

MeASBO

The official publication of the Maine Association of School Business Officials

Winter 2013-14

Recipe for Divorce

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COST, LOST CONTROL CITED**

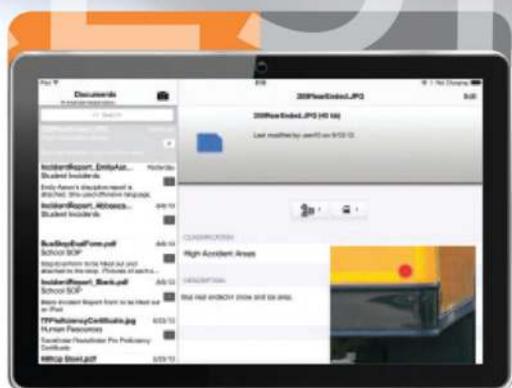
**MAINE LEGISLATURE BUSY
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Upcoming ASBO meetings

Maine ASBO

April 11, 2014 — United Technology Center, Bangor. Topics: Christine Burke, MEABT Health Insurance and ACA issues; and Tyler Backus/DOE Mainecare & Maintenance of Effort, & Excess Cost

June 6, 2014 — Portland or South Portland - TBD/Maine PERS Update and End-of-Year Celebration.

Tri-State Conference

May 14-16 — Sheraton Burlington Hotel and Conference Center in Burlington, Vt. Theme "Catch 22." See story on page 7.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

With all of us facing budget cuts, let's talk

Greetings, MeASBO members. First, let me say that I hope many of you are able to join me at the Tri-State ASBO Conference in Burlington, Vt., May 14-16.

I look forward to learning new things, collaborating with fellow business managers from around northern New England and making new contacts and connections. Last year in New Hampshire was a great time, and I expect Burlington to be another successful conference.

Thank you to the Tri-State Committee members for doing a great job with this event.

Second, I am sure many of you, like me, are in the throes of budget preparation. I expect that this year, like many recent years, will be a challenging budget season.

The usual issues are before us once again: waiting for health-insurance rates to be released; working on cutting staff without undermining programs; sifting through budget lines to make sure they are just right; and often proceeding on through the budget process without solid numbers from the state.

With the Maine Department of Education reporting that it needs to cut \$9.5 million in order to balance the state's budget, I am not expecting this year to be a walk in the park, but we will do the best we can.

Most years that we have needed to cut staff in my district, we have thankfully been able to do it through attrition.

We also have the opportunity in the near future to convert to natural gas or, most likely, a dual system so there is some potential cost reduction in our future.

What other potential cost reductions are out there? We need to be having these conversations with each other. Collaboration, thinking outside the box, throwing ideas around are all important, and I'm thankful for the times at MeASBO meetings when we have roundtable discussions.

Sometimes I wish we could have a whole meeting of them.

I know that many of you have walked the "Difficult Budget" path before, and after a few years of doing this myself, I have come to know what many of you know: Somehow, we will get through it.

I really feel we get through it best if we can connect with each other.

Take the opportunity to connect with a fellow business



Sue Lambert

manager or two and just see what's going on in their world and touch base on a few things. Visit their operation, and ask some questions and offer the same to them. Go to lunch... you know you'll end up talking business the whole time!

Two of my staff are leaving at the end of this year. My plan is to reach out to a couple of districts close to my size and see how their office is configured.

What automation have they put into place, and how can I take this opportunity to implement some innovations and efficiencies?

Do you have something you've wanted to implement, or are curious how other districts manage it?

Ask a question on the MeASBO.org web site's "Forum," call up another business manager, and reach out to our great resource, the MeASBO membership. ...



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Budget shortfall, virtual state academy, universal pre-K highlight second session

By Adam Hanson

As the 126th Legislature makes its way through a busy second session, a number of education bills, as well as proposals for covering a potential \$9.5-million budget gap, could dramatically impact public school districts.

Here is a brief look at five proposals carrying the most impact on programming and budgets for school administrative units.

1. The Budget: Though no supplemental budget has yet been proposed, the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) is working to fill a \$34-million “hole” that was built into the current biennial budget. OPM’s proposal to the Appropriations Committee calls for reducing 2014-15 GPA by \$9.5 million to help fill that hole. This proposal rests in part on Acting Commissioner Jim Rier’s assertion that school districts have not spent approximately \$18.5 million of the additional GPA added to the biennial budget just before it was passed last June.

The results of an anticipated Feb. 21 “revenue reforecasting” report will play a large role in determining the fate of 2014-15 GPA, according to Victoria Wallack, director of government relations and communications for the Maine School Management Association (MSMA).

The \$34-million hole is only part of an estimated budget shortfall of between \$130 million and \$160 million in the biennial budget. The results of the reforecasting will influence the direction the Appropriations Committee takes in filling budget holes, and the extent to which public school districts will be tapped to make up part of the actual shortfall.



Maine State House Chambers.

2. LD 1736: Resolve, To Create a State-run Virtual Academy Providing Maine Students with Access to Online Learning through Their Existing School Districts.

This bill was approved by the Education Committee on Feb. 12 on an 11-2 vote. It would require that the Department of Education (DOE) establish a state-administered virtual academy or online course portal to provide all public schools in the state access to online courses for their students.

The bill also calls for a moratorium on approval of any virtual public charter schools until January 2015. This would stop two proposed virtual schools currently seeking state approval from moving

ahead until a stakeholder group established by the bill meets certain benchmarks to make the state-run academy and portal a reality. That stakeholder group will be comprised of school administrators, school board members, teachers and technicians and others involved in K-12 education in the state.

As districts face the new reality of budgeting for charter school tuition, the moratorium on virtual charter schools could prove to be a huge cost-savings measure. Using a \$9,000 tuition figure, MSMA estimates that up to \$3 million could flow to virtual charter schools in year one of their existence, with up to \$7 million

annually by year five going to virtual schools run by out-of-state, for-profit corporations.

The Vermont Virtual Learning Cooperative and the Virtual Learning Academy Charter School in New Hampshire would be used as models for the Maine stakeholder group, according to the wording of the bill. There has been some talk that Maine would collaborate with the New Hampshire school in providing course offerings.

3. LD 1530: An Act To Establish a Process for the Implementation of Universal Voluntary Pre-kindergarten Education.

This bill would require that all districts offer universal voluntary pre-kindergarten education by the 2017-18 school year. It would require the Commissioner of Education to form a stakeholder group to develop standards for pre-kindergarten education programs, recommend uniform statewide procedures for screening children and assessing program performance, and recommend best practices to coordinate early childhood education programs with child-care providers.

A couple of financial provisions are of particular interest to school business officials. There is a requirement that funding provided to an SAU for pre-kindergarten purposes may not be used for other purposes. Another initiative calls for the DOE to provide \$1 million for grants to local SAUs to implement and expand pre-kindergarten programs. The grant money is proposed to come from excess funds generated by the Oxford Casino.

MSMA supports passage of this bill, with the caveat that the mandate be adequately funded, according to Wallack.

The educational advantages of universal Pre-K will need to be balanced against the realities of limited funding and physical space issues. The bill was still before the Education Committee at the time of this report.

4. LD 1747: Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Chapter 180:

Performance Evaluation and Professional Growth Systems, a Major Substantive Rule of the DOE.

This bill is the next step forward in establishing uniform evaluations for teachers and principals by the 2015-16 school year, as currently mandated in Maine law.

The evaluation rule establishes a set of professional practice standards for teachers and principals; a four-level effectiveness rating scale; potential measures of student learning and growth; major components of an evaluation process; a system of supports and professional development linked to the effectiveness ratings; and a percentage of student achievement data that should be considered in overall evaluation.

The DOE would like to use 20 percent of student achievement data toward the evaluation. MSMA supports the bill.

