



MAINE  
STATE  
CHAMBER  
of  
COMMERCE

**COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS**  
FOR MAINE 2016



# STRATEGIES TO ENSURE COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

## ONE OF A SERIES OF STRATEGIES DESIGNED TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS LAID OUT IN EDUCATION INDICATORS FOR MAINE: 2015

Of all our economic development strategies, education is the one with the greatest return on investment. Investment in the education of Maine people creates lifelong learners, opens pathways to promising careers, and produces civically engaged citizens. This in turn grows the economy and supports vibrant communities statewide.

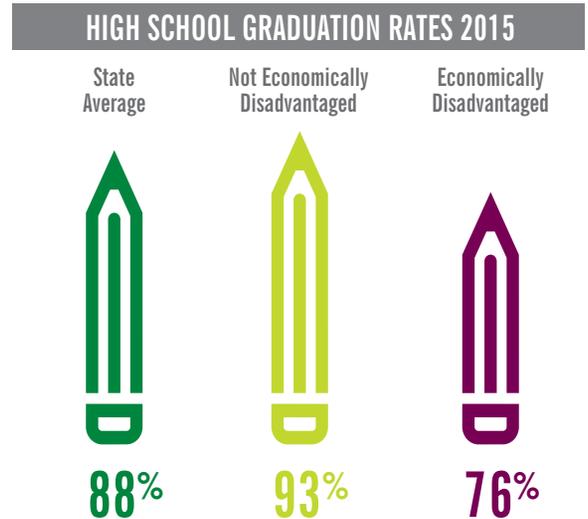
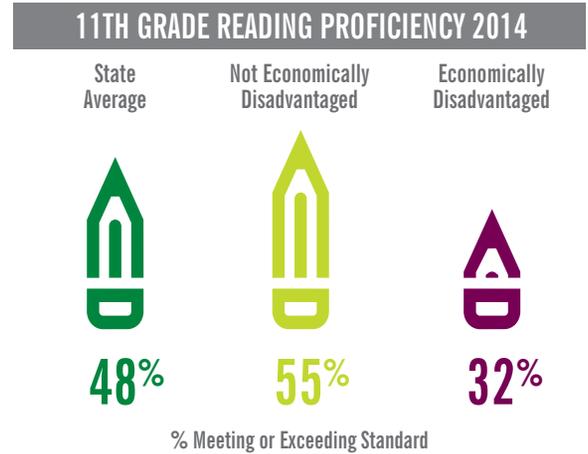
For the past three years, Educate Maine has published *Education Indicators for Maine*, a snapshot of Maine's education system presented through indicators that measure access, participation, and performance.

This policy brief series focuses on individual indicators within the larger report and presents recommendations to improve outcomes. **By design, the recommendations do not represent the full list of possible best practices, but rather focus on a few selected strategies with high return for Maine people.**

The issue highlighted within this brief is **College and Career Readiness**. *The Education Indicators for Maine* report found that only a third of 11th graders from low-income families are proficient in math and reading (compared to over half of students from higher-income families). Less than 80% of students from low-income families graduate from high school, and of these, less than half go on to college.

The path to college and career readiness begins in early childhood, and involves the support of families and communities as well as schools, a fact reflected in the seven strategies (with 15 actions) presented in the following pages.

The policy brief series is brought to you through a partnership between **Educate Maine** and the **Maine State Chamber of Commerce**, and through the generous support of the John T. Gorman and Nellie Mae Education Foundations. The production of the report was made possible by the contributions of Lisa Plimpton (research), Frank O'Hara (writing), and Pica (design and layout).



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# STRATEGY 1: INVEST IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

## The Problem

Nearly three out of five Maine three- and four-year-olds do not attend preschool. Further, the children of lower-income families, who benefit from preschool the most, are less likely to be enrolled in preschool than their higher-income peers.<sup>1</sup>

High-quality preschool improves the average child's academic achievement, reduces the chances that the child will drop out of high school, and increases the child's potential earnings in adulthood.

