevent the many possibilities for lawsuits that are rampant across the country.

Conducting Successful Interviews

Speaking of conducting successful interviews, Blessing, who holds a master of science degree in education, said, “When employers are in the catbird seat they don't have to worry about us poor slobs” and therefore often treat job candidates poorly.

But, she said, “Job hiring is an opportunity to reinforce your school district's image. Say, ‘Thank you for your effort.’ And people remember when you don't get back to them.”

“This is an experience, an outreach into the community and an opportunity for you to get the best person,” she said.

It is also a key time to “write it down!”

Document the interview, Blessing said, your questions and the applicant's responses.

As part of the paper trail, she suggested the interviewer tell the job candidate that they will be taking notes and the candidate will have an opportunity to ask questions at any time.

“You must ask each person the same questions,” Blessing said. “You are driving the bus, but the candidate is doing the talking. You have the roadmap that leads you in the appropriate way ... in the interview.”

Behavior-based Questions

The chance to let people talk is very helpful beyond the actual words, she said, adding that asking the right questions increases chances of getting the right person for the job.

“People who interview the best are not always the people who will do the job the best,” she said, adding that using behavior-based questions can give you the upper hand.



An entertaining, knowledgeable Linda Blessing speaks to MeASBO members

To do so, she recommended describing a situation and task, then ask open-ended questions because they garner more information.

“For instance, ‘Tell me about a time you had to be organized, what actions did you take and what were the results.’”

If the answer seems “too slick,” she said, “Ask, ‘Tell me a time when thing did not work out for you.’”

Some suggested behavior-based questions are:

√ What did you do in your last job in order to be effective with your organization and planning? What actions did you take? What were the results?

√ Describe the worst customer you have had and tell me how you dealt with him or her.

√ What did you do in your last job to contribute toward a teamwork environment? Be specific.

√ Describe a time when you felt it was necessary to change your actions in order to respond to the needs of another person.

√ Give me an example of a time when you were able to communicate successfully with another person, even when

that individual may not have personally liked you.

Take notes, Blessing said, and “Listen! You’re not taking phone calls, texting, being distracted in any way. You’re investing time. You’re establishing rapport.

“A good way to establish rapport is with eye contact and body language — and thank them. Explain the purpose of the interview; give them a copy of the job description. Have a conversation about the job. Then ask

open-ended and behavioral questions. The job itself is [not a subject of discussion] until the end of the interview.”

Questions Right or Wrong?

Blessing set about naming several questions that interviewers often ask, then either assailing or giving them credence.

For instance:

- Tell me about yourself.

“What a stupid question,” she said with a smile. “You have their resume. They can lead you someplace you have no place going.”

- Why are you here?

“Another stupid question. Where are you going with that?”

- How did you become interested in our organization?

“Ask rather ‘What is there about this job that entices you?’”

- What do you see as your principal strengths? Weaknesses?

“This is right up there with ‘Tell me about yourself,’” she said. “What is it you want to know. These are questions you should ask in a behavior-based format.”

- What is your long-term career objective?

“You can ask that — if you’re hoping to get a picture in a crystal ball about their expected future.”

- What disappointments did you have in your previous jobs?

“That’s okay. You’re coaching. You’re nudging,” Blessing said.

- Tell me a little about your outside activities. What do you like to do for fun and recreation.

“Do not ask this,” Blessing said.

“When you ask behavior-based questions, you get personality, confidentiality. They may tell you something or you may see something about how they deal with stress. By virtue of having behavior-based questions ahead of time you can watch the person’s responses.”

She said reading body language is 50 percent facial expressions, 38 percent tone of voice and the remainder what the person says.

Legal Implications

Again Blessing stressed documenting the interview, asking every applicant the same questions and writing down their responses.

Why? Not just finding the right person for the job but avoiding court.

“People may come in who are spring-loaded in the poised-off position and looking for a lawsuit opportunity,” Blessing said. “All questions must be job-related.”

She recalled when she interviewed for a human relations position at a major employer in Maine. The vice president asked if she was married,



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“Job hiring is an opportunity to reinforce your school district’s image.”

— Linda Blessing

then if she had a boyfriend, then if she was on birth control.

Her response: “You know. I think you need me here. All of your questions are inappropriate.”

To avoid a court case based on discrimination or otherwise, Blessing said, and at the top of the warnings is Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Whether it is intentional or not, any denial of rights to a protected class of people is prohibited by law.

Also, she said, the employment process must be job-related and the school district must eliminate discriminatory hiring practices against those denied equal employment opportunity in the past on the basis of race, color, relation, sex, age, national origin or handicap. “Protected classes” include African-Americans, Asians, Indians, females, Vietnam veterans, physically disabled, those over the age of 40, individuals with Spanish surnames and various religious groups.

Questions to avoid:

- What is your Social Security number?

“This can’t be asked until after the job is offered, and the offer I-9s contingent on the person passing the school’s screening process,” Blessing said.

- Where were you born?
- Where were your spouse or parents born?
- Will you submit proof of age by supplying a birth certificate?
- What religious holidays do you observe?
- Have you ever been arrested for a crime.
- What is your marital status.
- What political or religious organizations are you a member of?
- How many children do you have?

Blessing said she finds that many employers are unaware that they can not ask about physical limitations or health.

“The umbrella in the United States for discrimination is Title VII — from which are the Age and Employment Act, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act and the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) Equal Pay Act.

Therefore, an interviewer can not ask the nature or severity of a disability, the condition causing it, the prognosis, whether the person will need treatment or special leave due to the disability, if they have been injured on the job, filed for worker’s compensation insurance, or been hospitalized, or been treated for a mental problem or drug or alcohol addiction.

She said it is all right to ask how many sick days a person took on their last job, but it must be asked during the screening process after the job has been offered and if that information is a “must.”

“We must focus on the individual’s ability, not disability,” she said. “You can ask, ‘Can you lift 25

pounds with or without a reasonable accommodation?” as long as you ask everybody.”

Blessing said to invite questions from a job candidate and, when concluding the interview, “Tell them you will get back to them — and then do so. It builds character and is another marketing tool. Say, ‘We found someone who is better suited for the position.’

“Do not get specific.”

Blessing recommended keeping a “position folder” containing the job description, resume form, interview preparation tool, questions and answers, and candidate evaluation.

In other words, a paper trail.

Checking References

Blessing recommended checking references over the telephone and not using letters or e-mails.

Briefly describe the job for which the candidate has applied and ask the reference if this is something for which the person is well-suited, she said, adding to avoid vague questions but be specific, like “What was she best at?” and “What did her subordinates like most or least about her?”

“You can use a personal cell phone and call a reference on your own time,” Blessing suggested. “Then it’s a ‘personal’ recommendation. And if you choose not to give one, that says it all.”

She also suggested asking candidates to bring copies of recent performance appraisals to their interview.

“It’s a game and you’re trying to get enough information to win the game,” she said. •••



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\$11.3M available for at-risk students

PORTLAND — The Maine Department of Education is dispersing \$11.3 million over the next five years to support extended learning opportunities for at-risk students.

Maine Governor Paul R. LePage announced the awards alongside Education Commissioner Jim Rier, LearningWorks CEO Ethan Strimling, Portland Public Schools Superintendent Manny Caulk and South Portland School Department Superintendent Suzanne Godin at the Reiche School in Portland.

LearningWorks will receive around \$2.5 million over the five-year award period to provide hands-on, engaging and relevant extended day and summer programming at six schools in Portland and South Portland through the establishment and continuation of 21st Century Community Learning Centers.

Community learning centers provide academic support and enrichment opportunities outside of school hours that improve the in-school performance of at-risk students – including those who struggle academically or are from low-income or immigrant families.

They are run by school districts, nonprofit organizations or universities and primarily located on elementary or secondary school campuses where more than 40 percent of students qualify for free or reduced priced lunch.

The awards will help to establish or maintain 32 community learning centers, bringing the total number of sites that will be operating this coming school year in the state to 59, according to Rier.

The 15 grantees were selected by Maine DOE through a competitive process and will share in \$3 million this year.

New grantees will receive recurring amounts for the second and third year of the awards period, then 75 percent of the original award amount in the fourth year and 65 percent in the fifth year while renewing grants will be funded equally for three years.

The programs are expected to eventually become self-sustaining and continue with local funding.

With the state support, LearningWorks will annually provide 220 Portland and 105 from South Portland elementary school students more than 10 additional hours of learning each week during the school year, plus five weeks of summer programming.

The funding awarded by the State to support 21st Century Learning Centers is allocated to the Maine DOE by the U.S. Department of Education.

For more information, visit www.maine.gov/doe/21st-century/.

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MEMBER PROFILE

Kati Hunt gets her job done without using her five languages



Kati Hunt and Superintendent Steven Bailey look over one of eight budgets they must prepare for AOS #93.

Raised around the world MeASBO's new 2nd VP calls Maine her home

By Mark Leslie

As business manager of AOS #93, Katherine “Kati” Hunt may not need to draw upon her grasp of French, Indonesian or Arabic.

Indeed, the Central Lincoln County School System, which encompasses Damariscotta, Newcastle, Bremen, Jefferson, Nobleboro, Bristol and South Bristol, is far removed from Jakarta, where Hunt earned her high school degree. And it is on the other side of the earth from where she was born (Singapore) and where she grew up (Indonesia, Africa, Haiti, Yemen) — “places most people don’t even visit,” she says.

But it’s where she now calls “home.” And although AOS

#93 presents difficult economic challenges because it lies in the oldest county in the oldest state, population-wise, it is where she has made her roots, found her niche and proven her mettle.

“Kati has unbelievable dedication to the job,” said superintendent Steven Bailey, who has worked with Hunt the past three years. “She’s here early, stays late, is very committed to the towns, and communicates strongly with the town officials.”