5. Redesign of Essential Programs and Services (EPS).

The results of DOE's recently commissioned "Picus Report," which assessed whether EPS is "equitable and fair," are in the hands of the Education Committee. The committee is crafting a bill that would serve as the first step in an overhaul of EPS.

In ongoing talks, the committee focused

on four major components of EPS:

- greater support for low-income students;
- pre-kindergarten funding;
- increased professional development for teachers; and
- Labor Market areas (which determine the numerical factor applied to EPS salary numbers, either increasing, decreasing or leaving static the numbers as calculated using the state's salary matrix, based on the labor market of each SAU)

For phase one of this long-term project, the committee has tried to focus on what it feels to be the most important policy areas, and not shy away from them because of funding concerns. A bill is expected before the Legislature concludes its session, scheduled for April 15.

For more information on these and other bills, people may visit "Bills to Watch" at the MSMA website at www.msmaweb.com. MSMA provides a summary of each bill, along with links to the proposed bills on the Maine Legislature's website.

Look for updates on these and other legislative topics in future issues of *MeASBO Magazine*. •••

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SAD 52's transportation survey reveals significant savings initiatives

By Deb Roberts

MSAD #52 in Turner recently conducted a survey of other school districts to gather information on some important transportation issues being discussed at its long-range Planning Committee meetings. The key issues were: consolidated bus stops, a combined K-12 bus run, contracting bus mechanic services, and contracting bus transportation services.

The survey was sent out electronically to approximately 200 MeASBO members. Of the 28 responses, 22 districts have some form of consolidated bus stops. Most of them are at the grades 7-12 level.

Criteria used to determine stop locations include: safe walking distances, easy access for the driver, no hills, the most central locations, safety of the area, safety of stop, and student density.

Eleven districts that responded to the survey have a combined K-12 bus run. The majority of these districts has been doing this for years and has combined bus driver/custodian positions.

Savings recognized from this consolidation were between \$5,000 and \$25,000 annually.

Just over half of the districts that responded contract out their mechanic service work on their bus fleet. Many districts have used this model for many years and the majority are satisfied with their contracted mechanic services. Some of the benefits reported include: guaranteed workmanship, cost savings, and no workers' compensation responsibility.



Deb Roberts

Finally, six districts reported that they contract out their bus transportation services — some in their second year and others “always” — and all of them are satisfied with the arrangement.

The biggest benefits for contracting out? Not being responsible for scheduling and finding replacement drivers or dealing with workmans' comp issues.

Annual savings reported were unknown for a few as this practice has been in place for many years while others reported between \$60,000 and \$300,00 in annual savings.

Asked to share helpful information with districts, respondents suggested:

- start your RFP early;
- refine your overall athletic trips, field trips, extra and co-curricular trips;
- decide early if you plan on leasing vehicles or selling fleet- prefer ownership of fleet;
- examine insurance needs and understand that certain school district insurance may not be available for private vendors;
- the key to contracting is making sure that the vendor hires a competent director; and
- it is very important to have a good relationship with contractor.

To review a full copy of the survey responses, people may log on to the MEASBO forum or email: deborah.roberts@msad52.org. •••



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The lobby at the Sheraton Burlington Hotel & Conference Center, host of the Tri-State ASBO Conference.

Tri-State agenda runs gamut of useable information

By Kris Pottle

BURLINGTON, Vt. — This year's Tri-State ASBO Conference will be located near the shore of beautiful Lake Champlain at the Sheraton Burlington Hotel & Conference Center here, May 14-16.

The theme is "Catch-22." Our schools function amid a swirling mix of competing interests, demands and needs. We must reduce costs. We have increasing student needs. Taxpayers are upset. Parents want more for their children. We are being asked to expand our scope to include pre-K services.

Legislatures are tightening fiscal purse strings. Efforts to consolidate schools and districts compete with local control.

The Tri-State Conference agenda is packed with valuable in-service programs designed to sharpen business managers' skills. Among them are Google Docs, productivity apps, and effective use of technology in hiring and performance management; also GASB, Affordable Care Act and legal updates.

Maine ASBO President Sue Lambert noted: "Not only are there great professional-development opportunities at

the many workshops throughout the conference, but there are also many great chances to connect with peers and learn how others are meeting the challenges of being public school business officials."

The keynote speaker will be Captain Richard Phillips, a merchant mariner and author who captained the MV Maersk Alabama when it was hijacked by Somali pirates in April 2009. Afterwards, Phillips wrote the book *A Captain's Duty: Somali Pirates, Navy SEALs and Dangerous Days at Sea*, upon which the movie *Captain Phillips*, starring Tom Hanks, was created.

Several special events are planned, including a reception and dinner at the Echo museum and many opportunities to spend time with colleagues and good friends.

On Thursday afternoon the annual Exhibitors Show will allow time with the event's many vendors. Each year they exhibit the latest innovations that help improve school fiscal management. The Tri-State Committee extended a thank-you to these vital partners for making this conference cost-effective.

People may register and obtain additional information at www.tristateasbo.org.

Technology Committee reports advances on surveys, agenda, recording

By Sue Lambert

Our www.MeASBO.com forum membership participation now closely matches the number of school employee MeASBO members, so we are glad to see that most of our colleagues have signed up on the forum.

I encourage members to remember to subscribe to the different forums so that they will get an e-mail when a conversation is started. If they wish to respond, they must go to the forum to post. They cannot reply to the e-mail notification.

When documents are posted, it may appear that it is possible to click on the link in the e-mail, but participants must go to the forum and use the link in the message there. The e-mail only serves the purpose of notification. Always subscribe to the Announcement forum so that MeASBO has a reliable way to get important messages out to the membership.

Surveys & Agendas

Another way we have decided to use technology is to have online surveys after each meeting so that attendees can give feedback to the planning committees of what they want for new topics and how they ranked the speaker and meeting space of the last meeting.

These help to move in the right direction when planning future events, and the Google form/survey product summa-

rizes the results nicely for us.

Recently a member recommended that we have the agenda or a link to the latest agenda on the main web-page for people who might be logged on looking around because they are interested in the group. Potential members might want to see what our meetings are about before joining. That was a great idea, so visitors to www.MeASBO.com should see that change in the near future. Currently the agendas are available on the forum to everyone, even with guest status. Non-members may not think to follow the links to go to where the agendas are posted since all the links to the forum located on the main web page say "Members."

Meetings On Demand?

The Technology Committee is experimenting with recording the meetings using an ipad. This would be useful for members who are unable to attend certain meetings because of scheduling conflicts. We are hoping that the recorded meeting can be posted on our forum.

We are experimenting to try to find a simple solution with enough video and audio quality to make the project successful. Stay tuned as we work out the details.

We urge anyone with an idea or suggestion for the website, forum or another technology related idea, to e-mail Sue Lambert at slambert@msad49.org. ...

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In flux: Obamacare delays are again delayed

The latest in a series of presidential changes to the Affordable Care Act, better known as Obamacare, appear to affect most Maine school districts.

Because the 200-page document was released as *MeASBO Magazine* was about to go to press — and because of the extensive, intricate and complicated nature of the changes — we were unable to present a detailed report.

Readers are encouraged to check the web site www.MeASBO.org for the latest fact-gathering announcements as they become available.

The Obama Administration announced on Feb. 17 that it will phase in the requirement for employers with 50 or more full-time workers to offer health insurance to their employees by 2015. Now, that mandate will not apply until 2016 for some employers.

But applying the delay to particular school districts does not appear to be simple. Beyond number of employees, there appear to be many other factors affecting whether school districts may delay the insurance.

Among other changes are the pressuring of insurers to increase the size of medical provider networks offered to their customers; and allowing people insured by plans that are no longer compliant with ACA standards to maintain that coverage through 2016.