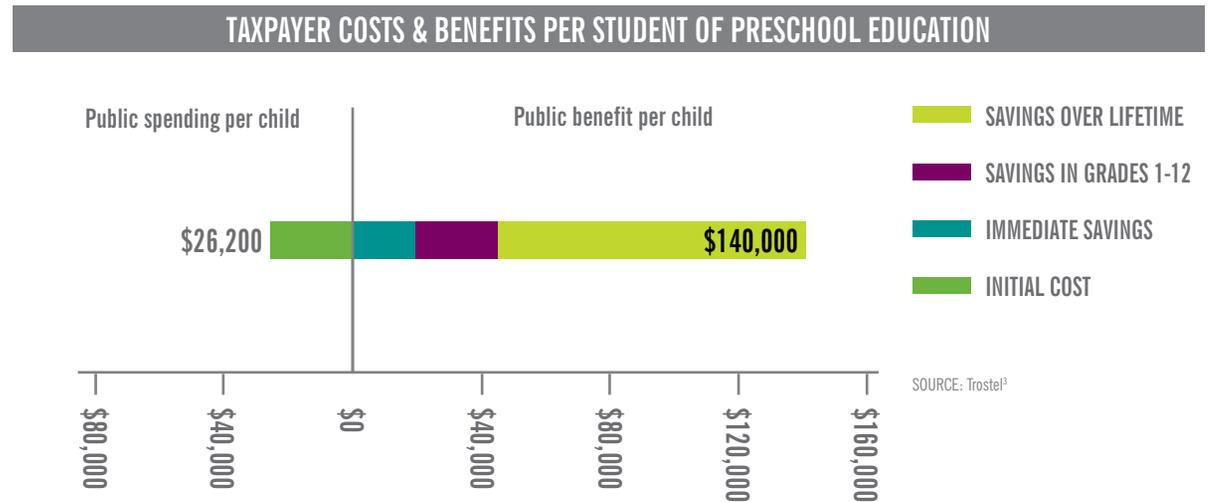
Preschool particularly helps children from lower-income families. High-quality preschool can reduce their achievement gap with students from higher-income families by 30% to 50%.<sup>2</sup> A recent Maine study found that the taxpayer gains \$140,000 in avoided costs and additional income over a lifetime from every child aided with \$26,200 of investment in preschool education (see chart).

## Action 1: Establish Public Preschool Options in Every Maine School District

State law requires this by the 2017-2018 school year. Currently two-thirds of school districts provide public preschool. State funding is available to support these classrooms once they are up and running. But no state funds are currently available for start-up costs—which in the case of districts the size of Westbrook can be quite large, in the \$500,000 range. Finding schools the needed start-up funds is in the State's best interest.

## Action 2: Support Parental Choice Through a Public/Private System

Even if public preschool were universally available in Maine, parents may not choose to send their children for a variety of reasons. Maine should support a mixed system of regulated public and private providers—including center-based child care, family child care homes, Head Start, and school-based settings—so that parents would have more options, and likely more children would be able to participate.





# STRATEGY 2: ADOPT STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING PRACTICES

## The Problem

Everyone learns differently. Some like the classroom. Some prefer to learn on the job. Some like to go at their own pace on a computer. Others enjoy the stimulation of group discussion. Some like to read. Some prefer a video. Most of us like different kinds of learning at different times. Research has identified seven learning styles that teachers must consider.<sup>4</sup>

A student-centered approach engages students in their learning. The learning is relevant and is geared to a student's skills and interests. The goal is to better prepare students for college and career by providing a variety of rigorous options for learning and demonstrating mastery of content. There are many great examples of this type of learning in Maine.



## Deer Isle-Stonington High School

In 2009, just 57% of students reached graduation. The school partnered with the Penobscot East Resource Center and others to create a Marine Studies Pathway and the Eastern Maine Skippers Program. Now students work alongside teachers, scientists, and fishermen to learn firsthand how to support the local fishing industry in the face of climate, regulatory, and technological challenges. The program has gained national acclaim.

