

Dirigo Schools of Distinction

Dirigo Schools of Distinction (DSD) is intended to celebrate Maine schools that are making a meaningful difference for students, staff, and communities. DSD also offers a clear, supportive roadmap for schools and school administrative units (SAUs), as they consider where to focus time, energy, and resources to strengthen student outcomes.

Through extensive conversations and data collection across the state, the Measure What Matters initiative identified the conditions, practices, and outcomes that Mainers consistently value and have deemed most important in their public schools. From this data, a [report](#) was published and used to create a framework called “Dirigo Schools of Distinction.” That framework is organized into several pillars, each with a set of indicators that reflect the priorities voiced by Mainers. Across all pillars, DSD emphasizes a set of critical life skills identified through the Measure What Matters initiative and aligned closely with Maine’s Guiding Principles:

Critical Life Skills	Maine’s Guiding Principles
• Adaptability • Collaboration • Communication • Creativity • Critical Thinking • Metacognition • Resilience • Self-Management • Technical Skills	• Clear and Effective Communicator • Self-Directed and Lifelong Learner • Creative and Practical Problem Solver • Responsible and Involved Citizen • Integrative and Informed Thinker

DSD is intended to recognize and highlight schools that nurture these skills and principles through effective programming, policies, and strategies — and encourages the sharing of those practices across the state.

Rubric

The Dirigo Schools of Distinction rubric contains seven pillars of excellence that recognize schools for the following:

- Excellence in Academics and Instructional Practices
- Excellence in Community and Family Engagement
- Excellence in Health and Wellness
- Excellence in Culture and Climate
- Excellence in Innovation and Innovative Practices
- Excellence in School Leadership, Educators, and Staff
- Excellence in Student Engagement

Every year, schools may apply to be recognized for excellence in **one** of these seven DSD pillars. Participating schools will complete an online application that contains the rubric for the pillar to which they are applying. An advisory committee made up of representatives from the public education field and overseen by the Maine Department of Education (DOE) Office of Innovation will review application submissions and ultimately select awardees. Application submissions are due by **January 30** of each year.

To be eligible to apply for a DSD pillar, a school must first complete the **Outcomes and Continuous Growth** section of the rubric. Many of the listed **Measures** are data points that are already collected for state reporting every year. A participating school may choose to mark “Outcomes” if it has achieved the Measure. If a school has not achieved the Measure but has seen significant improvement in that area, it may choose to mark “Continuous Growth” with a brief supporting narrative (no more than 100 words). Elementary schools must achieve three of these Outcomes/Continuous Growth Measures to be eligible for a pillar. Middle/high schools must achieve five.

Once a school has determined its eligibility, it can apply for a DSD pillar. Each pillar contains multiple indicators based on the data/information collected during the Measure What Matters initiative. Leaders from the public education field collaborated to assign a **Priority Multiplier** (1-3) to each of these indicators to determine their comparative values and weights in the rubric.

The Priority Multiplier is multiplied by an **Evidence of Practice Measure** (1-3), which the applying school self-assigns and explains through a brief narrative (no more than 100 words):

- 1 = Emerging (i.e., There is some training for/use of the indicator at the school.)
- 2 = Partially in place (i.e., There is schoolwide training for/use of the indicator at the school.)
- 3 = Universally in place/generalized among staff and students (i.e., There is consistent schoolwide training for/use of the indicator at the school that has resulted in positive outcomes.)

Note: If an SAU has multiple schools within a grade span (i.e., elementary, middle school, high school), leadership may choose to submit a single application for all schools in that grade span. In this case,

Outcomes/Continuous Growth Measures and Evidence of Practice Measures for the selected pillar should be averaged across participating schools.

The advisory committee reviews submissions and calculates a final total score. To be recognized for a DSD pillar, a school must achieve **at least 90% of the total possible score** as marked on the rubric. *Note: The total possible scores for each pillar may vary slightly for elementary versus middle/high school level.*

Schools that are ultimately recognized for a DSD pillar will earn a **DSD Badge of Excellence** for that school year and be celebrated during a statewide event in the spring.

Acknowledging that work is always underway to achieve best practices in public education, the DSD pillars and corresponding indicators will be **up for review** by the advisory committee every spring.