The credit rating agency Moody's said the proposals threaten not only the bottom lines of insurers, but also the pocketbooks of consumers, who would face likely higher

premiums as a result.

Meanwhile, the ACA faces multiple lawsuits that could affect its full implementation.

And in Congress many have raised the question of whether President Barack Obama's frequent unilateral "tweaks" to the law are constitutional.

Twenty-seven adjustments to the ACA have been made without congressional approval, Fox News reported. The question is: Can the President simply make tweak after tweak at will, without asking Congress?

Obama defended the most recent Obamacare delay, saying he wanted to make sure employers on the hook for coverage weren't "unnecessarily burdened," while administration officials cite their taxing authority as legal justification for the action.

Obama's legal rationale for the various delays rests on the view that the U.S. Treasury Department has wide latitude in enforcing tax laws and the Supreme Court ruled that the ACA is a tax law.

J. Mark Iwry, deputy assistant treasury secretary for health policy, said Treasury was granted the ability to offer relief in the legislation through the federal Internal Revenue Service code that allows them to "prescribe all needful rules and regulations for the enforcement" for taxing purposes, according to *The New York Times*.

Such enforcement would apply to the myriad new taxes contained in Obamacare.

Milewski proves: You can go home

By Mark Leslie

Some might say Lucianne “Luci” Milewski tap danced her way to where she is today. But Maine SAD 58’s dance-loving business manager says it hasn’t been all fun; she’s done it through hard work — lots and lots of hard work.

Since taking over the reins as business manager from her mentor, Anne Stinchfield, Milewski has grabbed the initiative and labored to become only the third certified school business official in Maine and has been elected secretary of MeASBO.

Some might also say, “You can’t go home.”

Milewski has proven that old saying wrong as well, returning to the community in which she was raised and educated and gaining the trust of the townspeople.

“I couldn’t do my job without her — absolutely couldn’t do it,” said Superintendent Brenda Joy Stevens, whose district includes Kingfield, Phillips and Strong elementary schools and Mt. Abram High School. “She’s incredible with intuitively knowing what you need in front of you when you go to a board meeting and fluent in translating numbers in an understandable, informative format.

“The school board knows exactly how important Luci is to the organization and the skill set she brings,” added Stevens, a friend of Milewski’s late mother Beatrice and who has known Milewski since she was born and worked with her for two years as a principal and the last three years in the central office.

Between 1993 when Milewski graduated from Calvary Hill Christian School in Wilton in three years instead of four (“The dean of the school told me I couldn’t graduate early, so I set my mind to proving him wrong. Don’t tell me I can’t



Luci Milewski, right, poses with Cindy Dixon, the superintendent’s secretary who handles payroll and works with Milewski on human-resource matters.

do something.”) then earned a bachelor’s degree in business economics from the University of Maine at Farmington and today, her entire career has prepared her for what she is doing.

“I see every job I’ve had as a stepping stone to what I do now,” Milewski said. “Every job has brought me here with the strengths and skills necessary. It set me up very well.”

Milewski actually started preparing for her career when she was in high school.

Not only did she carefully monitor how her parents — Charles and Beatrice Milewski — operated The Lunch Box and, later, a nursing home, she went far beyond her high school studies.

She worked at a nursing home, in the laundry and kitchen and doing house-keeping duties. When she was 17 and old enough she took a CNA course in order to work directly with residents, then passed

a course certifying her to dispense medications.

At UMF, Milewski continued working in that environment, volunteering at Limited Examination and Appointment Program (LEAP) to assist disabled people living in a community as opposed to an institutional facility.

“My intention when I started college,” she said, “was a career in nursing facility administration. But I got redirected to a different field.”

No problem. Each successive job she worked at taught Milewski something new, strengthened her resolve and added to her résumé of expertise.

Those positions included temp work as a telemarketer and at Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield in Portland; as assistant manager and then manager at a troubled Kentucky

Fried Chicken (KFC) restaurant in South Portland; in Central Maine Power Co.'s credit and collection center in Fairfield; and in real estate, first as a field agent and then office manager at Long Pond Realty in Belgrade.

When she stepped into the KFC position, the restaurant was borrowing staff from other locations, running in the red and struggling to keep the doors open. By the time she left, it was operating in the black, had regained awards and recognition, "and I was loaning my staff to other restaurants," Milewski said.

The key?

"Motivation and ambition," Milewski said. "I like to see things done right, and encourage my staff to be more and do more, and pursue advances of their own.

"As a kid I saw my parents do that. They impressed on me how to work a staff. They're not just employees but friends and family. If you treat them with respect and appreciation, it means a lot; it's not all about money. They want to feel they're accomplishing something.

At KFC, I was in charge of training, hiring and firing, inventory, purchasing — the gamut.

It was in 2007 when the opportunity came at SAD 58, where Stinchfield hired her to handle payroll and human resources. It was a chance for Milewski to put all her skills to work even as she has pushed forward to obtain a Master of Science in Business degree from Husson College in Bangor in 2004. (Today she needs just two courses to earn of MBA degree).

She admits to confronting some "eye-openers."

While she works closely with the budget and food service, one of the hats she wears at SAD 58 is that of human resource director, dealing with staff.

"I have a strong customer-service background and I want to do what is best for the staff... and a human resource person gets involved far beyond the immediate central office staff," Milewski said. "It's



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“ [Luci] is incredible with intuitively knowing what you need in front of you when you go to a board meeting and fluent in translating numbers in an understandable, informative format.

**— Brenda Joy Stevens,
MSAD 58 superintendent**

hard when people are going through personal issues, but I think I’ve seen quite a bit in my own life and feel I can draw from my personal experiences to help and encourage them as much as it is a struggle of my own.”

In fact, as a self-confessed introvert, it’s interesting that the favorite part of Milewski’s job is “People.”

At CMP, she said, “I enjoyed the opportunity to help people to make arrangements on their bills, get them assistance and help get them out of their situations. Here, I enjoy the interaction, whether it’s helping them with a personal problem or otherwise.

“Most of all, I’m a numbers person and numbers have to add up or things

aren’t right. But I enjoy the involvement, to support and encourage people.”

Ever Developing

Asked about her rush to gain the school business officer’s certification, Milewski said, “I’m always looking at how to improve, learn more, do better. I’m self-motivated, goal-oriented, setting goals I’d like to reach. Certification was voluntary but I accepted it as my goal. It’s about gaining more knowledge. Knowledge is power and I want to be the best I can be at my job. Certification was a great way to do that, to do more and get better here.”

The process took time, partly because the certification is newly established and

still a work in progress.

“They’re still putting the professional development in place, so I had to search to find a couple of necessary subjects. But because of my college degree I had a good base of courses.”

It was the popular Stinchfield who encouraged her involvement in MeASBO.

“I’ve been more of a hermit,” Milewski said, “and Anne was instrumental in getting me out.”

Milewski was new to the school environment and there was so much to do in the office with so many schools in the district and a small central-office staff, that she balked at attending MeASBO meetings. But Stinchfield pushed until Milewski relented.

“But once I started to see the professional development improving, I saw the value of that information as well as making contacts. There is all this new information you don’t even know exists. Tapping into the other members’ knowledge has been

Continued on page 25

THINK OF IT AS CAR SHOPPING FOR YOUR BOTTOM LINE

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Shotgun Marriages



Have withdrawn from RSUs:

Athens, Brighton Plantation, Cherryfield, Dayton, Ellsworth, Eustis, Frankfort, Glenburn, Hancock, Lamoine, Mars Hill, Portage Lake, Saco, Starks, Veazie, Wiscasset

Completed AOS Withdrawals:

Bancroft, Bridgewater, Calais, SAD 14, SAD 20, SAD 42, SAD 70, Orient

Withdrawal Committees have been authorized:

Buckfield, Dixfield, Palermo, Westport Island, Windsor, St. George

Withdrawal Committees Disbanded:

Dixfield, Westport Island

Withdrawal votes failed for insufficient ballots cast:

Andover, Belfast, Belmont, Monmouth, Morrill, Northport, Searsmont, Swanville

Withdrawal defeated by voters:

Arundel

Withdrawal Petition has been filed:

Durham, China, Ludlow, Steuben

'Divorces' increasing among RSUs

By Mark Leslie

In America the average length of first marriages that end in divorce is eight years. The leading reasons for the break-ups: finances and “irreconcilable differences.”