Because of the structure of an AOS, many budgets are involved and “she brings an incredible mindset to the job, with the ability to keep things straight and organized and, by necessity, pay attention to detail,” Bailey said.

Among her school business-official colleagues, Hunt’s background is unique. In what group would it *not* be?

Her father, Dr. William Leroy Emmet, is a public health physician whose work with the World Health Organization and as a contractor for the US Agency for International Development, took his Finnish wife Tuulikki (Tuuti), daughters, Kati and Mari, and son, William, to a different

Living overseas and dealing with different cultures and my work with the elderly and their families has helped a lot. It's making people comfortable with decisions that can be painful at times.'
— Kati Hunt



country every two years.

So, except for 2-1/2 years at an English boarding school and annual summer vacations with her parents on Cape Cod, odd corners of the world were Kati Emmet's backyard until she graduated in 1989 from Jakarta International School whose student body was 45 percent American, 30 percent European and 25 percent Indonesian.

And that is when she planted her feet in America for good. Four years later, she graduated with a bachelor's degree in English from Manhattanville College in Purchase, N.Y.

She was "temping" at a mortgage lending company in New York City when her parents bought a summer home in Bremen near Bristol — an area whose lakes and ocean her mother compared to her native Finland and Kati found to be beautiful.

A twist-and-a-turn later, she was processing mortgages at The First (formerly First National Bank) of Damariscotta in 1994. Quickly she was promoted to note teller in charge of commercial and consumer loans.

After marrying Dale Hunt in 1997 and having their first child, Lauren, in 1998, Kati began another job whose depths would prepare her for her future in school business: estate planning, real-estate and some elder law with attorney Robert Gregory in Damariscotta.

When son Augustus (Gus) was born in December 2000, Hunt became a homemaker, did the bookkeeping for Dale's house-painting business and performed part-time work for the now-defunct Roundtop Center for the Arts in Damariscotta until both children were in school.

Two school tuitions and a struggling economy nudged Hunt back into the workforce, this time with Griffin Law Offices in Boothbay Harbor, where she focused primarily on elder law and helping "lower-income families trying to get nursing-home care."

In December 2010 Hunt took the administrative assistant to the superintendent position at the one-year-old AOS #93, where MeASBO First Vice President Adam Hanson had recently resigned as business manager for a post at the Auburn School Department.

Hunt was called upon to help Hanson's replacement develop budgets, a grueling process that encompasses separate budgets for each of the unit's eight towns, plus one for the central office.

Soon the new business manager was gone and Hunt was promoted to the position in May 2011.

Was she overcome? Obviously not — yet she had help.

"I had Adam on speed-dial for awhile," Hunt laughs, "and the superintendent, Robert Bouchard, who retired in June 2011, was a big help.

Since then, Bailey has worked closely with Hunt and she defers credit to a "terrific" nine-person staff that includes two

in adult education, a curriculum coordinator and a human resources director.

"I'm fortunate that the group in the central office are great people to work with and I was familiar with them all," Hunt says.

Asked if her work has been helped by her past living experiences — among cultures as diverse as Asian and European, a degree in English and jobs ranging from mortgage processing to liaison for the elderly — Hunt answers a quick affirmative.

"Writing helps me be able to put work together. My legal background helps with legal research when necessary. I helped with the accounting part of my husband's business. So it's a little of everything," she says.

"Living overseas and dealing with different cultures and my work with the elderly and their families has helped a lot. It's making people comfortable with decisions that can be painful at times."

Talk of painful. Eight school board meetings, eight town meetings, separate K-8 and 9-12 budgets for three towns and K-12 budgets for four towns. One might joke that after awhile the work starts to pile up.

Why would the towns choose an AOS-type of school unit when confronted with the consolidation mandate?

"The school board liked the idea," Hunt says. "because it meant local control. Jefferson was the last town to join the AOS in 2009."

Tough Times

The last two years have been particularly difficult for AOS #93 towns whose distant location from any metropolitan center make everything more expensive.

Besides, that, Hunt says the region is at a disadvantage because of the tax base.

"We have beautiful oceanfront properties, but that doesn't reflect the actual people here," she says.

Continued on page 29



Maine Commissioner of Education Jim Rier chats with Immediate Past President Sue Lambert of the Maine Association of School Business Officials

Commissioner Rier: challenges abound

Maine Commissioner of Education Jim Rier sat down with MeASBO's then-President Sue Lambert and *MeASBO Magazine* publisher Mark Leslie in Rier's Augusta offices. The first part of that interview ran in the summer edition.

Following is the remainder of the interview, in which the commissioner spells out his thoughts on the present and future of Maine education and its finances.

MeASBO: Speaking of data, I'd like to ask about benchmarking software programs. Kathy Warren [business manager for Vinalhaven schools] and I attended the International ASBO meeting in Boston last October and one presentation discussed using benchmarking to compare school districts, peers and methods to pinpoint best practices for results and not just things like operations and transportation. They brought in more detail and student test results as well so that people could say, 'These people have similar programs to us but they're school is here. Let's look at their data to see if we can find anything helpful.'

Has that been discussed at the state level?

Rier: We have the data ready. The problem with it is trying

to assume that it's something you could compare district to district. If you ask JoAnn this question she's going to say that we only require a minimum number of account reports to us to go into MEDMS. So as we say create those 11 cost centers, some people give us a lot of information, some don't give us so much because we don't force them to go through all those multiple sublevel accounts.

I'm not saying we couldn't do it. But the first thing that would happen is that there would be a lot of districts that would have to give us a lot more fine breakdown of what they're doing in order to begin to make that happen.

We run into that all the time. There are times when we're trying to go in a break something down that we'd like to understand better. And ultimately we can't depend on how it's being reported to give us the information we want.

MeASBO: Back in 2008 we thought, oh, we've got thousands of lines. I'm sure that would be many people's first thoughts, 'Oh, we'll add more accounts.' Some of us are

Part 2

actually detailing our budgets more than gets reported to you. Some of us need some breakdown on a local level, and it gets sent to you in less detail.

Rier: But some we get more from than others. Some give us just a minimum — enough for us to be able to report those cost categories. We certainly are in favor of trying to have a more fine ability to look at those things. Some of them arguably — like health insurance or benefits — we always get people asking us to break it down, but we don't do that. So there is opportunity to look at that somehow, but it would be something we'd want to collectively agree to. Right now we can create reports of things because we have a level of detail. But the only way to make it more detailed is to have more data being reported then there is now.

MeASBO: I think Maine ASBO would be willing to participate in that. One of the issues, though, is the data you're looking at in the data warehouse. Is it available to us?

Rier: No. The reason we don't do that is that it can be very misleading, depending on how it's been reported to us. JoAnn [Allen] has the ability to go into it. I ask her once in awhile to find different categories for different units, and she is able to get that.

But it's one of the dangers in the warehouse of not having data that hasn't been scrutinized in the same way other than the totals. I think we are reasonably confident that when we get a regular instruction line that we're getting the same kind of expenditures for the units, but there would have to be a lot of work done on how fine-tuned those accounts would be before we start making those reports available that are in the warehouse.

We still have a number of issues. One that I keep getting pushed on all the time is that if you go in and look at the cost per pupil in those lines, if you have a lot of tuition kids, it's counting resident students when you get those per-pupil costs. So units that have higher numbers of tuition students in, they have the costs but it's making it look like the per-pupil resident pupil is high.

MeASBO: What the school districts would like the ability to compare district-to-district or peer-to-peer. Say I want to compare all the districts in Maine to those who have 2,000 students. Or if I want to compare everybody in my county in various ways to look at those numbers and compare, like Maine School Management does with salaries. Even though the data may not be 100 percent perfect, it might help us say, 'I want to go talk to this district about this because I can see they are spending a lot less for this, or look at their scores.'

So it's not that it's going to be data that someone can use to make commitments.

It can be used effectively in some ways but not in other ways.

Rier: Yes, because now I can do some of what you're talking about by going in and picking units I want to compare myself to. It's important to know that when the report cards come out (week of May 12) additional information will be on those report cards, not just the grade. Some of the students in those units will qualify for free-and-reduced lunch, the number of teachers with advanced teaching degrees, a number of things that haven't been determined as to why those schools have been successful or not. And there will be per-pupil costs for regular instruction in there.

We can argue that none of this is perfect because of the way it was created. Some are already complaining that they have a fair number of tuition students and their costs are going to look high. But I would argue there is a fair amount of information in there to help you do what you're trying to do.

Where you will get into trouble is where you want to start breaking down any of those 11 costs categories in ways that are going to meaningful to say, 'These schools have pretty good performance. I wonder what's going on.'

As controversial as this grading system is, I'm going to be visiting schools that showed improvement in grades and also are counter to the notion that all units with a lot of free-and-reduced kids are going to perform badly. We will focus on some good examples that have high performance but also a significant number of kids who qualify for free-and-reduced lunch. So what I hope that does — right after everybody condemns the grading system — is that if you have a D or F school you will see another school that has a B and looks just like me.

MeASBO: So you're zeroing in. The data doesn't tell you everything, but it tells you areas to look at.

Rier: Yes. Some will react by condemning the data, probably, but I

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hope they are encouraged to look at and understand what's going on in this other district that looks like mine, has some of the same characteristics, but they're being more successful. I'm not an educator, but I suspect those things have to do with things that are hard to measure. Is there very good community/parent interrelationship with the school? Because that's a big factor as far as I'm concerned.

Despite what you're spending on things, do you have a good working relationship? I'm not pretending I know the reasoning behind that. Part of the reason for my trips to these schools is to help me understand 'What do you think is happening since a year ago?' And 'What are you doing that may have influenced your improving the way you have?'