Outcomes and Continuous Growth

Measures	Outcomes: The school achieved the measure in the previous school year. <i>(Mark with an X.)</i>	Continuous Growth: The school did not achieve the measure in the previous school year but saw significant improvement. <i>(Mark with an X and include a narrative of 100 words or fewer justifying the selection.)</i>
85% of first-year high school students at the school passed all courses. <i>(middle/high school)</i>		
The school met its annual school growth measure/target on the state assessment, as outlined on the school ESSA profile.		
The school-wide average is at or above the state expectation in math.* <i>*State expectations vary from year to year. Please reference the Maine DOE ESSA Dashboard for the most current state expectation:</i> https://www.maine.gov/doe/dashboard		
The school-wide average is at or above the state expectation in reading.* <i>*State expectations vary from year to year. Please reference the Maine DOE ESSA Dashboard for the most</i>		

current state expectation: https://www.maine.gov/doe/dashboard		
97% of the school's students graduate or earn the equivalent of a high school diploma within six years. (middle/high school)		
80% of the school's students are enrolled in college or a career-training program and/or are employed full-time upon graduation. (middle/high school)		
The chronic absenteeism rate among students at the school is under 18%.		
Fewer than 2% of students received out-of-school exclusionary disciplinary consequences, indicating effective classroom management and behavioral support systems.		
Other measures not reflected (e.g., % of multilingual learners who made meaningful progress, % of students who go on to graduate college): _____.* *A school may provide up to three additional examples and should include a narrative of 100 words or fewer explaining the addition.		
TOTAL: <i>(Tally the number of Outcomes and Continuous Growth Measures marked with an X.)</i> To be eligible to apply for a DSD pillar, an elementary school must achieve three Outcomes/Continuous Growth Measures, and a middle/high school must achieve five.		

Pillars

Excellence in Academics and Instructional Practices

Intended to recognize schools for providing students with opportunities to achieve the Maine Learning Results through practices that support accelerated learning programs, multiple pathways to graduation, experiential and project-based learning, and the use of assessments to guide instruction.

Indicators	Evidence of Practice Measure* (1-3) *Include a narrative of 100 words or fewer justifying the selection.	x Priority Multiplier (1-3)	=
The school offers opportunities for all students to achieve the Maine Learning Results through student-centered pathways. <i>(middle/high school)</i>		3	
The school utilizes evidence-based best practices identified in the State of Maine Literacy and Numeracy Playbooks.		2	
The school uses Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), including classroom-based, inclusive interventions before special education referrals.		3	
The school has programming in place for early academic risk identification and intervention (e.g., BARR, MTSS, Restorative Practices, Structured Advisory, Student Assistance Team, etc.).		3	
The school offers accelerated learning opportunities (e.g., AP, Early College, IB, Talent Development/Enrichment, etc.) as part of a comprehensive MTSS framework responsive to student growth.		3	
The school utilizes differentiated practices, such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), to ensure all students can access and engage in rigorous learning.		2	
The school offers interdisciplinary, project-based learning.		2	
The school utilizes progress monitoring and formative assessments to inform and guide instructional practices.		3	

The school utilizes Maine Early Learning and Development Standards for pre-K to elementary education. <i>(elementary)</i>		3	
The school offers multiple pathways to graduation. <i>(middle/high school)</i>		3	
The school's teachers provide frequent and consistent feedback to students to enhance learning outcomes.		3	
The school's youngest learners (pre-K through elementary students) participate in play-based instruction. <i>(elementary)</i>		3	
The school consistently incorporates science into daily instruction for pre-K through elementary students. <i>(elementary)</i>		2	
The school's curriculum proactively integrates career and life skills into curricula. <i>(middle/high school)</i>		2	
Academics at the school incorporate experiential learning and work experiences. <i>(middle/high school)</i>		2	
The school's career exploration programs and activities are linked to academic standards or courses. <i>(middle/high school)</i>		2	
Other points of pride regarding academics and instructional practices systems/practices that are not reflected in this pillar include: _____.** **A school may provide up to three additional examples (worth 1 point each) to be counted toward the total score.			
TOTAL: <i>(Add the numbers in the far-right column for the score.)</i> To be recognized as a DSD - Excellence in Academics and Instructional Practices, an elementary school must score at least 78, and a middle/high school must score at least 89.			

Excellence in Community and Family Engagement

Intended to recognize schools for fostering positive, productive relationships with families and members of the community through clear and consistent communication, partnerships, and serving as a hub for activities and events.