Many of Maine’s new Regional School Units — called “shotgun marriages” by more than one observer — have not or will not last that long. The reasons: usually “local control” and finances.

When in 2007 then-Gov. John Baldacci and the Maine State Legislature gave Maine communities 18 months to consolidate their 290 school systems into 80 or face financial penalties, the aim was 1) to reduce the costs and improve the efficiency of providing education and 2) to expand educational opportunities and equity. The results for both are arguable, but a growing number of communities are giving the effort a flunking grade.

While many of the new Regional School Units (RSUs) are reporting savings and others are spending about the same, a number of individual towns have been hard hit by vastly increased education costs because of the school funding formula.

Whatever the reasons, when the required three-year waiting period for withdrawals expired in 2012, 38 communities began the lengthy process of leaving their school districts. Since then, 16 towns have completed withdrawal, another seven have voted to withdraw but fallen short of the required ballots cast, and others have

started the 21-step withdrawal process.

“Marriage” and “divorce” are recurring words in discussions of Maine’s consolidations.

“These marriages, some of them were doomed from the beginning,” said Jack Turcotte, former superintendent for the Ellsworth, Sanford and Old Orchard Beach school

“These marriages, some of them were doomed from the beginning.”
— Jack Turcotte, former superintendent for the Ellsworth, Sanford and Old Orchard Beach school systems



have to work through it. Or, if they’re not in love any longer, they’re better off apart. Some of these withdrawals are in the best interest of both parties.”

“These forced marriages made people resentful,” said Dr. Gehrig Johnson, full-time superintendent at the SAD 1 in Presque Isle and part-time superintendent for RSU 32 in Ashland. “I tried to tell Gov. Baldacci that you can not force communities to join together, that it’s not going to work. He did force them and caused a boatload of issues. We’re suffering the consequences and will for the foreseeable future. Look at the number of systems pulling out.”

From each corner of the state, many echo Johnson’s disgruntled remarks.

Lolisa Windover, who represents Peru on the RSU 10 School Board, compared the consolidation to “blackmail and extortion.” Yet, because of the difficulties in rebuilding a school system such as purchasing school buildings and buses, and “the risk of the state not helping us build a new school,” Peru has given up its withdrawal efforts.

“The grand experiment has not worked uniformly,” said Gary Fortier, a city councilor since 1992 in Ellsworth which, along with Lamoine and Hancock, voted last November to withdraw from RSU 24. “When you have a gun to your head and you’re being told to consolidate, it changes your mind.”

systems, who has worked with Ellsworth, Freeport, Arundel and Andover in their withdrawal processes. “It’s hard work to resolve conflict. Look how difficult it is in a marriage. Now communities that never fell in love in the first place

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The Financial Results

The consequences of Maine's consolidations are widely varied, but Gov. Baldacci's prediction that consolidation would save the state \$250 million over the first three years was "pie in the sky," said one school official.

The Education Policy and Research Center at the University of Southern Maine was engaged to study the overall results of the consolidation, but funding ran out before the financial analysis was begun, according to Director David Silvernail.

Asked if he thought the new units were saving money, Silvernail said any analysis is complicated by the fact that at that time federal stimulus moneys were appropriated and the state school subsidies were declining.

"Too many factors were too mixed [to determine if there were savings]," he said. "Our backup strategy was to look out three to four years at a group of districts that did reorganize and some that either didn't or didn't have to; and then compare them.

"My premise," Silvernail added, "was that consolidation was not necessarily going to lead to cost savings in all areas. In some cases it would just slow down the increase. My hypothesis was that administration costs in the consolidated districts should not be increasing as much."

Indeed, school administration costs average only 3.5 percent of school districts' expenditures, Silvernail said, "So even if you had big savings in administration, you wouldn't save big bucks in the total costs."

Silvernail said another projection from Baldacci was that the first year was supposed to bring a 5-percent reduction in special-ed costs and transportation costs. The next two years 2-1/2 percent and 2-1/2 percent.

"They did the cut in the first year but not the other cuts," he said.

Business Managers Weigh In

School business managers have reported varied results.

David L. Bridgham of RSU 24,

which will see Ellsworth, Lamoine and Hancock withdraw, effective July 1, asserted, "The consolidation really did save money."

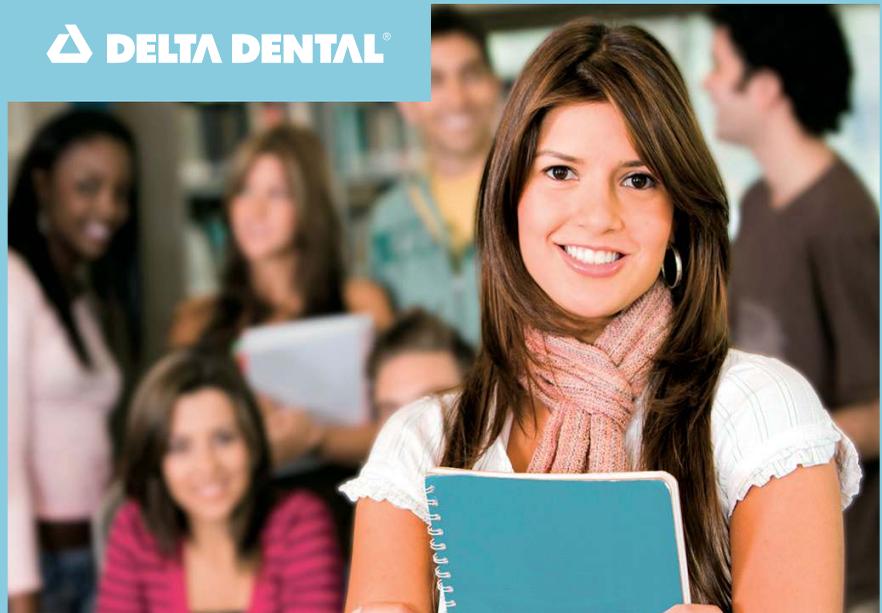
People in the withdrawing towns "acknowledged that it's not about money or education, but local control," he said. "From our perspective, our budget is \$1.5

"Too many factors were too mixed [to determine if there were savings],"
— David Silvernail, USM

million less than the budgets of the school systems that formed the RSU in 2008-09. And if you add up all those savings it comes to \$9.5

million in local taxpayer money that didn't get raised and appropriated for education; and that doesn't count the inflation we would have had to begin with."

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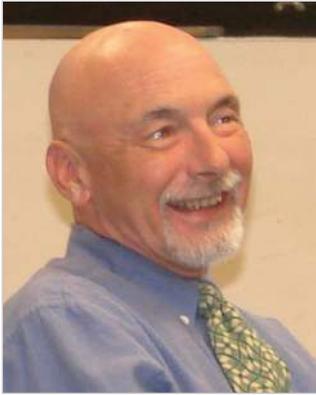
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“There’s a big sucking sound and the subsidy is going south on us. Budgets were going down but taxes going up. The average Joe sees his tax bill go up and thinks it’s related to the school budget.”
 — David L. Bridgham of RSU 24

Bridgham explained that property values around Frenchman’s Bay, Flanders Bay and the Schoodic Peninsula are rising faster — and some places much faster — than statewide. And its population is a high percentage of older retirement age.