It will be interesting to see what happens there. All this data we're using for these report cards is not new. It's just that when you put an A-to-F grade on it, it gets attention.

MeASBO: I think that the difference is the model that we were looking at in Boston **did** have more data points and **did** break it down more than those 11 cost centers and looked at things like library services, technology services, those sub-groups.

Rier: That's something that I'm sure we would be interested in working with MeASBO. There are obviously some in-between places where you can go with that. And looking at it carefully might decide whether we publish the whole cost center of the 11, but are there, reasonably, break points on some of those things that would be helpful to the schools.

MeASBO: But most people would have. For instance, I assume most people are breaking out staff support by guidance and technology and improvement of instruction. There are a huge number of things in that student/staff report as far as subcategories are concerned.

Rier: How we would structure that in the data warehouse

I'm not sure. But those are all things that are obviously doable. Because I'll ask JoAnn about minor capital improvements and she'll break it down and tell me what people are doing with those funds. It seems to me that rather than going to the point where you've got a thousand lines in each cost category that you might have more general categories that may be more helpful — not only for you making a comparison but for the public to understand. You can do that locally anyway. But to make the comparison, I think that is good information to have and it's reasonable to try to seek ways of doing it.

But I always get nervous. It's one thing to try to do that within the state. But when comparing to other states...

MeASBO: The Department of Ed compares itself to other states in regards to certain things. Montana is one of those.

Rier: I have all kinds of problems when we start comparing ourselves to other states in categories. We may learn from other states how they're doing it. But there is absolutely nobody that does things in the same ways we do. So when you start making comparisons, the best thing for me is the per-pupil costs. Reports will show Maine's per-pupil cost at \$15,000 to \$16,000. My question is, where are you getting that from?

That's nowhere near what we're spending. Come to find out, that report was created in a way that tried to equalize salaries across the country. It took our teachers, paid the way they were, and then compared to the other states they were only getting 85 percent of the rest gets, so they bumped them to 100.

MeASBO: Speaking of working with Maine ASBO, a commission was created by the Education Committee to look at the EPS in a few areas.

Rier: (Passes us the resolution establishing "The Commis-

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sion To Strengthen the Adequacy and Equity of Certain Cost Components of the School Funding Formula”).

This was a result of the Picus Report that was generated over the last couple of years and came back to the Education Committee a year or so ago and they worked through it. They spent \$450,000 on getting that report and it was purposely meant to be very independent from people like me and Dave Silvernail. We did get involved at some point later on, but a lot of the drive to have it done by an indepen-

dent source was that I not have the influence I might have had on the funding side of it or that David might have had on the EPS side of it.

So we were very much on the sidelines. We provided them a lot of data. We struggled with a lot of it because of the way they interpreted the data and the EPS formula. They had all those categories of things they came back with and reported last December in the final report. There were many new approaches about how they would go about defining the costs of education like EPS was doing. EPS’s job is to define the

costs of the things we associate with education. If you applied their model to Maine, it cost \$325 million more. Major chunks of that were to do with providing and supporting summer programs and providing and supporting after-school programs, which we don’t even recognize.

MeASBO: The model also had a little higher student/teacher ratio, but also had classroom assistants in regular ed, much more than most of our districts have. Most of us have ed-techs working in special-ed but not so many in regular ed. They had a lot more helpers in the classroom with the teachers.

Rier: Yes. So in deciding not only to approach it the way they (Picus) had, or to completely restructure how you support what goes on in the classroom... It was supposedly evidence-based. We wouldn’t necessarily agree with that, but without getting too focused on the critique of what they did, I wanted to influence the committee to do was focus on three or four areas that I would argue need to be looked at because they haven’t been adjusted since the formula was founded to begin with.

When Picus started to report back, one of the most important things we did early on was make quite a strong case that Maine’s funding approach with EPS and funding law they said was pretty equitable. They looked across the country and would have agreed with us that it was an equitable approach. But they wanted to make the case that some parts of it needed to be looked at. I agree with that.

Not surprisingly, what I tried to do with them (the committee this last summer and fall was at least willing to listen to some of the things I had to say. They weren’t willing to listen to anything prior to that because they were so turned off by the whole thing.)

As we began to work together last summer and fall, I would have been suggesting areas that we probably should have been looking at.

MeASBO: I noticed (on the commission report) that you’ve included

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public pre-school programs, economically disadvantaged and Title I funds, professional development regional cost adjustment for teacher salaries...

Rier: Yes and two or three others got put in at the last minute, which are not huge research items as far as I'm concerned. Special-ed allocation for minimum receivers is one. They wanted us to come up with a formula which I am not fond of doing because it would be adjusting the 30-35 percent to 40 percent that we provide to minimum receivers. They would like us to arrive at a way of not having one person decide what's equitable about that percentage being 35 or 38 or whatever. The minute you bump that up, it all comes away from somebody else, so you have to have some kind of balance.

I'm nervous about designing a formula that just applies every year depending on these three factors.

MeASBO: I wonder what other states do for that.

Rier: No one does what we do. Then [regarding debt service for locally approved school construction projects in the required local share of school funding] we've been through all that before. We did a report three or four years ago about this very subject. I did this report about four years ago for the Education Committee and they didn't even have the time to look at it. So I still have the report.

I'm going to bring this report back to them because it really disrupts things if you're going to decide that local debt is in fact a part of EPS. Because some places — Scarborough, for instance, has \$25 million in local debt — so if you're going to add that to their allocation somehow, it really distorts all kinds of things. So I would argue strongly that local debt is a local decision and it should stay that way.

The one that drove this is Lewiston, and some others don't commit to the required share. Each year you have the 8.-something mills and you have to commit that against the state share. They are one of 20 districts who don't do that and we have allowed them to get away with it.

That's been changed now so that over three years they won't be able to commit less than their required share. They want to be able to count the money they're spending on local debt towards their contribution. It's not consistent with what's going on.

It has very unintended consequences. They'd like to say, 'We spend a million on bucks on that project, so we'll use that as part of our local contribution.' Well, I don't think so.

The essence of the commission report is those seven areas they've asked us to look at. We have to report back. One of the ones I would have been — and many of your colleagues would have been not happy with the way we were calculating and taking into accounts Title I funds. So this will have us look at that. Ultimately we'll end up with pupil/teacher ratios that are different and don't reflect that. That has needed to happen. I think it's good that this has come about.

MeASBO: What is the timeframe for this?

Rier: I'll get to that because that's a problem. This is significant amounts of work for us and David Silvernail and the

people who do the research. Our original commitment to that was to be able to come back next session with most of these things. Some of the things, like minimum special-ed, I'll be able to report back soon.

As they went along in the very final moments of finishing this bill up with some amendments to it, two things were problematic for me. It put in place this commission (originally with 18 members) to do the work in a very short period of time. I would much rather have worked with David and come back with the requirements that are in here.

Now there will be 14 members and MeASBO will have a member on it. The challenge is to do the work and have the commission engaged to the level it needs to be in a very short period of time. This calls for them to meet probably by July just to get an idea what they're doing. The biggest problem is, we won't have anything to report by November first which is the date required. We'll do the best we can to get to that point. The chairman of the Ed Committee told me to report back just what we've got done.

The problem with putting commissions in place is that five of these members are legislators. They have to be appointed, and elections occur so you'll see a December 9th date in the legislation and some of the members might not have been re-elected. That December 9th date is there because that is the last day that this particular committee is in place.

We'll have a very hard time, but we'll do the best we can. David will get some of his work done. Some of this we think we can get done before the November date.

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Stacie Field sets her agenda with high aspirations for MeASBO

Stacie Field has taken office as president of the Maine Association of School Business Officials and, with a full plate of issues, is unafraid to share her opinions and goals for a stronger and ever-improving association. She took time from her busy duties as business manager at RSU #73 in Livermore Falls to chat with Publisher/Editor Mark Leslie. It follows:

MeASBO: Are any changes forthcoming from the MeASBO Executive Board's meeting this summer?

Field: We have decided to hold all the meetings in Augusta this year as it is more centrally located and many of the topics we will be presenting will have a Department of Education component.

MeASBO: What are the top goals you wish to accomplish as MeASBO president?

Field: I have done some research this summer on how other states pass school budgets. In some states, if the tax impact is the same, or a reduction from the year before, no vote is required. Other states have a maximum mill rate that can be raised without a vote. And in Maine, cities and towns can move forward with articles that do pass, and only have to bring back to the taxpayer articles that do not pass.

The referendum process has to be looked at and schools need to be treated the same as cities and towns. Several years ago my district took three votes to pass the school budget. We could not hire our usual summer help to get laptops ready, nor could we order supplies to have school ready to open. It is a very unrealistic process that the state Legislature needs to address and I am hoping to have some meaningful discussions about what can be done.

MeASBO: Would a bill to this effect find help from your colleagues at the Department of Education, or any particular members of the Legislature's Education Committee?

Field: I am just beginning my work in this area. It will most definitely involve conversations with DOE finance, and even superintendents, before it could move to the Legislature. But yes, eventually my hope is that it would make it that far in some form or another.

MeASBO: What particular strengths do you bring to the MeASBO presidency?

Field: This is a very tough question because I am a member of an organization where any one of us could step up and be president. We are all very qualified and I don't think I have anything anyone else in the organization doesn't. I am honored they are allowing me to be their president and I hope to do well for them. A fantastic Executive Committee to help keep me straight and on track.

MeASBO: Will you be able to represent school business officials' opinions in legislative hearings?

Field: I am both willing and able to attend legislative hearings. However, we have two very capable, long-standing business managers — Jude Cyr and Kathy Warren — on our Legislative Committee.

MeASBO: Has there been an increase in MeASBO members' participation in the certification process?