Indicators	Evidence of Practice Measure* (1-3) <i>*Include a narrative of 100 words or fewer justifying the selection.</i>	x Priority Multiplier (1-3)	=
The school provides structured opportunities for families to learn ways to reinforce learning at home.		2	
The school has an accessible system for regular communication with families/caregivers and students.		3	
The school's leaders and educators systemically use preemptive, positive outreach to build relationships early (ideally before any difficult conversations).		3	
The school's communication with families/caregivers is provided in applicable languages and in accessible formats.		3	
The school has before- and after-school care partnerships. <i>(elementary)</i>		1	
Families and caregivers know where to find information about school schedules, student progress, events, and opportunities.		3	
The emergency management plan is developed in collaboration with local emergency management and public safety agencies.		3	
The emergency management plan includes a communications plan or system for families/caregivers and community partners.		3	
The school provides numerous opportunities and supports for families/caregivers to engage with the school.		2	
The school provides community-based learning opportunities (e.g., ELOs, job shadowing, or other programs that involve partnerships with local businesses and agencies).		2	
The school welcomes community-based events.		1	

The school forms strong partnerships with families/caregivers and organizations, coordinating wrap-around supports as needed.		2	
The school is involved with the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative or has other after-school learning partnerships.		1	
Other points of pride regarding community and family engagement systems/practices that are not reflected in this pillar include: _____.** **A school may provide up to three additional examples (worth 1 point each) to be counted toward the total score.			
TOTAL: (Add the numbers in the far-right column for the score.) To be recognized as a DSD - Excellence in Community and Family Engagement, an elementary school must score at least 78, and a middle/high school must score at least 76.			

Excellence in Health and Wellness

Intended to recognize schools for prioritizing the physical, mental, and emotional health and safety of students and staff.

Indicators	Evidence of Practice Measure* (1-3) *Include a narrative of 100 words or fewer justifying the selection.	x Priority Multiplier (1-3)	=
The school provides designated outdoor learning spaces and regularly schedules outdoor learning activities.		2	
The school's recesses/movement breaks are thoughtfully incorporated into the daily schedule for all students.		3	
The school's mental health staff and supports are available to students.		3	
The school's nursing services and health supports are available to students.		3	
The school's health education focuses on both physical and mental health.		3	

The school provides physical education to all students.		3	
The school has tools for early-risk identification, prevention, and intervention for substance use.		2	
The school reviews the Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS) or similar data to address needs.		2	
On average, more than 85% of students participate in the free meals offered at the school because of their nutritious and appealing qualities.		1	
The school participates in programs and partnerships supporting health and wellness (e.g., Maine Farm and Sea to School Network, nutrition programs, etc.) and offers culturally diverse meals.		1	
Wellness is included within professional learning activities offered to the school's staff.		1	
The school ensures that educators are trained in classroom management strategies, including preemptive techniques for emotional regulation and early de-escalation.		3	
The school maintains policies and practices that support educator and student wellness (physical, mental, and emotional).		2	
The school maintains adequate safety planning and preparedness (e.g. emergency preparedness plan/EOP review).		3	
Other points of pride regarding health and wellness systems/practices that are not reflected in this pillar include: _____.** **A school may provide up to three additional examples (worth 1 point each) to be counted toward the total score.			
TOTAL: <i>(Add the numbers in the far-right column for the score.)</i> To be recognized as a DSD - Excellence in Health and Wellness, a school must score at least 86.			

Excellence in Culture and Climate

Intended to recognize schools for promoting a sense of belonging and inclusion among students, staff, and family and community members, resulting in an engaging, positive, and welcoming environment.

Indicator	Evidence of Practice Measure* (1-3) <i>*Include a narrative of 100 words or fewer justifying the selection.</i>	x Priority Multiplier (1-3)	=
The school uses a Whole-Student Approach, utilizing comprehensive data (e.g., attendance, behavior, connectedness, restorative practices, climate/culture surveys, etc.) to inform programs and courses and monitor progress.		3	
The school has a system for collecting information about workplace culture.		2	
The school uses teaming structures or other methods to create smaller learning communities		2	
The school uses responsive practices to create a welcoming environment for all students, including those with disabilities and vulnerable populations, to feel known and connected.		3	
The school employs a tiered approach (MTSS) to foster both academic and behavioral success for all students.		3	
The school conducts systemic reviews to ensure equitable access for students to all programs and develops goals to address gaps in participation.		2	
The school deliberately engages in relationship building to ensure that all students are well known by educators and connected with their peers.		3	
The school actively engages families/caregivers and community partners through a systemic approach.		2	
Other points of pride regarding culture and climate systems/practices that are not reflected in this pillar include: _____.** <i>**A school may provide up to three additional examples (worth 1 point each) to be counted toward the total score.</i>			

TOTAL: <i>(Add the numbers in the far-right column for the score.)</i> To be recognized as a DSD - Excellence in Culture and Climate, a school must score at least 54.	
--	--

Excellence in Innovation and Innovative Practices

Intended to recognize schools for embracing and encouraging innovation in curriculum, facilities, practices, and resources.

