

## **Maine Learning Results Taskforce**

**Topic:** Surface Shared Learning

**Date:** February 11, 2025

**Location:** Virtual (Zoom)

**Time:** 3:00 – 5:00 p.m.

### **Meeting Goals**

- Surface and articulate shared learning from prior meetings and homework.
- Identify recurring patterns in existing standards that either support or constrain deep, accessible learning.
- Name persistent tensions embedded in standards design (e.g., clarity vs. flexibility, coherence vs. responsiveness, accountability vs. rich learning).
- Develop shared language to describe what should always and never be true of standards designed for deep learning.
- Generate a preliminary set of patterns and tensions that will serve as the foundation for developing design criteria and principles.

### **Presenters and Facilitators**

- Beth Lambert, Chief Teaching and Learning Officer, Maine Department of Education
- Ellen Cushing and Beth Ratway, Northeast Comprehensive Center (NECC)

### **In Attendance**

#### **Taskforce Members**

Angela Hardy, Brian Cole, Courtney McLellan, Craig Haims, David Dorr, Deb McIntyre, Dee Saucier, Dr. Thomas Ambrose, Elizabeth Coen, Erica Mazzeo, Glenn Cummings, Hermenegildo Paulo, Jason Judd, Jen Belanger, Jennifer Nickerson, Julie Kimball, Kaitlin Young, Kevin Lavoie, Mercedes Pour, Paulette Bonneau, Peter Geiger, Renita Ward-Downer Brewer, Ruth Kermish, Sade Francis, Stephanie Bresett, and Tori Hildreth.

#### **DOE Staff**

Beth Lambert, Laura Cy, Nicole Madore, and additional staff supporting facilitation and logistics.

#### **Partner Organizations**

Northeast Comprehensive Center (NECC).

### **Discussion Summary**

#### **1. Welcome and Framing – Beth Lambert**

Beth welcomed Taskforce members and reaffirmed the group's mandate under LD 1701. She provided a brief overview of where the Taskforce has been and where it is headed: Meeting 1 focused on grounding the "why" behind the work—clarifying the charge, reflecting on the purpose and impact of standards, and surfacing hopes, tensions, and questions. Meeting 2 connected the Science of Learning and Development (SoLD) to standards design, and members applied a SoLD

lens to current standards through homework annotations. She framed today's session as a bridge between the foundational work and the design work ahead, with the goal of surfacing shared learning, identifying patterns and tensions, and beginning to build the language that will guide future design criteria and recommendations.

## 2. Unpacking the Homework – Individual Reflection

Taskforce members were given time to individually review their standard annotations from the interim homework assignment and write short observations based on four guiding questions:

- What should never be true of standards?
- What should always be true of standards designed for deep learning?
- How would we know—just by reading a standard—that it reflects SoLD principles?
- What principle would you want future standards writers to hold in mind when facing tough tradeoffs?

## 3. Unpacking the Homework – Small Group Reflections

Members moved into their small groups to share observations, cluster similar ideas, and identify recurring themes across their individual reflections. Groups worked to find common threads in what they noticed about existing standards and what they believe should guide future standards design.

## 4. Unpacking the Homework – Large Group Share Out

Each small group reported back to the full Taskforce on the recurring themes that emerged from their discussions. Common themes across groups included the need for standards to be learner-centered and relevant to students' lives, accessible and clear for all educators, flexible enough to honor local context and diverse learners, and reflective of the whole child rather than narrow academic content alone.

## 5. Reflecting on What We've Learned – Individual Reflection

Members were asked to individually review notes from Taskforce Meeting #1 and Taskforce Meeting #2, as well as their standard annotations, and write three learning statements framed as:

- “We’ve learned that students learn best when...”
- “We’ve noticed standards tend to...”
- “We keep encountering tension between...”

This activity was designed to synthesize cumulative insights from across the Taskforce's work to date and prepare members to identify broader patterns and persistence tensions.