Field: We held a Q&A after our Sept. 26 meeting to see what members who are pursuing certification may need in order to complete the process.

MeASBO: Has the tumult surrounding the Affordable Care Act subsided at all? Will it work or should it be scrubbed?

Field: All I can say about Obamacare is that it is unethical. I don't understand how you can charge someone a

penalty for not being able to afford insurance. We would all like insurance. I know a single mom who works two part-time jobs. She makes just enough that she does not qualify for assistance, and she is proud of that. However, she cannot afford insurance and now will be assessed a penalty she can't afford. Where are the representatives who are supposed to be fighting for the people, and who keeps her penalty money?

MeASBO: What are the toughest challenges facing school business officials today?

Field: School funding, of course. Now add in charter schools which will be taking funds away from public schools; getting budgets passed; and staff reductions where we are being asked to do more with less.

MeASBO: It sounds like you're not a fan of charter schools.

Field: Things just seem to be moving too quickly. It was my understanding, in order for a charter school to be approved in an area, they had to offer something different and unique.

“ The referendum process has to be looked at and schools need to be treated the same as cities and towns... It is a very unrealistic process that the state Legislature needs to address and I am hoping to have some meaningful discussions about what can be done.”
— Stacie Field, MeASBO president

William Shuttleworth was the only member of the committee to vote against the charter school in Gray, as he stated MSAD #15 was already providing what the charter school was proposing, and MSAD #15 was doing an excellent job. If there are regulations in place, why aren't they being followed?

MeASBO: How have charter schools affected public schools?

Field: Other than the drain on our funds, I think it is too early in the game to assess what impact charter schools have had. There was an article in the paper recently where Lewiston's superintendent is proposing his own virtual school to compete with the charter schools. It will be very interesting to see where this goes in the next few years. RSU 73 was notified this week of our first charter school student; an invoice is forthcoming.

MeASBO: How can MeASBO help address those challenges?

Field: We can be part of the discussion by being members of committees that work on these issues. We have experience and ideas and are always trying to gain knowledge for ourselves and our members.

MeASBO: Will MeASBO meetings tackle these issues and how?

Field: Jude Cyr is currently serving on a committee looking at the school funding formula. My self-appointed project is the referendum process I have already touched on.

I would welcome any input from members of MeASBO. At the same time, I realize this will be more than a one-year commitment, but it is something I have been thinking about for several years now.

MeASBO: Has the association improved its standing in statewide education discussions?

Yes, I feel we have. I was recently contacted to appoint a member of our organization to the Commission to Strengthen the Adequacy and Equity of Certain Cost Components of the School Funding Formula. Sue Lambert, our immediate past president, had already appointed Jude Cyr, but somehow the information did not make it to the right person. It was nice to

see that someone noticed we were not represented and they set out to correct that.

MeASBO: What has been the single most helpful change in school business in the past few years?

Certainly all the electronic reporting has helped streamline the data we are required to submit.

I personally miss the EF-M-45. I love numbers and putting them all in the little boxes was fun to me. Joanne Allen can corroborate how sad I was to see the EF-M-45 go away.

However, with the special education excess cost calculation and maintenance of effort worksheets, it looks like I'll get my little boxes back.

MeASBO: Has your district, or others taken advantage of the release of Anthem BC&BS data to lower the cost of their insurance coverage?

Field: My district has not been able to as our collective bargaining agreements specifically state Anthem. As contracts are expiring, that issue is being addressed.

MeASBO: How has your district dealt with the federal food regulations?

Field: We had the Fruit and Veggie grant last year so our students are used to having more fruits and vegetables offered to them. This year they are getting used to more whole grains. My food service director does not report any more waste in general.

MeASBO: What do you perceive as your greatest accomplishment in your job?

Field: I feel a great accomplishment in my job has been being a member of the team that implemented a smooth transition into RSU 73.

Kallie Oakes printed an article just before we consolidated and said it would be a shame for the Jay School Department and MSAD 36 to form one system, as our two systems had become one of the best sports rivalries in the state. I am not sure independently either system would have had much of a sports program left had we not consolidated.

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DON'T let them eat cake

Maine schools drop embattled lunch program

By Mark Leslie

It's a classic example of one level of government setting a priority and demanding that another level of government pay for it, according to Marge Kilkelly, senior policy advisor to Sen. Angus King. And now, some exasperated Maine schools are joining a more than 600 others nationwide that are rebelling against the federal Healthier Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 which demands exhaustive and seemingly inflexible regulations.

This all in the midst of a School Nutrition Association report that 25 percent of school lunch programs have lost money for more than six months because of the federally inspired food options; a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) survey that found student lunch participation has dropped in 49 states; USDA estimates that the meal standards will force schools to absorb \$1.22 billion in additional food, labor and administrative costs in 2015 alone, up from \$362 million this year; and a Government Accountability Institute finding that students are throwing away more than \$1 billion worth of unwanted food a year.

Since the federal act was rolled out last year, it has been found to contain so many snags that, as Kilkelly noted, "not one silver bullet, but silver buckshot," is needed to fix it.

Indeed, in some places rebellion is in the air. School officials report students with "open-campus"



Food Service Director Alisa Roman's Lewiston High School cafeteria offers "healthy," which always means apples.

privileges leaving the school property to buy fast foods elsewhere; athletic coaches "dealing" snacks out of their desk drawers; students hauling junk food to school and selling it out of their cars; children going out of their way to make sure the lunch personnel see them toss an uneaten apple or orange into the trash...

Anecdotally, at least, it sounds like the Boston Tea Party circa 2014.

Good Idea, But...

Maine school officials feel that the fight against obesity is an excellent idea. However, many have misgivings about how the battle has been carried out.

Maine School Nutrition Association President Betty Hayes of RSU #16 in

Poland, new president of the Maine School Nutrition Association (MSNA), lamented that nutritionists — those literally on the front lines — weren't even invited to the table when the law was being crafted. In fact, she added that an anti-hunger group that was involved "actually advocated for the price-equity changes, which is a big issue for us because those changes force us to keep raising the prices, which lowers participation."

In a Feb. 26 letter to the USDA, MSNA Secretary-elect Stephanie Salley, food service director at RSU #34 in Old Town, wrote: "Our changing of the meal requirements so drastically each year has resulted in unintended consequences. Instead of getting children to eat healthy food and



It has gone past “healthier” to “What’s the strictest thing we can do?”
 — Will Hamilton, RSU #1 & food service director

make good choices, we have upset them to the point where they are doing just the opposite and we need to deal with this before we can expect to be effective in reaching our goals.”

Salley related one visit to the largest of her six schools on a day when “we dumped over 90 of the 136 pounds of fruits and vegetables that we served. We threw away almost twice as much as the students actually consumed, and by all accounts that was a typical day. A very conservative estimate shows that we will throw away over \$21,000 worth of fruits and vegetables this year.

“When you factor in other food that does not get consumed, along with labor costs and tipping fees for waste disposal, then we have, by any definition, a terrible waste of local, state and federal funds.”

Indeed, Maine school business officials who deal with these funds are generally not pleased and some of the wealthier communities that can afford to live without federal reimbursements are dropping out of the program at their high schools, and would do so at their k-8 schools if not for laws prohibiting it.

“Our program had always made money or broken even until all the new regulations were put in place,” said Scott Poulin, director of finance, human resources and operations at SAD #51 in Cumberland, which has pulled its high school out of the federal lunch program and therefore forfeited its reimbursement. “We’ve watched participation go steadily downhill by about 20 percent.”

“We have great fruits and veggies,” said Martha Poliquin, director of food serves at Falmouth School Department, “but we

Continued on page 18

From N.Y. & Georgia to Illinois & Colorado, schools are up in arms over regulations

ATLANTA, GA. Aug. 22 – Georgia Board of Education members chastised federal bureaucrats Thursday as they voted to exempt public schools from new snack regulations the majority believe are overbearing.

“I’m offended by the belief that only people in Washington, D.C. care for children,” board member Larry Winter said.

WASHINGTON, D.C., Oct. 3 – The School Nutrition Association (SNA) is claiming the new school lunch and snack regulations are causing administrative costs to explode and wants Congress to take action.

“The cost of meeting new federal nutrition standards for school meals will triple in Fiscal Year 2015,” according to the SNA.

MUSKEGO, Wis., July 3 — “We believe that proper food nutrition and meal portion guidelines are best decided at a local level,” said Rick Petfalski, School Board president for the Muskego-Norway School District, which withdrew from the federal School Lunch Program.

The district’s food service was projected to be headed toward a \$54,000 deficit. By opting out — and presumably selling more food — he expects about a \$7,100 surplus.

“By leaving the program we will not be required to follow these onerous guidelines, pushed by and large by Michelle Obama, who last I checked has been elected by no one,” Petfalski said.

PLYMOUTH, Minn., Sept. 12 — Even with a 25-cent price increase, officials at Wayzata High School, Minnesota’s largest, report that school lunch sales have increased significantly with a new menu after they dropped out of the National School Lunch Program.

Sue Johnson, the school’s cafeteria coordinator, said, “We’re trying to make sure they get enough food, because if they are athletes, they are here at six in the morning until six at night, so they’re hungry.”

QUARRYVILLE, Pa., Sept. 10 — At Solanco High

Continued on page 24

COVER STORY

From page 17

see our kids go to the Irving's store, get two hotdogs, giant chips and a soda for \$3 and say, 'How can you beat that?'"

When she saw the new "Smart Snack" rules take effect July 1, Poliquin decided to pull the high school out of the federal program for the current school year, saying, "The value we would have to eliminate was about \$40,000 compared to the \$10,000 we would keep by staying in the program... We'll absorb the lost \$10,000."