By 2012, the proportion of students graduating had increased to 94%, and remains over 90% today.<sup>5</sup>



## Wayfinder Schools

The Wayfinder Schools offer unique learning experiences in Camden and New Gloucester. The schools help students who have had trouble in conventional classrooms to succeed in a residential program that combines, academics, work, and off-site experiences.<sup>6</sup>

## Oxford Hills Aspire Higher Racing Team

Students are able to participate in a unique experiential racecar program. The students build a racecar, design the graphics, create a business plan, recruit corporate sponsors, market to the press, and hire a driver on race days.<sup>7</sup>



## Action 3: Offer Experiential Learning Opportunities in all School Districts

All Maine school districts should offer experiential alternatives to students, either by offering existing programs in new places (the Marine Studies Pathway is being adopted by several coastal schools) or by creating new experiential programs with new community/business partnerships.

## Action 4: Eliminate the Barriers to Career and Technical Education (CTE)

Maine's CTE programs have been offering rigorous and relevant experiential education that prepares students to successfully pursue college and career for years. Barriers prevent many students from participating in these high quality programs. Most of the barriers are not financial—they are such things as scheduling, coordination, transportation, and uninformed attitudes that diminish the achievements of career technical education. These barriers need to be addressed and CTE pathways should be positioned as desirable options for all students.



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SOURCES: 4 See <http://mycolormusic.com/the-7-basic-styles-of-learning-2/> 5 [www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/tayloring-high-school-local-economy-boosts-graduation-rates](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/tayloring-high-school-local-economy-boosts-graduation-rates) 6 <http://wayfinderschools.org/about-us/mission-and-vision> 7 <http://www.aspirehigherracing.org/about-us.html>



# STRATEGY 3: RAISE ASPIRATIONS

## The Problem

The challenge of raising students' aspirations to pursue some form of postsecondary education has been studied in Maine since the 1980s. In 2003, the Maine Educational Loan Marketing Corporation (MELMAC) defined Maine's "gap to college" as follows:

*Maine's adult population outperforms the nation in high school graduation rates but lags in bachelor's degree attainment. In 2000, 89% of Maine residents 25 or over had attained a high school diploma, as compared to 83% of the nationwide population. In 2000, only 24% of Maine residents 25 or over had attained a bachelor's degree, versus 26% nationwide.<sup>8</sup>*

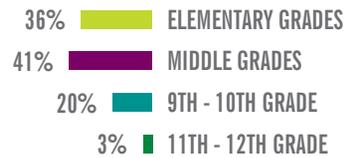
Although the overall numbers have improved some since 2000, fewer than half of Maine adults hold a college degree, certificate, or industry credential today and this trails our regional competitors in New England by several percentage points.<sup>9</sup> More recently, a 2013 survey of Maine educators by the Mitchell Institute found continuing issues with aspirations in Maine.<sup>10</sup>

Raising a student's aspirations must begin early in their education. The most effective times are in the elementary and middle grades but efforts carried through the high school years also bear fruit.

The **MELMAC Foundation** created a program called "**Connect Aspirations to a Plan.**" The program provides grants to Maine schools to support proven best practices that improve students' understanding of postsecondary

education options and that increase college-going, retention, and graduation. They target middle and high school students. About half of Maine schools and students have been touched by these grants.<sup>11</sup>

## MOST EFFECTIVE TIME TO BEGIN ADDRESSING ASPIRATIONS



SOURCE: Mitchell Institute

Other efforts that have successfully raised postsecondary education aspirations include **Early College** and **Dual Enrollment Programs**. These expose high school students to college courses and allow them to earn transferable college credits at low or no cost while they are still in high school. Popular options for Maine high schools students include the **University of Maine System's Academe-e**;<sup>12</sup> the **Maine Community College System's On Course for College**;<sup>13</sup> the **University of Maine at Fort Kent's Rural U program**;<sup>14</sup> and the **Bridge Program**<sup>15</sup> that allow students to earn up to an associate degree while still in high school.