## 6. Identifying Patterns and Tensions – Small Group Work

Taskforce members were placed into new small groups, introduced themselves, and shared their learning statements. Groups then worked collaboratively to identify two to three patterns and one to two persistent tensions in standards design. The following captures what emerged across all groups.

## Emerging Patterns:

- **Relevance and Real-World Connection:** Across nearly every group, members emphasized that students learn best when learning is relevant, meaningful, and connected to real-world experiences. Standards should reflect the "why" behind the learning and enable students to see purpose in what they are being asked to do. Members noted that current standards often lack this connection, leaving students disengaged.
- **Practicality and Usability for Educators:** Multiple groups identified that standards need to be practical, clearly written, and formatted in a way that is accessible to teachers. Members noted that current standards are too long, too complicated, and too difficult for teachers to unpack on their own. Several groups called for standards organized in unit-like clusters or with consistent formatting across content areas to support planning and implementation rather than interpretation.
- **Whole-Child Focus:** Groups consistently observed that standards should address the whole child—including social-emotional development, relationships, identity, culture, and a sense of safety and belonging—rather than focusing narrowly on academic content. Members noted a tension between what is developmentally best for students and the expectations that schools and employers hold, and that current standards tend to prioritize knowledge attainment without attention to application, demonstration, or the conditions that support deep learning.
- **Integration and Interdisciplinary Connections:** There was strong agreement that future standards should break down silos between content areas and support integrated, multidisciplinary learning. Groups noted that learning in upper grades is particularly siloed and that standards are content-driven in ways that make it difficult to assess cross-cutting skills such as literacy or collaboration within other disciplines.
- **Clarity with Flexibility:** Groups identified a pattern around the need for standards that are clear about expected outcomes while remaining flexible in how students demonstrate learning and how educators deliver instruction. Members emphasized that standards should be "clear in the why but flexible in the how," providing big-picture expectations rather than exhaustive, prescriptive lists.
- **Community Connections and Multiple Pathways:** Several groups highlighted the importance of connecting learning to community contexts and offering multiple pathways for students to demonstrate mastery. Members stressed that authentic learning often happens outside the classroom and that standards should create space for project-based, community-grounded, and experiential approaches to learning.
- **Student Choice and Personalization:** Members observed that students learn best when they have voice and choice in their learning—in topics, in how they engage, and in how they demonstrate understanding. Standards should support personalized learning while still maintaining consistent expectations.

## Persistent Tensions:

- **Clarity vs. Flexibility:** The desire for clear, specific standards that provide consistent expectations statewide was in tension with the need for flexibility to honor local contexts,

cultural responsiveness, and diverse learner needs. Members noted that standards need to give enough information to be useful without becoming overwhelming or overly prescriptive.

- **Breadth vs. Depth:** Groups identified a persistent tension between covering a broad range of content and allowing sufficient depth for students to develop mastery and transferable skills. Members noted that the sheer number of current standards makes it difficult to go deep, and that the push to include everything works against the goal of prioritizing essentials.
- **Accountability and Assessment vs. Rich Learning:** Members recognized a tension between standards as tools for accountability and measurement versus standards as frameworks for fostering deep, meaningful learning. Multiple groups noted a disconnect between what standards ask of teachers and students and what high-stakes testing asks of them. Authentic assessment was described as nuanced, while policy and public perception demand easy-to-digest measurements.
- **Statewide Consistency vs. Local Control:** Ensuring equitable expectations across all districts while preserving the autonomy of schools and communities to make decisions about curriculum, instruction, and assessment remained a persistent concern. Members noted that Maine is a local control state, and different communities hold strongly different beliefs about what is important, which creates an ongoing challenge for standards design.
- **Whole Child vs. Content Coverage:** Groups identified a tension between honoring the development of the whole child—including social-emotional learning, relationships, cultural responsiveness, and durable life skills—and the expectation to cover defined academic content. Members questioned whether building multiple pathways and attending to enrichment and student supports diminishes rigor or enhances it.
- **Interdisciplinary Learning vs. Content Expertise:** The desire for integrated, interdisciplinary standards was in tension with longstanding structures that organize teaching and assessment around discrete content areas. High school educators in particular noted that content-specific roles and siloed instruction have been entrenched for a long time and are difficult to shift, especially when standards are written in content-driven ways.
- **Research-Based Standards vs. Implementation Capacity:** Members noted that while numerous research-backed standards exist for each subject, the field's capacity to support implementation is limited. Revision cycles generate significant writing but the time and resources devoted to rewriting standards come at the cost of supporting educators in actually using them. Groups called for shifting effort from revision to implementation support.
- **Multiple Pathways vs. Traditional Teaching and Assessment Systems:** There was a tension between the aspiration for multiple pathways, authentic learning, and community-grounded approaches and the reality that many educators and systems remain tied to traditional textbook-driven instruction and standardized assessment. Some members expressed that standards should move beyond traditional approaches, while others noted the difficulty of doing so within existing structures.
- **Instructional Time vs. Number of Standards:** Groups noted a significant tension between the limited instructional minutes in a school day, year, and career and the number of