“There’s a big sucking sound and the subsidy is going south on us,” he said. “Budgets were going down but taxes going up. The average Joe sees his tax bill go up and thinks it’s related to the school budget.”

Fortier, of Ellsworth, agreed, saying, “For whatever reason, Ellsworth’s contribution to educa-

tion increased \$2 million over three years. I don’t place all the blame on the RSU. It’s just that the public saw a \$2-million increase.

“Some of that can go back to the changes in the funding formula; some to increases in our valuation now that we’re over a \$1-billion community. The RSU did very well in some areas: IT, food and beverage, special ed, the central office.”

Mary Dailey, the former business manager with SAD 21 and now with Western Foothills RSU 10, said each member town’s cost may have changed according to valuation, but the total budget remained unchanged through the first three years of

the merger between SADs 21, 39 and 43. This last year saw an increase, she said.

At 5-year-old Sheepscot Valley RSU 12, where Wiscasset is withdrawing on July 1 and Windsor and Palermo have initiated the procedure, Business Manager Belinda Waterhouse reported the district has saved money.

The member towns’ total budgets before RSU 12 was created were \$28 million to \$29 million, Waterhouse said. “Consolidating, our first budget was \$27 million and now it’s \$26 million. It’s going down every year — partially because of the number of students, partially efficiencies. It takes awhile to find efficiencies — energy being a big one.”

Waterhouse said three central offices were merged into one, losing one finance manager and a full-time receptionist. “We reduced hours and next will lose another full-time business-office person because of Wiscasset leaving.”

It’s a different story for a number of individual towns, however.

Wiscasset’s state subsidy has been reduced from \$1.5 million in 2008-09 to \$1 million this year, Waterhouse said.

Cherryfield, which withdrew last year from RSU 37 in western Washington County because the district wanted to close the town’s elementary school, is halfway through its first academic year back standing alone.

Its report?

“The other towns thought we would go broke, but as it turns out, it’s relatively the same,” said Art Tatangelo, a self-employed mason who led the effort to pull out.

He said the major financial hit has come from the state’s “Draconian” penalty for keeping the school open: \$420,000 the first year and \$300,500 the second.

Jonesport-Beal is providing Cherryfield with central-office services as well as Superintendent William Shuttleworth’s expertise, and Tatangelo foresees that they “will continue with that relationship for some time as long as it’s benefiting both parties.”

In RSU 26, Veazie and Glenburn



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both voted in November 2012 to withdraw, leaving Orono as the district's lone surviving community.

Veazie withdrawal committee members expected to save \$170,000 a year in taxpayer allocations.

The withdrawal agreement allowed the three towns to continue sharing some administrative services as well as some teachers.

"It's absolutely not saving us money. It's costing us money, no question about it," said Jon Holmes, who was active in Dixfield's failed attempt to leave RSU 10, a 3-year-old system that married the Dixfield area's SAD 21,

Buckfield area's SAD 39, Rumford area's SAD 43 and Hanover.

Dixfield, Carthage, Peru and Canton — the former SAD 21 — are all paying more, he said. But while the first three have all voted in favor of withdrawing from RSU 10, none can do so because of a peculiarity in the reorganization law. The law states that when an SAD merges with other districts, in order to withdraw, all the communities from that former SAD must agree. In this case, Canton remains the lone holdout.

"It's as plain as the nose on their face it won't work," Holmes said. "Even when they first mentioned merging there was standing-room-only in the gymnasium. It just wasn't feasible for us. Simply the distance to bus all the kids to Rumford and the high school kids from Rumford to Dixfield is asinine."

Johnson at Presque Isle noted that he actually recommended to Portage Lake residents that they withdraw from SAD 32 in Ashland in 2012.

"They saved \$235,000 a year right out of the gate," he said, explaining that Portage Lake, like many towns with high-valued properties, saw its valuation driven up.

"Their value as a portion of the whole five-town district was disproportionate to the point that for 46 kids they were paying out \$13,000 per student, while the rest of the towns were paying about \$3,800 per

Consolidating, our first budget was \$27 million and now it's \$26 million. It's going down every year.

**— Belinda Waterhouse,
business manager, RSU 12**

student," Johnson said.

Asked if the new districts are realizing savings, Johnson said: "That's debatable. In the systems I've had experience with, I hear superintendents saying they're not seeing savings. Very few are saying

it's successful and they're happy."

He pointed out that Aroostook County did not respond well to the governor's initiative "and we are one of the counties it was aimed at. We have 11 school

systems that have fewer than 500 students each."

A Local 'Voice'

While many are advocating withdrawal of their communities, perhaps



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the more poignant, potent argument regards local control.

“It’s true that some of the towns’ tax burdens have gone up, but that has been more a product of the distribution of the money — a greater amount shifted to another town,” said USM’s Silvernail. “People have legitimate concerns about that sort of thing, but the arguments you hear to pull out tend to be around voice and local control, not around this or that costing much more.”

“Local control is a huge issue,” agreed Johnson. “A number of systems felt they had a gun to their heads to join with a neighboring system, with a penalty which nobody could afford. As soon as the penalty went away they started taking steps to withdraw.

“It’s like a prearranged marriage that didn’t work. It’s going on all over the place... In our systems we feel we did the right thing. We didn’t consolidate. If we needed to take the penalty, we would.”

He said that to avoid the penalty, Mars Hill joined with Ft. Fairfield, but “as soon as the penalty went away they started the process. And last July 1 they withdrew.”

Saying that RSU 12 members Palermo and his town of Windsor “got the brunt” of a change in the funding formula, Tom Squiers added that he and others are so upset that even if the finances were more favorable “it would have no effect on my vote. It will probably cost us to get out, but I’m OK with that.”

After overwhelming preliminary votes in favor of withdrawal, Windsor is waiting for the November elections to ensure the town gets the required 50-percent turnout of the

last gubernatorial election. Beginning in 2015, a two-thirds vote to withdraw will become necessary.

Peru’s Windover drove home the point of a “local voice.” RSU 10 encompasses eight towns and she is the only Peru resident among 17 school board members.

In Ellsworth, Fortier said, “A majority of citizens felt Ellsworth had lost all control of our local education system. Although we’re the largest community with the most students, we only had three out of 14 or 15 votes on the school board.”

Several of the towns attempting to withdraw, including Monmouth, balked at the idea of sending their taxpayer dollars to repair another RSU partner’s school roof or boiler when they themselves had taken better care of their own buildings.

But Monmouth — like seven other towns including Belfast, Belmont, Morrill, Northport, Searsmont and Swanville from RSU 20 and Arundel from RSU 21 — voted in favor of withdrawal but fell 22 votes short of the required number of ballots to make it happen.

Doug Ludwig, one of the leaders of Monmouth’s effort, lamented that because only 57 percent of the voters (three percent below the 60-percent threshold) favored withdrawal, the town now has to wait two years before another vote. He indicated citizens may be too exhausted from the lengthy first effort to try again.

“We’ve gotten through the withdrawal agreement so it will be easier because there is a framework,” Ludwig said. “But we still would have to go through the petitioning process, get it on ballot, get it passed to form a withdrawal

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committee. That's a lot of hard work."

School Closures Raise Ire

Elsewhere, like Cherryfield, other communities rebelled against their RSUs because of proposed school closures.

Turcotte, the retired superintendent who also has been helping Andover withdraw from Bethel-based RSU 44 for the past year, said the battle has raged over the district's attempt to close Andover's K-5 school with 30-plus students.

"The only way to keep the school open is to withdraw," he said. "But Andover is not the norm. Their reason is clear-cut. They want to keep the school. Usually it's local control. I've been a Mainer all my life and I have an understanding of how Maine people dislike enforced organization."

Saying that many new RSUs "might make sense on paper," he added, "but if you don't understand the communities and their relations between communities you can almost predict they're like oil and water and will never accept each other as partners."