Indicator	Evidence of Practice Measure* (1-3) <i>*Include a narrative of 100 words or fewer justifying the selection.</i>	x Priority Multiplier (1-3)	=
The school's professional climate actively fosters collaboration and intentional, innovative teaching practices to improve student outcomes.		3	
The school's facilities reflect innovation (e.g., green energy, locally sourced nutrition programs, etc.), and the school effectively utilizes free related Maine DOE resources.		2	
The school offers alternative education pathways. <i>(middle/high school)</i>		3	
The school incorporates outdoor/nature-based and/or place-based learning.		3	
The school's instructional model includes emerging technologies (e.g., AI) and design thinking alongside entrepreneurial programs.		2	
The school's instructional model includes interdisciplinary units or courses, such as Civics, Financial Literacy, Humanities, Solutionaries, STEM/STEAM, etc.		3	
The school ensures equitable access to innovative programs and classes, offering flexible scheduling for staff, students, and families/caregivers.		2	
The school provides opportunities for staff, students, and school leaders to actively collaborate on creative solutions to local challenges.		3	

Other points of pride regarding innovation and innovative practices systems/practices that are not reflected in this pillar include: _____.** **A school may provide up to three additional examples (worth 1 point each) to be counted toward the total score.			
TOTAL: <i>(Add the numbers in the far-right column for the score.)</i> To be recognized as a DSD - Excellence in Innovation and Innovative Practices, an elementary school must score at least 49, and a middle/high school must score at least 57.			

Excellence in School Leadership, Educators, and Staff

Intended to recognize schools for fostering a strong workplace culture in which educators and staff feel valued, have opportunities to strengthen their craft via professional development, and develop leadership skills in an effort to provide students with the best possible education.

Indicator	Evidence of Practice Measure* (1-3) <i>*Include a narrative of 100 words or fewer justifying the selection.</i>	x Priority Multiplier (1-3)	=
The school has intentional strategies in place to build and sustain a strong, positive workplace culture.		3	
Teacher leadership is developed and fostered intentionally at the school.		2	
The school has a strong staff mentoring program, complemented by an effective onboarding process for new hires.		3	
The school offers professional development opportunities that are tailored to staff needs and interests, including training, support, and resources for effective teaching and leadership.		3	
Communities of practice at the school reflect teacher voice, interests, and needs.		1	

The school's leadership encourages educators to design interesting and motivating lessons, demonstrating skills in classroom management and understanding student behavior.		3	
The school's leadership routinely requests input and feedback from staff and actively participates in the celebration and recognition of staff.		2	
Other points of pride regarding school leadership, educators, and staff systems/practices that are not reflected in this pillar include: ____.** **A school may provide up to three additional examples (worth 1 point each) to be counted toward the total score.			
TOTAL: (Add the numbers in the far-right column for the score.) To be recognized as a DSD - Excellence in School Leadership, Educators, and Staff, a school must score at least 46.			

Excellence in Student Engagement

Intended to recognize schools for encouraging student engagement inside and outside of the classroom, ensuring that students feel as though they are part of a greater community and find value in connecting and engaging with their peers.

Indicator	Evidence of Practice Measure* (1-3) *Include a narrative of 100 words or fewer justifying the selection.	x Priority Multiplier (1-3)	=
The school ensures that immersive, active, and hands-on learning is a fundamental component of everyday instruction.		3	
The school provides opportunities for students to engage in community-based learning (e.g., ELOs, service projects, etc.).		2	
Students with IEPs spend a significant portion of their time alongside typically developing peers in regular classroom settings to ensure the least restrictive environment.		3	

Special education students at the school report feeling prepared by the transition planning provided.		3	
The school routinely implements specific strategies to promote and improve student attendance.		3	
The school offers a variety of extra- and co-curricular activities tailored to student interest and feedback.		2	
The school addresses cost and transportation barriers to student participation in extracurricular programs, such as by accounting for transportation needs, providing loaner instruments, or offering programs during the regular school day.		2	
The school has an effective system in place to support students in developing a postsecondary plan.		2	
The school fosters a well-established culture of student leadership, with clubs and organizations aligning with student interests.		2	
The school provides opportunities for older students to mentor younger students.		2	
Other points of pride regarding student engagement systems/practices that are not reflected in this pillar include: _____.** **A school may provide up to three additional examples (worth 1 point each) to be counted toward the total score.			
TOTAL: <i>(Add the numbers in the far-right column for the score.)</i> To be recognized as a DSD - Excellence in Student Engagement, a school must score at least 65.			