(Meanwhile, the USDA has decided to delay implementation of the Smart Snack rules, perhaps changing some of them, and expects to release them in late-winter or early-spring.)

In Scarborough, where the lunch program has historically run at a deficit, Business Manager Kate Bolton said, "Those deficits are continuing to grow and it's because of the cost of the food, the restrictive nature of what we can serve and the lost revenue. A number of schools in the area, including ours, are considering dropping out to the program.

"The one-size-fits-all approach

‘The one-size fits all approach doesn't help. It's frustrating because we've been recognized for our healthy food, our school nutrition program is excellent and we've won awards. And here we're told that's not sufficient.'



— Kate Bolton, business manager, Scarborough School Dept.

doesn't help," Bolton added. "It's frustrating because we've been recognized for our healthy food, our school nutrition program is excellent and we've won awards. And here we're told that's not sufficient."

Bolton said the biggest problem is that "the new rules cost 42 cents per meal and the USDA gave us 6 cents."

"People have to understand that all these regulations affect something," said

SAD #51's Poulin. "You're going to either have fewer supplies, laptops, curriculum materials, et cetera, or an increase to the community's taxes to support the lunch program."

A United Front

Maine's school food directors stand with their business colleagues.

"We've experienced decreased participation that is very alarming," said Louise Bray, food services director at RSU #39 in Caribou. "We were in the hole \$60,000 and that hasn't happened since I took over 25 years ago. That's got to come from the general fund into my program.

"The average cost per meal in Maine is \$4.54. I'm paying \$3.90 per meal for labor and food and we're all getting \$2.98 from the feds and another nickel from the state," she added. "It doesn't add up."

From 2011-12 to 2013-14 lunch sales were down about \$70,000 a year at SAD #51, said Food Service Director Jon Carlson. "Half of that is from the high school," he said. "Last year it was almost \$200 a day."

A major factor, he said, is that "some of the choices the kids really liked went away. We do a Chinese buffet once a week. No more white wheat was allowed, so we would have had to go with whole-grain pizza,

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Sen. Collins to the rescue

When the USDA declared potatoes off-limits to school lunch programs, the starchy-vegetable lobby was quick to take offense.

“We didn’t find favor with efforts to paint certain vegetables as, for unspecified reasons, less healthy than other vegetables,” said Kraig R. Naasz, the head of the American Frozen Food Institute, which represents about 500 makers of frozen foods and vegetables.

The potato and frozen-food lobbies mobilized, orchestrating waves of letters from lawmakers to Tom Vilsack, the agriculture secretary, extolling the potato’s low cost and high potassium con-



Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, makes a point with panache.

tent. When Vilsack went before the Senate to discuss his budget request for the year, Sen. Susan Collins of Maine marched into the hearing holding a potato in one hand and a head of iceberg lettuce — no one’s

idea of a nutrient-dense vegetable — in the other.

“My question, Mr. Secretary,” Collins asked, “is: What does the department have against potatoes?”

which doesn’t rise as much, is denser and kids don’t like it.”

“It was a tough decision [to drop out],” Carlson said, “but once you lose customers it’s tough to get them back. I’m finding that out.”

Many school officials agree the fight against obesity is noble but it came too fast and was too stringent.

“The federal program was well-intended,” Carlson said, “but it is affecting people’s sales and how many kids are eating. Everywhere sales are down.”

“I don’t think anybody is against these regulations, but the rapid-fire way they were implemented,” said Ron Adams, director of the Portland Public Schools Food Service.

“Participation drives my budget... Any hiccups in participation have ramifications for the city and its taxpayers,” said Adams, a member of the Legislative Committee of the National School Nutrition Association, which has evolved from an adamant proponent of the act when it was first proposed to one of its fiercest opponents.

“It has gone past ‘healthier’ to

‘what’s the strictest thing we can do?’” said Will Hamilton, food service director at RSU #18 in Oakland.

“We actually brought in chefs,” said Cumberland’s Poulin about trying to get students to eat food prepared under the strict guidelines. “But I don’t care how many chefs you bring in, it won’t make a difference. It’s a fine line to serve healthy foods that the kids will eat to keep them from throwing stuff away in the trash. Hungry kids can’t learn.”

Meeting of the Minds

At an invitation-only roundtable meeting on Sept. 16 at Sen. King’s office in Augusta set up by Kilkelly and attended by USDA Under Secretary Janey Thornton, National School Boards Association Federal Programs Director Lucy Gettman, Maine Department of Education’s Walter Beesly, and several school food service directors among others, nutritionists took exception to the USDA’s “overreach.”

“Our kids throw away so much food that my custodian has the best-fed livestock in the area,” said one.

“Experts tell us that ‘for change to be successful, make one change at a time,’” said Bray. “In one year, they changed

our calories, our serving sizes for vegetables, sub-grouped the vegetables, the amount of whole grains and proteins. This all in one year and you wonder why the kids are rebelling and participation rates are down? We lost 10,000 lunches and 4,000 breakfasts that year.

“My custodian said he needed heavier trash bags because so much food was being thrown away.”

“If you institute one change it takes students a week to get used to it,” agreed Alisa Roman, director of nutrition for Lewiston Public Schools. “When you make four changes all at once it takes that much longer.”

“There’s some disconnect at the national level,” said Hamilton, urging Thornton to “listen to what our kids are saying and to our feedback. I’m worried that the message is being sent that the system is working just fine. If we’re defining that by students eating a healthier meal, I would say that we still have room to grow and a lot of work to be done.”

Judy Campbell of the Scarborough School Department, immediate past president of the MSNA, listed for

Thornton a number of problems with the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act, including:

- “Kids, especially high school kids, don’t want us to put a fruit or vegetable on their tray. They just don’t. They get very belligerent sometimes. So you get pushback.
- “The snack regulations are very limiting.
- “The snacks are going to be smaller but cost 20 to 25 cents more.
- “If I have an entree left over, I can only use it the next day. So to avoid that regulation, we decided to put everything on the menu every day.
- “You have to figure condiments’ effects, so it’s very, very limiting.
- “In the past we could offer school-baked cookies. Now it’s vendor cookies.
- “The sodium and 350-calorie levels are too reduced.
- “In the past we made a lot from scratch. No more.
- “About beverages: at the high school we can not give students larger containers. Consequently, a lot of things teenagers like can only be 12 ounces.
- “The snack regulations mean reformulation from our vendors and

Students’ video blasts feds, goes viral

The term “student dropout rates” has taken on a new meaning as a staggering number of youth refuse to eat school lunches consisting of food made under government-mandated limits.

And now some students have taken to technology to protest, declaring the “Hunger-Free” act is actually **causing** hunger.

The latest is a musical video produced by Kansas high school students that has gone viral of the internet. It can be seen at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IB7NDUSBOo&feature=youtu.be>



“Timing is a huge factor. In Lewiston there’s not enough time to eat...,” says Food Service Director Alisa Roman, who offers 14 to 16 entrees each day at Lewiston High School.

it will take awhile for them to catch up. The chips are awful and cookies taste like cardboard.”

Lewiston’s Roman said manufacturers, indeed, are not catching up.

“We are our distributors’ lowest margin of profit,” she said. “Some products won’t be available until next July.”

Hamilton took particular exception to the limit of 12 ounces of milk.

“We know calcium, potassium, and vitamin B are important health concerns,” he said. “And we know milk has great amounts of these... Kids don’t hydrate well to begin with and this barrier doesn’t help.”

Hamilton added that limits on some ingredients, like sugar, are nonsensical because they serve a function of the cooking process and the chemical reaction they have.

Fixes?

Nutritionists everywhere would like to be in the shoes of SAD #52’s food service director, David Roberts, who calls his district “a success story.”

While acknowledging a 10- to 15-percent drop in participation, Robert said it would have been far worse if he had not begun adding whole wheat to his recipes several years ago.

“Being proactive put us ahead of the

curve,” he said. We were the first school district in Maine to pursue Healthier U.S. School Challenge certification.”

Roberts instituted a 10-day-cycle menu at the high school, with 16 to 18 entrees daily. Besides the rotating menus, he offers tacos, pizzas and fajitas every day; a Subway-style wrap station; and pre-made salads.

“I recommend more variety,” he said. “If we hadn’t done this, we would have lost more kids.”

Nutritionists also agreed that students need sufficient time for their meals.

“Timing is a huge factor,” said Lewiston’s Roman. “Timing affects everything. In Lewiston there’s not time for the kids to eat” and yet she was not included in the discussion when the school department established its timetables.

Thornton said the USDA had heard that complaint across the country, adding, “Fresh is great but it takes more time to eat a fresh product.”

Portland’s Adams stressed the importance of a la cart items which, he said, “are critical to us as a revenue source.”

His point was echoed by others at Falmouth, Cumberland and other

USDA School Meal Trends 2010 to 2014

National and Maine Trends from FRAC Reports

	Free/Reduced Lunch		Full Lunch		Free/Reduced Breakfast		Full Breakfast	
	USA	Maine	USA	Maine	USA	Maine	USA	Maine
2010	20,298,193	62,804	10,550,491	44,916	9,787,467	31,148	1,949,397	9,363
2011	20,901,926	63,940	10,052,952	42,442	10,526,336	33,653	2,005,437	9,903
2012	19,586,166	58,610	8,470,798	35,858	10,837,174	34,080	1,977,987	10,345
Change	-4%	-7%	-20%	-20%	11%	9%	1%	10%

Data from Maine DOE Public Reports

Cost per Meal	
2010	\$3.68
2011	\$3.83
2012	\$3.96
2013	\$4.34
2014	\$4.54
Change	23%

high schools that have dropped out of the federal program.

“We do great, healthy offerings,” said Falmouth’s Poliquin. “Most high school students here want to buy a la cart and we encourage a meal deal which qualifies for reimbursable.”