## Action 5: Match MELMAC Grants with Public and Private Dollars to Reach More Students and Sustain Programs

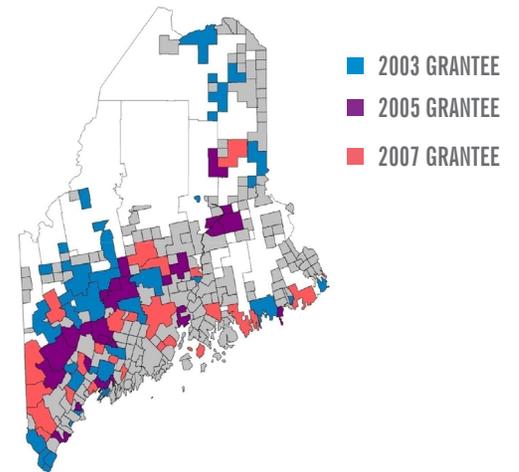
MELMAC investments work and offer an opportunity for local and state government, as well as corporate

and philanthropic entities to match and leverage these funds. This would help reach more students—**particularly middle school students**—and to sustain these efforts after the grant has run its course.

## Action 6: Provide Early College and Dual Enrollment Opportunities to Every Student in Every Maine District

Early College and Dual Enrollment must be viable opportunities for every Maine student regardless of where they live. The State must make this a top priority and work with school districts and postsecondary education institutions to connect all students to this valuable opportunity.

## MELMAC CONNECT ASPIRATIONS TO A PLAN IMPACT ON MAINE HIGH SCHOOLS



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SOURCES: 8 Education needs assessment and strategy, melmac, february 2003 9 Education Indicators for Maine 2015 10 Page 3, Aspirations Survey of Maine High Schools: Results December 2013, Mitchell Institute, [http://mitchellinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/MIAspirations\\_HSSurveyFullReport.pdf](http://mitchellinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/MIAspirations_HSSurveyFullReport.pdf) 11 See <http://melmacfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/2007CATPMap.pdf> 12 See <https://umaine.edu/academe-e/> 13 See [www.mccs.me.edu/our-programs/programs-for-high-school-students/course-college](http://www.mccs.me.edu/our-programs/programs-for-high-school-students/course-college) 14 See [https://communityed.umfk.edu/about/rural\\_u/](https://communityed.umfk.edu/about/rural_u/) 15 See <http://regiontwo.maine.cte.org/programs/category/36922>



# STRATEGY 4: PROVIDE SUMMER AND AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

## The Problem

Successful students have plentiful opportunities to learn outside the classroom, both in informal family and community activities, and in formal programs. “These experiences support in-school learning and serve to foster children’s intellectual, creative, social, emotional, civic, and physical development, all of which are necessary for school success.”<sup>16</sup>

Such learning opportunities are not available equally to all children. Disadvantaged students—who most need such experiences—are the least likely to have them.<sup>17</sup>

The lack of out-of-school stimulation is particularly problematic during the extended summer vacation. Low-income kids return to school in September about two months academically behind where they stood at the start of the summer vacation.<sup>18</sup> There are great Maine models for providing quality after-school and summer programs.

**Tree Street Youth Center** in Lewiston/Auburn serves 120 at-risk students a day, speaking 14 languages. They provide after-school, arts and athletics, summer, leadership, and college exploration programs. Participating students have a 100% high school graduation rate. Participants in their College Prep program have a 95% college acceptance rate.<sup>19</sup>

**LearningWorks** provides similar programming for at-risk students in Cumberland and York counties.<sup>20</sup> Their program at Biddeford schools served approximately

100 students. Of those, 100% of rising kindergarteners and 88% of rising 1st and 2nd graders maintained or increased literacy scores over the summer.<sup>21</sup>

