



**Maine State Legislature**  
Office of Policy and Legal Analysis

**MEMORANDUM**

August 21, 2007

To: Members, Legislative Youth Advisory Council  
From: Brenna Byrne, Legislative Researcher, OPLA  
Re: State Board of Education Youth Forum: Summary Report to the Legislative Youth Advisory Council

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I am pleased to report the following summary of the Maine State Board of Education's youth forum held last Tuesday August 14 at Bates College in Lewiston.

Date: Tuesday August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2007  
Location: Muskie Archives Building, Bates College, Lewiston Maine

**Legislative Youth Advisory Council Members and Staff Present:** Meg Richardson, Kents Hill; Will Colan, Waterville; Mary Beth Moyer, Lewiston; Hannah Lennett, Litchfield; Brenna Byrne, Staff.

Hosted by the Maine State Board of Education and facilitated by the Maine Youth Action Network, this youth forum engaged 25 high school students from around the state to voice their perspectives and opinions on two key aspects of Maine's education policy infrastructure. From representatives of student governments and other student bodies, members of the Legislative Youth Advisory Council to interested youth citizens, a wide spectrum of Maine's youth voices were heard.

After brief introductions and several ice breaker activities participants quickly dove into the first matter at hand:

***What should the criteria be for the selection of student members to serve on the State Board of Education?***

After a review of the recently enacted legislation that set this forum in motion (20-A MRSA §401) and a brief overview of the role and responsibilities of the State Board of Education, participants were asked to brainstorm, discuss and identify, through small group discussions, the criteria they believe selected student members of the State Board should meet. Participants also addressed concerns about the existing criteria already set in statute and offered suggestions about how the State Board might implement a process for recruiting potential candidates.

The four members of the Legislative Youth Advisory Council present split up to participate in each of four small discussion groups. Each group reported back to the larger audience their thoughts and recommendations for consideration by the State Board of Education, who met Wednesday August 15<sup>th</sup> to decide on the specific criteria to be used to select its youth members and how to implement the selection process. From these small group discussions emerged the following recommendations:

- Allow applicants to submit a personal statement that, in their own words, speaks to what they feel they will bring to the position and why they believe they are qualified;
- At the interview phase of selection, impress upon candidates the level of commitment expected and required of the position;
- When applicable, allow candidates the option of submitting a non-teacher reference, or reference from a knowledgeable adult outside of the school setting (i.e. members of the community, employers);
- Ensure that the pool of potential candidates to be considered equally represent schools across the state;
- Require teacher references to speak to candidates' demonstration of the following qualities;
  - Leadership skills;
  - Community service experience;
  - Commitment and dedication to the State Board's mission;
  - Time management skills;
  - Interest /experience within the education policy arena;
  - A strong, independent student voice;
  - Active involvement in their school and/or community.

In general, participants were not in support of requiring a minimum GPA but were in agreement that the selected candidates should maintain passing grades. Many participants were also concerned about the staggered nature of the selection process already set in statute with only one senior from one congressional district one and one junior from the other congressional. Participants saw an inequity in the fact that students who graduate in an odd year and who reside in the district from which a junior was selected will be excluded because their State Board representative will have been chosen the previous year. Likewise, students who graduate in an even year and who reside in the district from which a senior was selected will be excluded for the same reason.

Just before lunch, Jim Carignan, Chair of the Maine State Board of Education challenged participants to consider the pros and cons of selecting youth members to begin serving on the Board as early as September as opposed to waiting until January when the full Legislature is in session. After some discussion, a majority of participants felt that the sooner the Board could select its youth members and begin its work, the better.

After lunch, the second matter of the day was addressed using the same format with participants choosing to remain in the same groups formed for the first discussion on criteria. In the

afternoon work session, participants were asked to brainstorm and respond to the following question:

***What should the structure of student engagement look like to ensure that student voices influence public policy in Maine?***

A much broader topic of discussion, this resulted in a mosaic of ideas, thoughts, and suggestions for State Board and other State policy makers to consider. Though a range of diverse perspectives were shared, the following commonalities emerged from small group reports to the larger audience:

- Student representation should exist at all levels of policy decision-making (i.e. school, district, state);
- Elected officials should regularly come into direct contact with the youth they represent;
- Engage more youth to be involved in Maine's public policy process;
- Increase visibility of and communication among existing youth groups such as MYAN and LYAC, who are engaged in public policy issues;
- Student members of policy decision-making bodies should eventually have the same rights and status as their adult counterparts (i.e. the right to vote);
- Increase awareness and "spread the word" among Maine's youth about civic engagement opportunities around the state;
- Increase youth representation in the State Legislature (i.e. beyond LYAC);

To wrap things up, participants had an opportunity to vocalize their appreciation for various aspects of the event, the discussions, and the contributions of participants. There was a general sense of accomplishment and sentiments of appreciation for the opportunity to be involved with the event were echoed by many participants. Participants spoke to the fact that they felt as though their voices were heard and the resulting messages will make a difference.

Jim closed the forum with the promise that the State Board would follow up with participants about its decision on these matters. Email contact information was collected from participants interested in learning more about the Legislative Youth Advisory Council.