“I think the feds over-thought this whole thing,” said Scott Poulin, who’s Cumberland high school offers extensive a la cart items. “If they had said, ‘We want you to offer salad bars, healthy choices... Eighty percent of the kids go to our salad bar and get something great. It’s not that we don’t want the kids eating healthy. It’s the way they [USDA] went about it.’”

Bolton, in Scarborough which hasn’t yet decided whether to withdraw from the program, said, “A number of directors in the region are looking at the tradeoff among the extra costs being incurred versus the reimbursement we’re getting for school nutrition and how much revenue we may lose from a la cart sales where kids aren’t getting the types of foods they’re used to purchasing. We’re thinking it may be financially sensible to pull out the high school, which is where we earn the most on a la cart sales. The students are older and have their own particular choices. And there are more offerings there...”

“It’s critical to have healthy choices available, but we don’t want super-stringent guidelines that tell us we have to have this one day and that the next. It makes for extra cost and enormous waste.”

Under Fire

“They did too much too fast,” Bray said of the USDA. “Manufacturers couldn’t catch up. We couldn’t catch up... We have no recipes, so I’m forced to buy frozen pizza crust. I’m not a test kitchen and can’t test all the products to find a good pizza-crust recipe. That’s what the USDA should be doing.”

When she spoke at the Augusta roundtable, the USDA’s Thornton said, “The biggest challenge we have had is ... fear of change and recognizing that any time change is

made, particularly substantial change, it takes awhile for everybody to adapt, take a breath and realize it’s not going to happen overnight.”

Thornton said the administration is indeed listening, having changed protein requirements, postponing the Smart Snack rules and implementation of breakfast, and “I could go on and on.”

Specifically, she said people had issues with the 100-percent whole-grain regulations, so the USDA added an “Other” category “so that if there is something that your



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‘I don’t think anybody is against these regulations, but the rapid-fire way they were implemented.’
— Ron Adams,
director of food service,
Portland Public Schools

kids will not accept, waiting for new products to be developed and on the market which are slowly coming about, you can still serve those ‘Other’ foods but still need to have a regular consummate whole-grain roll, which many people are doing and finding very, very acceptable.”

Thornton added, “We’ve got to be the voice for the kids and not necessarily of the kids all the time. It is so important that we see that kids eat healthy.

“If they learn little else in school, to get the most out of that learning

dollar and be the most productive, these kids need to learn to eat well and they can do it in school.”

Nutritionists in the room, however, said experience shows that if a student doesn’t eat whole-wheat at home, they won’t eat it in school.

After listening to a number of complaints, Thornton said, “The points you bring out are exactly why the USDA has said and continues to say, ‘We are in a transition period. We know that no one is going to be perfect across the board... When people come in and do the reviews we are not going to start fining people. We

PAL called ‘a winning program’

William Hamilton, food services director in Oakland, hailed his district’s success using PAL, opt Plain Allowance Money, calling it “a very winning program.”

“We use a program called Net-Off Invoice [NOI],” he said, referring to the system where Processed USDA Food is ordered with the school’s regular order from its regular distributor.

NOI is available to school food administrators to buy approved end product directly from a distributor and then get billed at a net price. The net price is determined by reducing the agreed-upon (gross) price by an amount at least equal to the value of donated food contained in a case of approved end-product identified in the processing agreement.

Hamilton said, “If a case costs \$50 and the NOI is \$15, we pay \$35 for a 40-percent discount. That takes a 52-cent Tyson chicken patty down to 22 cents.”

The distributor will deliver the NOI item and the school district receives a discount on the item for the value of USDA Food in the item.

Schools can receive these items as often as they wish and get the discount as long as they have allotment.,

The NOI program allows school districts to:

- purchase weekly instead of one big monthly delivery;
- purchase product during months commodities are not available;
- ensure they use all of their PAL;
- obtain consistent product when commodity dollars run out;
- have a wider selection of products; and
- pick a distributor.

The NOI program does not penalize districts for using or not using NOI product.



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are looking to see where the challenges are to try to work with school districts to improve and find ways to solve those problems...

"You will eventually get to the point where you will sort of know what you can put together without necessarily having to run everything through that complicated process [reporting calories, protein, etc.] that you did initially. It's just going to take time to learn that."

Afterward, Adams of the Portland School Department said that statement was the first he had heard from the USDA that the country was "in the opening phase" of the program.

"They're in the right place to help fight the obesity crisis with all of these changes," Adams said. "But they didn't solve the financial impact. Kids will be turned off in the 'transition time' and that 'transition time' is what is going to cost schools money."

"Did the meeting have any effect? I don't know," said Caribou's Bray. "I'm really disappointed. I don't think she [Thornton] can do anything. She was a school nutritionist for many years, so I don't know why she doesn't get it."

Indeed, Bray said she was later stunned to receive a request from Thornton for food-cost information and that the USDA Under Secretary did not know the national average per meal food cost.

Bray responded via e-mail, in part: "I don't understand how these new meals are not fully funded by the USDA. You don't need school bids to know that whole grains and increased servings of vegetables and fruits cost more. You can go to your local grocery store and see the cost of these products for yourself."

The additional 6-cent per-meal reimbursement is not enough. This bonus amount was also supposed to be adjusted for inflation in subsequent years. I haven't heard of any inflation adjustment."

A week after the roundtable, the Maine food service directors attended the Northeast Regional School Nutrition Association Conference.

The response?

"I think we're very disappointed," said Campbell of Scarborough. "The only way to get things changed, truthfully, is to get our U.S. Senators and Congressmen to know what's going on because Congress is where the money comes from. And we're going through the whole process of re-evaluating the whole ag-school lunch area of the USDA. So the only way to get money is to get them to understand how the cost of food has increased, transportation has increased, plus we're making kids take foods they don't want and it becomes waste."

Hayes said, "I'd love to see challenges turned into opportunities for us, but with government programs there is always lots of work and lots of paperwork that makes it harder."

"I know Maine schools and our association want to work with the USDA in ways that will benefit all of us. It's difficult because ... this is so much more politics than we

DoD Fresh Fruits and Veggie Program helps nationwide

Walter Beesly of Maine Department of Education, who works closely with food service directors, touted the DoD Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, hoping more schools would jump aboard which allows schools to use USDA Foods entitlement dollars to buy fresh produce.

Through the program, operated by the DoD's Defense Logistics Agency, Beesly said, "We select apples, carrots, potatoes, ground beef, et cetera that come from the Department of Defense. We don't try to get Maine products because we want schools to buy Maine, too. It's the same product you would buy in a grocery store."

The program began as a pilot in eight states in 1994-95, delivering \$3.2 million in produce.

Today, schools in 46 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Guam participate, with more than \$100 million in purchases in 2012-13.

realized."

Hayes added, "From our perspective what we heard in those meetings is that the USDA believes [problems] are indicative of just Maine. And that's just not true. I've read that 240 school food directors in 46 states said they had financial losses and 87 percent don't see how to turn it around."

She added one final blow for most schools:

While rich communities — those below 20 percent free-and-reduced — have the option to pull out of the federal subsidies and poorer communities — those above 70 percent — are in "a good spot" because of the subsidies, those in the middle are apt to suffer the most.

"If you're under 50 percent you're not eligible for a lot of the programs," Hayes said. "You don't have the options of either the rich towns or the poor."

Hamilton of Oakland spelled out the bottom line nutritionally:

"We have the healthiest menu ever, but nothing is nutritious unless it's eaten."

The bottom line financially is that the USDA instituted strict guidelines that are costing schools more money every day and has not provided the dollars to pay for it.

The bottom line of a "fix" apparently lies with Congress.

"We will try to figure out a way to make this work," said Kilkelly, Sen. King's senior adviser. "It's not just about school nutrition but our entire communities." •••

Continued from page 17

School, M&M cookies are now whole grain rich, and bags of Frito-Lay Sun Chips have been downsized and mixed with pretzels to comply with the sodium limit. School officials were also forced to stop selling 1-percent chocolate milk and replace it with a fat-free variety half the size.

Some schools here contend the federal regulations are costing schools far more than they should, and have opted to forfeit as much as \$150,000 in federal funding to preserve autonomy over what students are served.

MANHEIM TOWNSHIP, Pa. Sept. 10, 2014 — Manheim Central and Manheim Township schools both recently decided to ditch the National School Lunch Program for high schools over concerns about declining lunch sales, and meeting the nutritional needs of a diverse student body — particularly student athletes — under “one-size-fits-all” rules.

Manheim Central Food Service Director David Ludwig wrote in an email to Lancaster Online. “Our students all have different needs. For this reason variety is needed.”

Ludwig also raised issue with the potential for lost sales, pointing out that French fries alone bring in \$16,476 per year but would be banned under the new rules.

“He said the school offers more than 10 ‘restaurant-quality salads,’ which students purchase as entrees. Since they are classified as a la crates ... some of the salads wouldn’t meet calorie restrictions designed to apply to side items.”

HERSHEY, Pa., Sept. 11 — Derry Township schools have banned cupcakes or “other snacks.” Instead of cupcakes, school leaders are suggesting students bring pencils, pens and stickers or wear “silly socks.”

FORT THOMAS, Ky., Aug. 10 — Lunch at Fort Thomas Independent Schools may include more French fries, fewer vegetables and larger portions this year. One thing that won’t be on the menu: federal dollars.

The Campbell County, Ky., district is opting out of the federal school lunch program, forfeiting hundreds of thousands of dollars in federal funding.

“The calorie limitations and types of foods that have to be provided ... have resulted in the kids just saying, ‘I’m not going to eat that,’” said Fort Thomas Superintendent Gene Kirchner.

