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To: DOE, SIS <SIS.DOE@maine.gov>
Subject: Maine Learning Results - Public Comments

It's been over 20 years - thank you for the opportunity to comment on the MLR specifically, and the Standards Movement in general. Like any guideline, the MLR have organized curriculum over the past two decades. Yet in combination with the concurrent federal initiative of high-stakes testing mandated by No Child Left Behind, the standards became **ambitious, competitive, and unrealistic**. **Ambitious** in that no days were added to the school year, yet the curriculum now ranged from "figures of the 20th Century" to comparing them to those of previous centuries. Every grade level taking the MEA, NECAP, SBAC or EmPowerMEA has been under pressure to not just deliver their own locally-determined portions of the Content Standard and Performance Indicators (as now blended with the Common Core), but to also prep kids for anything that might come their way on the test. The resulting lessons? Tedious with detail, or too broad, and not meeting the kids' developmental needs. Middle schoolers were expected to not only to learn about their world, but rather to become experts on its past, and to write sophisticated, on-demand responses when asked about such matters. No mere summaries would do here, but fully-developed, 7-paragraph essays were expected by the SBAC. Since no minutes were added to the day, and no days were added to the school year, kids just lost their recess, as budget-cuts took away any hands-on classes such as HomeEc or Shop.

Competitive standards? We are guilty of standards chasing. The MLR was revised, then the Common Core adopted, and now the Next Gen Science Standards and the C3 Framework threaten to replace what remains of the MLR. They may indeed be improvements, but here's what happens at the local level. A state mandate is delivered to administration, who have no choice but to crack the whip on implementation. Existing curriculum? Throw it up into the air! As it comes down, reorganize it for all you're worth. Building level teams are re-structured, content is shifted to hit learning targets before the content shows up on a test, and what was gained? Professional development days served only this transition, while the loss of teaming relationships, the loss of developmentally appropriate tasks at grade level, the loss of experienced teachers who chose these latest initiatives as their reason to retire...the many losses outweigh any possible gains. If the gains are there, have they been measured on the MEA, NECAP, or SBAC? So we wait and wonder for the EmPowerMEA will be able to measure any success. Meanwhile, the Legislature and the DoE had other initiatives to promote. GLEs? Schools reorganized! SLOs? Teachers now document for many additional hours. MLTI? There's no time for that - let the technology integrate itself. PEPG? Conform district practice to the new protocols, but cut administration just as the hours required have tripled. When does it end?

With all these worthy, yet competing initiatives, the Standards Based reforms become **unrealistic**. The Legislature's choice to abandon the SBAC seemed to recognize that. Yet the cost saving measure of helping local districts pay for the NWEA as an annual assessment was not taken. Instead, the DOE has spent millions in developing its own test, most recently called the EmPowerMEA. The local districts still pay of the NWEA in order to supply data for federal programs like Title I and now the ESSA. See what happened to the kids in all this? We stopped teaching them. We got caught up in teaching the standards, and in order to measure our success (or lack thereof) kids are saddled with multiple rounds of high-stakes testing. Nearly a month of the school year is dedicated to these assessments, and test fatigue is the result. Students click through the screens, enter Submit, exit the test, and in the case of the EmPowerMEA, wait months or a year before they have any feedback. So much for the technology that was meant to offer timely results. The other vastly unrealistic aspect of implementing these standards has been the policy to accept late work. The intention was of course a good one: to allow each learner his or her own pace. In practice, however, screen-addicted teens would shrug off due dates, ending the term w/ hastily submitted work that in many cases forced schools to fund the time & resources for "standards recovery." What had students learned? Manipulation & procrastination -- not exactly the job-ready skills that Maine businesses have been promised with a standards-based diploma.

Teacher anecdotes like this are often dismissed as not being reliable. So let's look at the data. Test scores have plateaued, or follow a slow downward trend in reading, and a sharp downward trend in math. (My favorite data points for this view are the NAEP compared to any of our state-administered tests. As we have assessment-hopped, the NAEP has consistently documented the plateau or decline in 4th and 8th grade achievement.) The NWEA -used and paid for by many districts throughout the state, however, shows individual yearly growth. That growth may not meet a standard, but any teacher who finds Tommy in her class knows that to take an abused & neglected child from a 3rd grade level to a 5th grade level is a successful year. To hell with the 7th grade "standards" he's supposed to "meet." He's come a long way, and to deny that progress with constant negative feedback and labels of DOES NOT MEET, or PARTIALLY MEETS is just unfair & wrong. Praise Timmy to the moon for overcoming his homeless months at that cold campground, and let him know how proud you are of all the gains he has made. Give a sigh of relief that you never had to show him the "significantly below" results of his last state test, because he had of course moved out of the district before the scores were released (The millions spent on the EmPowerMEA could have

helped Tommy's family more in the form of home-health, addiction treatment, etc) Just hope that Tommy remembers that you adored him, and hope the best for him.) For the legislators who voted for Standards Based Curriculum, or Proficiency Based Curriculum, or whatever the lexicon is for 2018, know that the intention was noble to hold all students to high expectations, but it was poorly timed to occur with an opioid epidemic just as screen-addictions have eroded parental support, and kids are coming to school with fewer basic social & emotional skills. Full day Kindergarten is in place not to work on those issues, but to improve test scores by third grade. Have the standards helped the kids? Look at the test scores for your answer.