Penalties Versus 'Carrots'

Turcotte bemoaned the fact that Gov. Baldacci's consolidation attempt was penalty-driven and not carrot-driven like the Sinclair Act.

In 1957 the Maine state Legislature passed the Sinclair Act, creating SADs, and "giving huge incentives to consolidate," Turcotte said. "They'd build you buildings and other rewards for forming an SAD. Many towns did because the rewards were enticing. But if you look at it, many of those communities still have yet to accept the all-for-one and one-for-all concept. Every town still likes to think they're independent."

Baldacci's law carries with it "no carrots, no reason to feel good about it," he said. "It's the opposite. It's been penalty-driven. 'Do this or else.'"

"Everybody felt 'We don't want to marry them but we don't want to lose the money' in penalties. It's proven the old adage: 'It's not what you do, it's how you do it.'"

Turcotte, with experience from Penobscot Valley to Southern Maine, said, "Some communities have done a great job and worked together and probably saved money. Other communities say it cost them more."

He bemoaned the fact that millions of dollars have been spent putting the consolidation together.

"It disrupted the focus on education's objective," he said. "They threw a big monkey wrench [into the education system]. There is only so much energy and so many dollars to go around and it all had to go into the 'marriage.' Then you say, 'Nope, now we've got to take it apart' and all your energy is going toward destroying what you put together."

"Many of the towns are talking about withdrawal. It's showing up in every weekly paper."



'You can see that this town feels more invested in this element of schools. It's staggering. It's standing room only.'
Art Tatangelo, chairman
Cherryfield Board of Selectmen

What To Do?

Asked what could improve the situation, Silvernail said, "It's very difficult. I know school districts constantly try to see where they are spending and where they could realize savings, such as in more telecommunications. That will continue because we have declining enrollments and limited resources."

"I think we're going into another period of time where the focus is on how to provide an education that is reasonable to taxpayers but also ensures quality education."

Quality education at optimum cost. That is the bottom line — for school administrators and staff as well as parents and taxpayers. A glimpse at how the past year has evolved for Cherryfield may be uplifting in an otherwise depressing story.

Asked if the town's withdrawal from RSU 32 has been a good move, Tatangelo, whose wife sits on the school board, said, "We've only been through one budget cycle, but we've made it so far. We went through this year with two used buses — one bought for \$20,000 and the other less than that."

"It's amazing now to go to a Cherryfield School Board meeting," he continued. "It's so different. Parents are welcome. You don't have to sign up beforehand if you have something to say. You can actually talk about education. It's not just about how to run things. Even Christmas and Veterans Day programs are up for discussion."

"You can see that this town feels more invested in this element of schools. It's staggering. It's standing-room-only. This is the way, in my mind, that education is supposed to be. It's part of the community — not some separate entity where your kids are being sent off here or there." ...



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Plan to expand for broadband

Ways your school can take action and meet the demand for next-generation technology

By Beth McCarthy

The need for broadband in the classroom has never been more pressing. Schools across the country are striving to stay current and provide every opportunity for students to grow and benefit from online learning, interactive media and cutting-edge electronic devices. All together, it can lower the costs of offering unique subject matter. But it's a struggle.

The optimal bandwidth for a school depends on several factors. Whatever it is today, experts say that number will only grow over the next five years. This ever-increasing demand for flexible, scalable Internet bandwidth presents real challenges for educational institutions, both logistically and financially.

What is creating the demand for greater speed and bandwidth?

The demand comes from advances in both technology and mandates handed down to districts to implement technology programs and leverage online capabilities. Online testing and e-textbooks create efficiencies, but can drive network costs higher. Online learning brings in new students and new subjects to current students, but depends upon a network that can provide the required service levels. Technology has delivered an abundance of devices designed to expand learning opportunities in the classroom, but they are useless without adequate speed and connectivity.

Educational institutions require a network that can handle many complexities while bringing the high-capacity, reliable services needed.

How can schools plan today to ensure they invest in the right technology that will lead them into tomorrow?

In mapping the future, schools should attempt to create a technology plan that addresses the specific needs of their students and staff. Forming a technology planning committee is a good way to get official buy-in and encourage active participation. The committee should first articulate the vision for its school's technology expansion.

Also, it may consider hiring consultants — professionals who grasp the pros and cons, the ins and outs, and the ups and downs of every type of technology the committee

will need to understand. Once the team is established, it can conduct a needs assessment and inventory. It should understand what it has already acquired that can work, and prioritize its needs. A consultant can also help in this circumstance, by outlining all of the options for new and cutting-edge technology solutions.

Once there is a complete picture of the technology readiness of the school, it is time to create a well-informed plan, taking into account budget for infrastructure, devices, training and additional data storage.

Where can schools go for help in funding their technology expansion?

Make sure the district is taking full advantage of the E-Rate program — also known as the Universal Service Schools and Libraries Program. E-Rate helps ensure that schools and libraries can obtain telecommunications and Internet access at affordable rates. Eligible schools can apply for yearly funding.

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- Open to any not-for-profit school or district
- Funds support schools' technology infrastructure
- E-Rate consultants are available who will help with the application process
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This ongoing effort to improve connectivity in the classroom has also come into national discourse recently with the ConnectED initiative.

The purpose of ConnectED is to leverage current programs like E-Rate, to ensure students can connect to valuable learning resources and opportunities through their schools and libraries. A vision initiated by the White House, ConnectED calls on the Federal Communications Commission to take the necessary steps to ensure that American students have access to high-speed broadband of at least 100 Mbps in the classroom, to reap the benefits of the new digital age of learning.

Although this initiative is new, the educational community will be paying close attention to how it will be implemented.

How can schools leverage their resources?

School districts should partner with a telecommunications provider who can meet the requirements and regulations set forth in the federal funding programs and also provide the necessary services to achieve techn-

Continued on next page

Seekins: Use natural-gas savings for upgrades

Noting that Maine schools annually include much-needed facility repairs in their budgets, yet often see those requests cut, Energy Account Manager Tom Seekins of Siemens suggested they consider paying for those repairs through an investment: conversion to natural gas.

The money saved by converting to natural gas could be used to pay for the upgrades, he said.

“When you have budgets that are so tight and sometimes seemingly impossible to pass, it is certainly understanding why \$250,000 for a new boiler plant or ventilation upgrades get put on the back burner,” Seekins said, “even though they’re past their useful life and extremely inefficient.”

With natural gas finally coming through the state, many K-12 customers are “obviously chomping at the bit to convert to NG,” Seekins said. “One thing to consider might be to take a step back and look at the past five years’ plans that have been established by the school’s administration, or CIP budgets that have included such things as boilers, boiler room code update requirements, building envelope issues (insulation, crack infiltration etc.), roofs and humidity issues.

“A natural-gas conversion could possibly pay for some of the much-needed upgrades through savings.”

A “side bonus,” he said, “is that you could also see a significant increase in efficiency of the new equipment.”

O’Connor Bus hosts propane-powered event

O’Connor Bus Sales is inviting school officials to join them at their 299 Warren Ave. location in Portland from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Feb. 26 for a Ride-and-Drive Event featuring Blue Bird Vision’s Rough propane-powered school buses.

People planning to attend are asked to RSVP Heather Bernier at 797-7837, or via e-mail at heather.bernier@oconnormaine.com.

Propane-powered buses are a drive toward clean technology at lower expense

Broadband expansion

Continued from previous page

ology expansion goals.

For instance, more than 20 percent of FairPoint’s K-12 customers are already using speeds over 100 Mbps.

Beth McCarthy is a senior Government and Education account manager for FairPoint Communications in Maine. FairPoint is a leading provider of voice and data solutions in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont, and across 17 states nationwide. For more information, contact Beth at (207) 797-1269 or visit fairpoint.com/industry_solutions.