BALDWINVILLE, N.Y., Sept. 3 — As a result of last year’s school lunch menu, high school lunch sales in Baldwinsville plummeted from about 600 to 430 students per day. “We all want a lower carb diet. But it’s hard to sell a sub on something that looks more like a piece of paper than a sub roll,” a school official said. “I understand the shift but now the students aren’t opting to eat any of that. They’re stepping away entirely.”

DENVER, Colo., July 25 — More than two years into the nationwide implementation of new health guidelines for school meals, the Douglas County School District’s board approved a resolution last week allowing the district’s nine high schools to opt out of the National School Lunch Program, calling the food choices “unappealing” and “dissatisfying and citing concerns that students would turn to less healthy lunch options.

With only about 6 percent of district students qualifying for free or reduced lunch — excluding students from an online school — the district expects a loss of \$167,000.

NORTH TONAWANDA, N.Y., July 10, 2014 — More schools are pointing out the emperor has no clothes, or in this case, isn’t eating the “rabbit food” being given to everyone else.

ARLINGTON HEIGHTS, Ill., May 8 — Township High School District 214, the state’s second largest high school district with 12,000 students, has dropped out of the National School Lunch Program.

A district spokesperson said the new school lunch guidelines are too restrictive; for example, not allowing kids to buy hard-boiled eggs or certain yogurts. School officials also have noted the new guidelines consider hummus to be too high in fat, and pretzels to be too high in salt; non-fat milk containers larger than 12 ounces could not be sold either.

Officials believe they can increase profits by 10 percent if they come up with a healthy menu their own way.

NEW YORK, Aug. 28 — In upstate New York, a few have quit the program, including the Schenectady-area Burnt Hills Ballston Lake system, whose five lunchrooms ended the year \$100,000 in the red.

SARTELL, Minn., Sept. 12 — There’s a sign in the lunchroom of Sartell High School: Students can choose two packets of barbecue sauce, or three ketchup packets, or two ketchups and a mustard, or just one packet of mayonnaise. The new condiment quotas are the product of new federal regulations that strictly limit calories, fat, sodium, sugar and most other nutritional elements of school snacks and lunch foods. •••

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-Lynn Brady, President



Sen. King spells out school lunch proposals

Maine's Independent Senator, Angus King, has taken seriously the complaints of the state's school nutritionists and developed four proposals dealing with the federal Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act.

Marge Kilkelly, senior policy advisor for King, spelled out these proposals:

- Create a School Nutrition Advisory Committee (SNAC) to advise the USDA.
- Delay implementation of the competitive A La Carte options for schools until 2016.
- In School Year 2014-15 allow a "No, thank you — Taste" option to allow children to taste healthy foods without taking the full amount.
- Evaluate the impact of volume purchasing for rural school nutrition programs to consider a "Geographic Isolation Bonus."

SNAC

The proposal suggests the SNAC because "School nutrition program directors need to have more of an opportunity to communication with the USDA as policies are being developed as they are responsible for final implementation."

The SNAC also would include members from relevant industries in what King says is "a natural step in the forward progression and improvement of the USDA's policies and to develop a clear line of communication between directors and regulators.

Such a committee, the paper says, "will create a better understanding of schools' economic and nutritional capacity and will facilitate for the smooth implementation" of the act as well as reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act in 2015.

A La Carte

School nutrition programs often operate a la carte lines that sell a variety of foods at retail value to sustain their food programs. Under the 2013 USDA restriction a law

carte foods have to comply with the set limits on fats, calories, sugars and sodium. The fatty foods have already been replaced with healthier alternatives like baked chips, salads and low-fat hamburgers, but tighter restrictions that went into effect July 1 further reduce revenue for schools "at a time when their costs are increasing," King wrote. "Delaying this requirement will provide some regulatory and financial breathing room for struggling schools."

King proposes implementing the standards in 2016 to allow schools a chance to "move towards compliance requirements while maintaining a revenue stream."

No, Thank You

Although the law requires inclusion of fruits and vegetables to "educate" children's palates, a Harvard study in Massachusetts found that schools are reporting a high rate of waste.

Furthermore, the proposal says, "children are less likely to come back for school lunches if they have had an upsetting experience getting lunch."

King supports the notion — related by the Columbia University Center for Anxi-

ety and Related Disorders — that children should be exposed to new foods in small amounts at a time. Thus, he wants to "gradually increase and develop young children's palates and the next time they see that food item, if they enjoyed it, they will take the full amount."

Geographic Isolation Bonus

The six-cent reimbursement for each meal served "does not come close to covering the current additional expenses and will fall even further behind as new requirements are put in place in SY 2014-15," King's proposal says. "Small rural schools are particularly hard hit by the scale and lack of ability to negotiate prices... Their higher costs to implement the same regulations as a larger urban school should be reflected in the funding formula."

King recommends these increased costs should be evaluated and the USDA report the data, along with recommendations, to the appropriate congressional committees. •••



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Team Cleaning: A systematic approach

By Leo Bifulco

While many contract service providers have been incorporating some method of Team Cleaning for years, it is still an underused concept in the cleaning industry.

My first exposure to Team Cleaning was over 40 years ago when my father (who was then running the company) had just acquired a new contract with a 10-story office building in downtown Portland.

Having just recently immigrated to the United States, my father was unable to read or write English and any articles or reading material involving cleaning methods and procedures were unavailable to him. However, common sense indicated if he kept his crew cleaning the same spaces together instead of assigning a person to each floor he could better manage his crew and spend less money on equipment.

Although it was not called Team Cleaning back then, the concept of Team Cleaning follows the same principles. Unlike Zone Cleaning, which has workers who are responsible for all cleaning tasks in one area, Team Cleaning keeps employees working in the same area, with each worker completing the same cleaning responsibility as the group moves into different spaces.

Our experience with team cleaning has provided us

with the benefits of: improved supervision and quality of work, more effective training, higher employee morale, increased energy savings, and an overall positive impact on our workforce.

Supervision and quality of work have improved due to the smaller areas supervisors need to inspect as everyone is completing their duties in the same area of the building.

Team Cleaning practices are based on training employees on predetermined specific tasks. We have found there is a direct correlation between assigning employees with fewer clearly defined responsibilities and overall performance and consistency. Training becomes more efficient through employees having less responsibilities to master.

By being responsible for the same job-specific tasks like vacuuming or emptying trash, employees become more proficient through the high frequency of their work duties. These proficiencies lead to better performance, which helps increase worker moral.

By improving training, oversight and employee morale, we have found the results are a more focused, efficient and flexible work force capable of adapting to the various events that occur in schools without impacting productivity. Energy savings are achieved through sections of

Continued on page 30

The logo for Benchmark Cleaning & Supply features a stylized lowercase 'b' in blue with a white circle inside, followed by the word 'enchmark' in a bold, green, sans-serif font. A thick blue horizontal line is positioned below the 'enchmark' text.

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VENDOR PROFILE

For O'Connor Bus Sales crew: 'It's a pleasure to represent the best'

Investing in the best isn't always more expensive.

It's not just a bus. It starts and ends the school day for many students. There's no question that it's a big investment for school districts. It's also a place of work for drivers. For parents, school boards and transportation directors, it's a complex mixture of safety concerns and scheduling logistics that simply serves to connect schools and homes on a daily basis.

Administrators have many choices when it comes to bus manufacturers.

According to Rodney Waugh of O'Connor bus sales, "The number-one most recognized school bus is Bluebird. All around the country Bluebird enjoys a stellar reputation and this current generation of Bluebird bus is the finest ever built — period.

"New popular features," he added, "include baseboard heat and a Bluebird exclusive: front air suspension. These buses provide more safety and comfort for students and for drivers."

Bluebird offers best-in-class fuel economy and is the only manufacturer to offer a full line of alternative-fuel school buses.

"It's a pleasure to represent the best," said Waugh, "and Bluebird is simply the finest bus on the road. Schools that convert to Bluebird are delighted to find that apples to apples — the best is not always more expensive."

Dave Fontaine, transportation director at Oxford Hills School District which has been con-



O'Connor Bus Sales owner Randy Hutchins, left, with Service Director Rick Hersom and Rodney Waugh.

verting its fleet to Bluebird, said, "In these changing times, Bluebird and O'Connor provide consistency. With Bluebird, there are a lot of small things that work well and Bluebird seems to be committed to being consistent.

"I'm seeing other bus manufacturers making changes that take away some of our flexibility, making more items proprietary, for instance, and limiting aftermarket availability. With Bluebird, I have more options available. And O'Connor, my Bluebird dealer, has simply been excellent to work with, right from the beginning of this changeover. Rodney Waugh has been easy to work with — very responsive."

Four years ago Bluebird recommitted itself to being the industry leader,

with a major consolidation of its bus-assembly operations at its corporate headquarters in central Georgia.

The process boosted efficiency and production capacity and business has been booming. Bluebird sales are up about 40 percent in just the last two years.

"O'Connor has been on a similar course," said Randy Hutchins, owner of Hutchins Motors d/b/a O'Connor Auto Park. "Over the last four years we've been consolidating our Augusta operations with the construction of new stores for our General Motors franchises, relocating the Volkswagen dealership from State Street to Riverside Drive, and

moving the sales division of our bus and medium/heavy duty truck division to new facilities in the O'Connor Auto Park on Riverside Drive.”

The medium and heavy duty trucks and buses division of O'Connor operates out of facilities in both Augusta and Portland, representing Medium duty truck brands Hino (a division of Toyota) and Isuzu; Class Eight heavy trucks, including Mack, Volvo, and Western Star; and buses by Bluebird and Girardin.

Rick Hersom, who has been with O'Connor for more than 40 years, oversees the O'Connor Bus and Truck Service Center.