standards educators are expected to meet. This was described as a fundamental constraint that standards design must account for.

- **Attainment vs. Aspiration:** Members raised the question of whether standards are developed for all students to meet as minimum targets or whether they are aspirational goals. This tension affects how standards are written, how progress is measured, and how educators differentiate instruction for diverse learners.
- **Tested Content Areas vs. Non-Tested Content Areas:** Groups noted a tension between content areas assessed through state testing and those that are not. Educators observed that subjects tied to state assessments receive disproportionate attention, while other content areas—despite being part of the standards—are deprioritized. Members also noted that teacher authority to make instruction relevant to student life can be constrained when assessment pressures drive instructional decisions.

## 7. Large Group Share Out – Patterns and Tensions

Each group shared its identified patterns and tensions with the full Taskforce. Facilitators noted significant convergence across groups, particularly around the themes of relevance and real-world connection, the clarity-flexibility tension, the breadth-depth tension, and the challenge of honoring the whole child within existing standards structures. As one group summarized, patterns serve as the guideposts for standards development—providing the guidelines as teams look to revise and rewrite—while tensions represent what makes it hard to stick to those guidelines, especially when honoring the voices of those who support the development of standards. Another group noted that standards are the only state-level mandate of what gets taught, so they are important, but the way they are now, educators often do not pay attention to them—raising the question of how to ensure standards are meaningful and used. These shared insights were positioned as the foundation for the upcoming interim work on design criteria and principles.

## 8. Preparing for Interim Work – Beth Lambert

Beth outlined the interim work assignment for the period between Meeting 3 and the next Taskforce session. In the days following the meeting, each participant would be assigned one to two of the patterns or tensions identified during the session and asked to generate one to two design criteria. The process involves two steps:

- Craft initial framing statements: "Standards should..." and "Standards must avoid..."
- Develop draft design principles using the framework: Standards should \_\_\_\_\_ so that \_\_\_\_\_, because students learn and develop best when \_\_\_\_\_.

Additionally, members were directed to a CCSSO reading and protocol to inform their thinking as they developed their design principles.

### Action Items

- Next Taskforce Meeting: April 8, 2026, 3:00–5:00 p.m. via Zoom.

- Interim Work Assignment: Each Taskforce member will be assigned one to two patterns or tensions and will develop one to two draft design criteria and principles using the provided framework.
- CCSSO Reading: Members will complete the assigned CCSSO reading and following the accompanying protocol to support the development of their design principles.
- Maine DOE Follow-Up: Maine DOE will share pattern and tension assignments, the slide deck, and clear instructions for interim work following the meeting.
- Resource Access: Meeting slides, recording, and small group notes will be shared in the Taskforce folder for reference.

### **Looking Ahead**

The April 8, 2026, meeting will focus on reviewing and refining the draft design criteria and principles developed through the interim work. Members will come prepared to share their design principles, engage in collaborative feedback, and begin building the shared framework that will guide recommendations for Maine's next generation of Learning Results. The Taskforce will also begin studying models from other states and centering equity and historically marginalized learners in the design process.