“Today’s technology of boilers, especially for hot-water applications, could realize efficiencies upwards of 95 percent.”

— Tom Seekins

An example, he said, would be a 35-year-old hot-water boiler that has been running on #2 heating oil for many years, which is at the end of its useful life and currently runs at around 78-percent efficiency.

“Instead of just putting a new NG-fired burner on that old boiler, why not consider making the complete boiler replacement that has been in the district’s five-year plan or CIP for several years?” Seekins asked. “Today’s technology of boilers, especially for hot-water applications, could realize efficiencies upwards of 95 percent.

“This difference in efficiency has a direct effect on fuel consumption, which realizes almost as much savings as just converting to gas. On top of this, you can leverage the same savings to make similar efficiency upgrades to ventilation upgrades that are obviously a very important aspect to our learning environments.”

All of these upgrades, he said, can be easily financed, with many attractive financing methods available to schools. The payment to the financial institution that a school partners with simply can be made by the energy savings.

“With many energy service companies located in Maine, this savings for the payment can be guaranteed, creating a financing vehicle for the school that is extremely low-risk,” Seekins added. •••

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Improved cleaning inspection recommended

The International Sanitary Supply Association (ISSA), now known as The Worldwide Cleaning Industry Association, has developed new cleaning standards for K-12 schools, hoping to change schools' perception of what is clean, from the traditional methods, to one that informs them of how well their cleaning processes have eliminated germs.

According to the ISSA, the standard should be considered a tool for schools to measure the effectiveness of their cleaning programs. The ISSA would like schools to not only use the traditional methods of sight, smell and touch, but add to the inspection process.

ATP (adenosine triphosphate) is a chemical that is produced in every living cell. If ATP is present on a surface, it means that microbial organisms or environmental pathogens are also present.

ATP Meters provide a scientific measuring system to the evaluation process.

The association would like schools to develop cleaning guidelines and specifications that include, as often as possible, cleaning of high-touch surfaces recognized as posing health risks in schools (such as student desks, cafeteria tables, restrooms sinks, stall doors, and common area high

touch surfaces).

By reducing the amount of germs from these surfaces, schools will become healthier learning environments for staff and students.

ATP testing provides a guideline to what quantity of germs left on a surface is acceptable. Any amount above that standard should trigger an evaluation of the cleaning process or specification.

The question to be answered is, with schools' ever-tightening budgets, how does a school improve on what it is currently doing? Benchmark has been working closely with the facilities directors in schools to evaluate current workloads of custodians, and have developed new specifications to improve on the services it has been providing. Also re-training to integrate a smarter working procedure, that improves productivity, so custodians can address the high-touch surfaces more often. This is not always as simple as it may sound, but custodial managers must always incorporate a self-evaluation process to their departments, to assure that they are providing the best and most complete service possible.

— From Leo Bifulco, President, Benchmark Cleaning & Supply, www.benchmarkportland.net.

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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After 35 years in business, W.C. Cressey still expanding, improving its services

Wore with less.” That’s how the team at W.C. Cressey and Son, Inc. describes the expectations of the school transportation industry.

Even while new environmental regulations have been placed on the industry, inspection standards continue to make sure that buses operate with no slack for safety items. New, more aggressive chemicals for de-icing take their toll on vehicles day in and out and fuel prices soar. Yet, transportation directors need to focus on topics such as security that were never even considered important 20 years ago. At the same time, school budgets are stretched thinner than ever.

“Both our employees and our customers have had to become experts in not just getting their jobs done but developing creative plans for doing more with less,” said President Brian Cressey. “And their school boards ask them to do it again the next year. We have been doing this since 1979 all over Northern New England, and I don’t think it has ever been tougher.”

Yet, the family-owned and run business seems to handle it all in stride.

Walter Churchill (Church) Cressey and his son, George, started the business out of Church’s attic in Kennebunk in 1979 when there were many different types of bus bodies. W.C. Cressey and Son, Inc. eventually grew and moved to a Main Street office in downtown Kennebunk and then to its present location on Commerce Drive, just 100 yards off the Maine Turnpike.

Constantly evolving in the industry, WCC began chassis repair when then-Freightliner LLC purchased Thomas Built Buses in 1997, then

added Detroit Diesel and Cummins engine repair to its lineup.

Currently, WCC also offers Braun and Ricon wheelchair lift repair and installation and Radio Engineering surveillance systems. It installs and services everything from air-conditioning systems for Rifled Air Conditioning and Mobile Climate Controls that the school buses use in summer school, to Onspot Tire Chains which allow an easy deployment when school buses need to get children home in the snow and ice.

“There isn’t much that we can’t do to a school bus,” boasted George Cressey, who is “easing back a bit” after 35 years. It should be easier to “ease back” now with WCC’s talented staff of department managers. They include DiAnna Reynolds, who oversees the office and all administrative functions; Service Manager John McCrillis, who also deals with technician development; Inside and Outside Parts Manager Kevin Nichols; and Marc Hopkins, who just started as sales manager. Hopkins comes with a long slate of experience in vehicle sales in Maine and New Hampshire.

“We have a great team in place,” said Brian Cressey. “There’s a mix of older, experienced folks and young kids with plenty of enthusiasm.”

WCC sells and services buses all over northern New England from its facility in Kennebunk just as it has since 1979.

“We have been very lucky to be able to take advantage of some opportunities such as our growth in New Hampshire and Vermont,” Brian said. “I am equally grateful that we have remained strong through the recent recession which hit hard, especially in Maine and the education arena. We were able to do this through diversification of our services to serve both customers who required new equipment or those who were trying to get extra years and miles out of older equipment.”

Northern New England, especially Maine, offers a host of challenges that many other regions do not possess. Fleets can be hours from the nearest dealership, result-

ing in the need for road technician work, extra time on the phone trying to support customers, and better training for customers so they can work on their own buses.

Even internet connections, which are required for some diagnosis and work on newer vehicles, can be challenging. So WCC set up trucks with internet capability and often-used tools so they are ready to go at a moment's notice to support customers.

Asked "What does the future hold?" the employees at WCC are excited to respond.

Thomas Built Buses now offers anti-corrosion options, including bedliner-style undercoating, to extend the life of school buses. With corrosion being the chief challenge for Maine school bus technicians, these options should serve to keep buses on the road longer.

Recently enacted EPA changes for diesel engines also mean more stringent requirements for school buses moving forward.

The difference between engine

and computers becomes more blurred every day, according to the technicians in the shop. The new requirements mean better carbon emissions, reductions in oxides of nitrogen (NOx) and particulate matter, and increased fuel mileage.

To achieve these targets, today's school buses need to be finely tuned, incorporating the latest in power-train technology and computer monitoring. And the dealerships and school technicians who support them need to be trained to repair these systems.

It offers all sorts of new-age challenges, while still dealing with the old ones: freezing or hot temperatures, dust and dirt, tough duty cycles and demanding schedules.

"I love the new engines," Brian said. "We get to run a near-zero emissions vehicle to get the most important cargo on the road to school. Thomas Built Buses has also gone zero-waste to landfill in its production processes. We offer the most fuel-efficient bus on the road and there is a ton of interest in alternative-fuel buses right now, with compressed natural gas (CNG), propane, and diesel hybrid electric. It is a lot to handle, but it is great stuff.

"Besides keeping our technicians schooled appropriately, we also attend important state meetings," he added. "We actively participate in the Maine Association for Pupil Transportation (MAPT) and the New Hampshire School Transportation Association (NHSTA) which conduct regular monthly meetings to review industry developments and help develop policy recommendations to state agencies, school officials and legislators.

Among other solutions, the company has also started WCC Leasing LLC, to help customers bridge gaps with traditional funding models.