So as the standards are re-evaluated, and probably updated, know that the last overhaul of the SS MLR was meant to simplify the four Content Standards and their 50+ Performance Indicators. It was the largest set of standards in the original document. Instead of simplifying it, another Content Standard was added! The Applications of SS were added in addition to the original categories of Civics & Government, History, Geography and Economics. Once again, more time was not added to allow for more standards, but we've done our level best to still deliver the original four areas of this content in engaging and authentic ways. But remember the month lost to the testing? There's a lot thrown at the kids in just 8 months now. Somehow I will try not to worry that we've overdone our reforms. To satisfy the expectations of the PEPG, I will post my learning targets, dedicate time to the metacognition of literacy and numeracy strategies, allowing the kids even less time than ever to experience the Social Studies content.

Twenty years ago the standards movement began -in part - as an effort to demystify what an "85" meant in English. Today, technology does just that. PowerSchool, Infinite Campus & other online grading programs offer parents a look at all the assignments in the grade book, with descriptions, scores, and even individual comments. Parents can access updated information at the click of a button. That has been extremely useful to me as a parent and as a teacher. Meanwhile, much of the MLR has been supplanted by the Common Core, and the Next Gen Science Standards and the C3 framework lurk to replace what remains of the Learning Results. Parents are left to decipher the Byzantine language of these intermingled standards, and the arbitrary scoring mechanisms that accompany them. I currently teach a Geography course that uses none of the Geography Content Standards; administration preferred that the Applications of SS standards be used. I have offered feed back to my students over the past 20 years using letter grades, 100-pt. scales, a 4 pt. scale, in combination w/ other markers such as N, PP, P, Pw/D, or DNM, PM, M and E. Confused? That was the feedback from parents. Conferences were eaten up in translating the standards, and demystifying the rating scales. Little time left to talk about their child.

My daughter's experience offers another disturbing glimpse into the reality these policies have brought to the classroom. I might ask what is meant by Number Sense as a standard in Math, but she'll only shrug her shoulders. She's not sure if it means place value, computations, or even scientific notation. When I ask what the 3 means that she earned in Number Sense, she again shrugs her shoulders. She had tried to earn a 4, but some of her teachers warn that it's not always possible. You see, when tested, she got a 100, but that only receive a 3, because passing the test "met the standard." There was no way to exceed the standard, or earn a 4. There likely wasn't time. Sadly, some teachers are warned that they can't catch a child beyond a "meets" score. That would be interfering with the creativity & innovation that truly defines an "exceeds" score. So my daughter often can't earn the old-school "A." To her credit she has kept working hard, in hopes of still being on the honor roll. Now, that too, is in jeopardy. She earned honors in 7th grade, but to date the school has not printed an honor roll for her 8th grade year. I asked if she felt like something had been taken away from her, and she strongly agreed. "Mom, last year they said we would be able to earn Highest Honors, so I worked extra hard to have all my scores over 95, and to earn all 3s and 4s, but now we don't even have an honor roll." Is this really what the Legislature wanted? To take away incentives? To relay that excellence is unattainable? We have been hearing about honor roll and class rank being phased out, and it may have finally happened to my daughter. I am not seeing that this change came with any benefits. Instead, I see more draw backs. Consider other school policies that have slowed down the pace of the curriculum. Late work is allowed without penalty promotes procrastination. The average of all assignments is now discouraged, and the most recent 3 to 5 scores instead are considered more valid data. To me as a teacher that sounded reasonable, but I did wonder how I would fit in 3-5 assessments per standard when one quiz may have been all that time allowed before. My daughter gave me a different perspective: "Mom, when we work on a unit for two weeks, some of the kids know that none of the grades count until we do the last three assignments. They know they can goof off for 7 days!" I was stunned...she was absolutely right, and I could see that the kids had found another loop hole. Just like accepting late work w/o penalty encouraged procrastination, scoring only 3 days work out of ten meant kids took a week off. Is this really what we want?!

I have sent this plea to my delegation in Augusta before, but I will repeat it for you: **Please, let's stop teaching standards, and get back to teaching students.** Please stop the standards chasing. Adopting yet another set of standards leads to re-tooling the tests, grading scales, and even dismantling the existing structures we have to communicate and recognize achievement. If the testing data we've collected over the past 20 years is disappointing, then we have the Standards Movement to thank for two decades of poor performance.