“O'Connor got its start with trucks in 1950 — and expanding to offer buses was a natural progression,” Hersom said. “Our service centers, in Augusta and Portland, are set up to keep fleets where they belong — on the road — with a second service shift running overnight Mondays through Thursdays until 3 in the morning. We service and repair all makes and models of trucks, buses and engines and we continue to send technicians to various factory programs, including Bluebird technical school on a regular basis to remain right on top of the latest technology.”

Parts Department Manager Steve



Randy Hutchins and Rick Hersom get a briefing about the latest Bluebird innovations from Technician Steve McLaughlin following his most recent Bluebird Factory training.

Denis oversees a staff of two dozen and an inventory valued at nearly \$2 million of replacement parts for cars, trucks, buses and Fisher Plows. The massive inventory contributes to the quick response customers have come to expect from O'Connor.

The O'Connor Collision Repair Center, run by Manager Scott Nadeau and staffed by 11 certified technicians, was designed on a larger scale than average collision centers to accommodate buses and heavy-duty trucks.

Ongoing recertification ensures that the latest available knowledge goes into every repair. State-of-the-art equipment undoes frame damage, and a downdraft spray booth facilitates specialized painting, striping and logos for vehicles of any

size, using earth-friendly paints. O'Connor's second, oversized spray booth easily handles larger vehicles like school buses right up to tractor trailer trucks.

While O'Connor has grown and diversified over the decades, the heart of the business is medium- and heavy-duty trucks and buses — and the premiere brand of the bus division is Bluebird.

“We're proud to be in business with America's foremost brand of school bus — Bluebird,” Hutchins said. “More and more schools are discovering that investing in the best isn't always more expensive.” ...

Presidential Q&A

Continued from page 15

MeASBO: What do you perceive as your greatest accomplishment in your life?

Field: You really know how to ask the tough questions. I would like to think it has not happened yet. I have done some neat things, I have a pilot's license, two fantastic children, a successful career, and I will finally complete my degree in December (I have been taking classes at night since 2008). I am also a cancer survivor.

However, the “greatest accomplishment” I hope is still to come. ...

Team Cleaning approach

Continued from page 28

the buildings being shut down once they are completed. Additional savings are achieved by reduced equipment purchases.

When properly implemented Team Cleaning can have endless benefits. The largest benefits being cost savings, a proactive workforce, and easier supervision. In the 15 years we have been servicing schools we have always implemented Team Cleaning and it has been one of underlying factors to why we are able to provide cost savings for the schools we service.

Hunt, Baily tackle challenges

Continued from page 8

“So any additional tax bills mean, Do they keep or not keep their homes?. Any upgrade in curriculum, et cetera raises the question of how does it impact taxes.

“Lincoln County is the oldest county in the oldest state in the United States, so you have to be aware of that.”

Last year, at one of the town meetings, residents voted down the first budget; and fiscally conservative Jefferson cut \$240,000 from the budget at the second town meeting. One group of townspeople wanted more cuts, the others less cuts, “so they just voted it down,” Hunt says.

“That fall the kindergarten class increased by 18 kids,” she says. “We were going to hire two teachers and we didn’t. They had one teacher per grade.

“We were able to work with the principal and make some drastic personnel cuts and then, as the budget started to go in, we made sure we had a fund balance for this year. We met frequently with our auditor, William Brewer, and principals to make sure the budgets would work. And it did.

“The staff did an incredible job of cutting back on supplies. We went half-time with music, art and phys ed

for just one year. But then people realized the importance of those classes and this year we were able to go back to eight-tenths,” Hunt says.

Arming themselves for the last budget season, Hunt and Bailey acted on the precept that townspeople simply needed more information.

Borrowing an idea they had seen at a conference, they created and published a four-page brochure for voters and distributed it at town offices and town meetings.

Complete with graphs and photos, the document told the history and reasoning behind the budget as well as all the budget articles and updates and changes.

“That made a huge difference and the budget passed easily,” Hunt says, adding, “Every time we have a town meeting they thank us for those brochures.”

The positive votes and thanks told Hunt she fulfilled one of the reasons she took the job: to make a difference — a difference to taxpayers and to the students, including Lauren, now a junior at Lincoln Academy, and Gus, an eighth-grader at Great Salt Bay School.

(One oddity that AOS #93 lives with is that children in the member towns have a choice of high schools and 90 percent choose Lincoln Academy, a semiprivate school in Newcastle that runs its own budget and bills the district for tuition.)

MeASBO Has Meaning

Celebrating her favorite time of the year

— July 4 because of the nation’s independence and her own freedom from budget preparations, Hunt has taken on one more challenge. She accepted the nomination and was elected Second Vice President of MeASBO.

“It’s an important organization to

“Sharing of knowledge and experiences is really important, and especially we can bounce ideas off one another and professional development is really important.”

— Kati Hunt

belong to and after the third year at my job, I feel comfortable enough to dedicate the time to be involved. I’ve really benefitted from going to the MeASBO meetings and learning,” she says. “Sharing of knowledge and experiences is really important, and especially we can bounce ideas off one another and professional development is really important. I’ve been taking as many professional-development opportunities as I can at MeASBO’s afternoon sessions.

And the choice of jobs?

“Excellent,” Hunt says. “I’ve really enjoyed it. •••



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Rier eyes future

Continued from page 15

The big stuff, like the Title I changes and the labor market adjustment, I'm not sure we're going to be able to get that done, but we'll get it done as best we can.

MeASBO: I wondered if you were going to touch transportation or special-ed or voc centers because I've heard the voc centers might be done under a different EPS-type method.

Rier: Yes. That's ongoing. We decided to do that a year

“There are those who argue that Maine should have a state-operated virtual school, or have an environment that would allow school districts to do a lot more of this...”

— Commissioner Jim Rier

ago. Susan and I were involved before. Now I'm not as much. But the law required us to look at and begin to structure that EPA allocation in a way that is program-driven instead of just expenditure-driven because if you spend the money it becomes the allocation. And that's not the right way to do it, especially not now because you all keep spending less on it and the allocation keeps going down because you're in such tough times. Right now you spend and two years later you get

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an allocation that reflects it.

This would be getting approval for programs, and when you start the program the allocation would be provided to support it so you wouldn't be waiting.

MeASBO: Now we're in a tech center and we are paying what they bill us based on the student population. In the future will that method change if it's going to be program-driven instead of expenditure-driven?

Rier: Part of the work that's going on is to see how that might work in regions and centers because everyone's doing things differently. If you were in a center like Sanford, for instance, those members of the Sanford center don't pay anything. Sanford submits all the bills and we subsidize Sanford for the whole thing.

There are some contributions by some of the towns but very, very minimal. In other words they don't charge by pupil. Sanford reports all the expenditures and we provide the support in their subsidy. That's what happens in the centers for the most part.

This has been a subject for quite awhile, even before EPS came along. Most centers operate that way. Of course regions are completely different because they are part of another sort of district.

MeASBO: You mentioned virtual education. Belfast has an oceanography program. Presque Isle has horticulture. Even when Susan Gendron was commissioner she was upset that more schools were not taking advantage of the possibilities for virtual education. Now that there is a virtual school will you be pushing for more cooperation between school districts in this technology?

Rier: There's a tremendous amount already going on where those kinds of sharing are happening between school districts. The technology we have today, compared to even five years ago, helps that happen. But there are those who argue that Maine should have a state-operated virtual school, or have an environment that would allow school districts to do a lot more of this — giving kids, especially rural kids, opportunities for access.

One of the challenges is figuring out which ones students should be able to access — whether it's at other schools here in Maine or the zillion of other opportunities out of the Cloud or off the web. That will continue to be an interest, I'm sure. As much as we can arguably meet some of the students' needs through the virtual charter that's been established, that's maybe 200 or 300 kids out of 185,000. We also want to do things that are more impactful to a broader number.

Economics are changing. And some of these rural school districts can't possibly support all of the opportunities like you just mentioned, so it would promote more of what's you're suggesting. You know very well it's going to happen. A lot of schools, especially post-secondary, were reluctant to get into this because they saw it as competing with their everyday classroom operation.

But more and more post-secondary folks are going down that road — and significantly because they're trying to attract people that they otherwise couldn't get. •••

2014-15 MeASBO leadership



President

Stacie Lowe Field, Bus. Mgr.
RSU #73
9 Cedar St.
Livermore Falls, ME 04254
Tel. 897-6722, ext. 109
slowe@rsu73.org



1st Vice President

Adam Hanson, Bus. Off. Spvr.
Auburn School Department
P.O. Box 800
Auburn, ME 04212
Tel. 784-6431, ext. 1425
ahanson@auburnschl.edu



2nd Vice President

Kati Hunt, Business Manager
AOS #93
767 Main St. 1-A
Damariscotta, ME 04543
Tel. 563-3044, ext. 106
khunt@aos93.org



Treasurer

Sherrie Small, Fin. Coord.
MSAD #61
900 Portland Rd.
Bridgton, ME 04009
Tel. 647-3048, ext. 523
sherrie.small@lakeregion
schools.org



Secretary

Lucianne Milewski, Bus. Mgr.
MSAD #58
1401 Rangeley Rd.
Phillips, ME 04966
Tel. 639-2086, ext. 2
lmilewski@msad58.org



Immediate Past President

Sue Lambert, Finance Dir.
MSAD #49
8 School St.
Fairfield, ME 04937
Tel. 453-4200, ext. 3112
slambert@msad49.org

Executive Committee

Diane Boucher, Gray
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MeASBO meetings

Oct. 31 — with Drummond Woodsum representatives on a number of topics at the Augusta Civic Center.

Nov. 21 — at Elks Lodge in Augusta.

March 6, 2015 — Place TBA.

June 5, 2015 — Place TBA.

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Katherine Hunt, MeASBO

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