"We are seeing a lot of customers coming to us and asking, 'What can I do?'" Brian said. "They are looking for solutions embraced by the truck industry or ones that have not even been developed yet. Schools have been hit hard and transportation budgets even harder. I predict that we will see much more leasing, lease-maintenance contracts and a switch to school bus contracting in many places in northern New England as schools explore any option possible.

"Buses keep getting more expensive. Yet at the same time, administrators don't want to cut sports and field trips, or make longer bus runs a reality. And special education, homeless transportation, and summer school all place increasing demands on the transportation department at every school system in the state.

Brian said WCC has quoted more and more transactions where the schools retain their drivers and operating responsibilities but WCC Leasing deals with the buses.

"That way," he said, "the equipment is there and serviced but the school doesn't have to deal with purchasing or financing buses or dealing with old equipment. Big-ticket repairs are covered since they are under warranty. And they get to run a newer fleet, which keeps fuel and maintenance expenses lower."

The staff at W.C. Cressey stands ready to tackle these challenges as they have been for the past 35 years. •••



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‘ [Staff] are not just employees but friends and family. If you treat them with respect and appreciation, it means a lot; it’s not all about money. They want to feel they’re accomplishing something.’
— Luci Milewski



Alone Time

When Milewski isn’t configuring budgets and dealing with staff, studying for her MBA and helping MeASBO advance its aims, she is heavily involved with church, family and friends.

That is, Western Mountains Baptist Church in New Portland; and father Charles and younger brother Chris of Strong and older brother, Scott, his wife Carlene and their three daughters of Augusta.

“I just love being ‘Aunt Luci,’” she said.

People around Strong aren’t surprised to see Milewski on her motorcycle, and she is an independent consultant with Thrive Life Foods, selling freeze-dried and dehydrated foods prepared for long-term storage as well as emergency supplies and equipment.

“I like to be prepared. You never know what might happen that you can’t plan for. It drives me nuts that the public sees the ‘contingency’ line of a budget as the first place to cut. My personal contingency,” she says with a laugh, “is in my pantry.”

Milewski recalls those days in high school and college when she and friends joined dance instructor Brad Adams of Skowhegan and traveled to perform at New Years Eve and Merrill Auditorium events in Portland.

And she waits for one more opportunity to dance — tap dance, that is. •••

Continued from page 12
 a huge a part of it.

“It’s given me a professional and personal chance to make some great friends and contacts through. It’s made me be a part of a group, to be involved, to meet people.

And last year that involvement took a step up to the position of MeASBO secretary.

“It’s been enjoyable to be a part of the group, to get the inside scoop, to be involved in putting together plans,” Milewski said.

The Frustrations

Asked about the difficult economic times schools are facing, she said, “I know everyone’s budget is extraordinarily tight, but being a small district there are so many things we’d like to do but the money is just not there for either certain curricular items or professional development.

“That’s frustrating, not being able to provide all you’d want to. The kids deserve it and the staff needs professional-development time. But we simply cannot afford it.”

The expenses are exacerbated by the district’s high free-and-reduced lunch percentage (one school is over 70 percent).

Taxpayers, she said, already feel they pay too much. And so it has been an education process — both of the School Board and the citizenry.

“We’ve spent the last couple years educating the board about how the budget works, in hopes they see they have to continue to support necessary items. After all, if it weren’t for the students none of us would be here.”

Budget cuts, Milewski said, “begin to dig in and hurt.”

While most staff elimination has been by attrition, she said, “Unfortunately, most cuts have been to the curriculum.

“We want to protect the core, so we dropped foreign language in elementary schools; librarians have been reduced to half-time; we’ve reduced music, art and phys-ed offerings; reduced supply money for the schools, and these are just a few of the things that we have cut that directly affect the students.”

Meanwhile, the state’s attempts at consolidation have not changed SAD 58. Twice it attempted to consolidate — once with RSU 9 in Farmington and another time to create an AOS with SAD 74 in North Anson — but in both cases the voters overwhelmingly objected to the idea.

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RSU 2 breaks new money-raising ground

MONMOUTH — Move over, chocolate bar and cookie drives, RSU 2's Futures Committee, a new group of school board and community members, intends to organize fund-raisers that will generate \$100,000 a year for the district.

The Futures Committee is unique because its profits are not earmarked for a specific school, program or activity, but to directly offset the district's tax burden.

Out of the gate was an ice-fishing derby on Cochnewagen Lake in Monmouth that drew more than 50

participants and raised \$1,000, according to Superintendent Virgel Hammonds.

The committee is planning events to draw people from outside the RSU 2 towns of Monmouth, Farmingdale, Hal-lowell, Richmond and Dresden to avoid asking too much of people who already support the district through their taxes.

Raymond said the Futures Committee is planning a golf tournament and a mud run.

"We want to do new events not being done by booster groups and PTOs because we don't want to take away from their efforts," Hammond said. "We want two

things: one, to attract folks from outside so our towns can highlight what makes them great; and, two, to gain revenues from folks other than RSU 2 residents."

Hammond said the Futures Committee gained "a lot of take-aways. One is that if we had gotten corporate sponsorship we might have quadrupled our revenues. Another is that we should improve advertising our events. Many people didn't even know the fishing derby was being held."

He said the committee is planning social events like a large-scale auction; dinners and networking opportunities encompassing an entry fee; and even an adult prom formal for parents and others in Central Maine, with students providing baby-sitting.

Dave Holden Award nominations being requested

MeASBO members are asked to file nominations for the 2014 recipient of the Dave Holden Award, presented to the Outstanding School Business Official of the Year.

Nominations should include a brief description of the reasons. Candidates should be paid-up members in good standing; have a consistent attendance at MeASBO meetings; assume an active role during meetings and generally support the organization with enthusiasm; be associated with other organizations related to school business and civic organizations; and usually be available for volunteer service to MeASBO.

Nominations should be sent to Past President Kathy Warren of Vinalhaven at kwarren@vinalhavenschool.org; fax number 207-863-4572.

The award will be presented at the last meeting of the school year.

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MeASBO magazine Feature Article Index

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Fall 2013

Natural Gas Conversions

The new fast-and-furious savings vehicle is giving school districts return on investment 'scary fast'

Obamacare and Fast Fines

Portions of the Affordable Care Act are delayed, but others loom with possible 'enormous penalties'

Presidential Q&A

MeASBO's Sue Lambert outlines her vision of an expanded role for the association in education



Summer 2013

Securing Our Schools

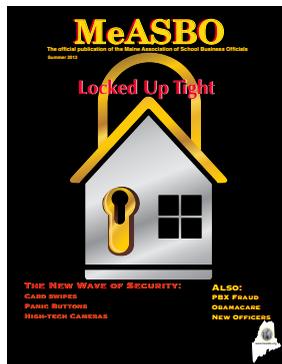
Skeleton keys and streetlights are no longer sufficient to stop or deter evil from entering in

Obamacare Time Squeeze

The Affordable Care Act may not be the Zombie Apocalypse but neither is it proving 'affordable'

PBX Fraud

Telephone hackers are find their way into school systems. Here's how to prevent it



Winter 2012-13

Obama-beware

Two 'hammers' are included in the Affordable Care Act that's coming our way

Outsourcing F&B

Hiring an outside food service is the easiest and best solution for some Maine schools



Set Free, Free Indeed

The medical data is available to show which districts will set themselves free from the MEABT

Member Profile

Biddeford's Terry Gauvin has rolled with the punches and how she's the 'rock.'

Fall 2012

Full Steam Ahead

The Appeals Court handing the MEA's Benefits Trust another defeat in its attempt to derail Maine's new health-insurance law

A New Wrinkle in Outsourcing

Dover, N.H., schools report major savings by contracting out grounds maintenance

Member Profile

RSU 34's Scott Eldridge combines experience in the business world and as a teacher



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

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