**Gateway to Opportunity (G2O)** is an 8-week summer program that engages rising juniors and seniors from Portland-area high schools in work-based learning projects. In 2016, the program was piloted with 22 students who were split into four teams, paired with four USM students, and connected to projects run by Portland Empowered, the USM Department of Communications and Media Studies, the Portland Housing Authority, and the Opportunity Alliance. Students gained critical work ready skills that employers need while undertaking meaningful projects. The program is a partnership of Portland ConnectED, Southern Maine Youth Transition Network, USM Muskie School, the Greater Portland Workforce Initiative, and Goodwill of Northern New England, with funding from the John T. Gorman Foundation and the Maine Economic Improvement Fund (MEIF).<sup>22</sup>

## Action 7: Scale Up Existing Summer and After-School Programs Across Maine

We have examples of successful after-school and summer programs with measurable results. State government and local districts need to partner with federal and philanthropic organizations to identify those rural and urban communities with the greatest need (and greatest documented achievement gaps) and align investments and resources to scale up successful models to reach more students across Maine.

**THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP**  
The achievement gap between children from high- and low-income families is roughly **30 TO 40 PERCENT LARGER** among children born in 2001 than among those born twenty-five years earlier.<sup>1</sup>

“...EDUCATION IS A WAY OUT OF POVERTY — BUT POVERTY IS ALSO A HINDRANCE TO EDUCATION.”<sup>2</sup>

Parents with the means invest more time and money than ever before in their children while lower-income families, which are now more likely to be headed by a single parent, are increasingly stretched for time and resources.<sup>3</sup>

**LOW-INCOME YOUTH LACK OPTIONS IN THE SUMMER, and sometimes come to the library because it's air conditioned.**<sup>4</sup>

**What Happens to Children DURING THE SUMMER?**

During the summer months, disadvantaged children read water at best or even fall behind. It's what we call **“SUMMER SLIDE”** while better off children build their skills steadily over the summer months.

**FOR EVERY ONE LINE OF PRINT READ BY LOW-INCOME CHILDREN, MIDDLE-INCOME CHILDREN READ THREE.**<sup>5</sup>

**How Summer Learning Can Help CLOSE the Achievement Gap.**

**SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAMS TARGETED TO LOW-INCOME STUDENTS** can help close the achievement gap that has been attributed, at least in part, to cumulative learning loss during the summers and that has been shown to be steeper for low-income students than for others.

Longitudinal studies indicate that **the effects of summer learning programs endure for at least two years after participation.**<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> New York Times, Feb. 9, 2012. Education Gap Grows Between Rich and Poor. Studies Say. Sean F. Reardon, Stanford University. *Whither Opportunity?* Rising Inequality and the Unbroken Life Chances of Low-Income Children. <sup>2</sup> Fred E. Feiwel, Professor of Law, Georgetown Law Center, Huffington Post. *Reimagining the American Dream: A Broader Bold Approach to Tackling the Achievement Gap.* <sup>3</sup> Gains and Gaps: Changing Inequality in U.S. College Entry and Completion. Martha J. Bailey, Susan M. Dynarski. <sup>4</sup> Making Summer Count: How Summer Programs Can Boost Children's Learning. RAND Corporation 2011. <sup>5</sup> Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap. Karl L. Alexander, Dana R. Echevarria, and Linda Stabel Davis. *American Sociological Review* 2007. Additional Sources: The Achievement Gap, Education Week, Aug 3, 2004; Annie E. Casey Foundation 2011.

National Summer Learning Association | [www.summerlearning.org](http://www.summerlearning.org)

**nsia**  
national summer learning association

SOURCE: National Summer Learning Association



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17 Rebell, Michael and Jessica Wolff (October 2011). A Proposal for Essential Standards and Resources: A Proposal to the Task Force on Comprehensive Educational Opportunity. Teachers College, Columbia University. [http://www.tc.columbia.edu/i/a/document/18665\\_Srebellwolff.pdf](http://www.tc.columbia.edu/i/a/document/18665_Srebellwolff.pdf)  
18 Alexander, K. L., D.R. Entwisle, and L.S. Olson (2007). “Summer Learning and Its Implications: Insights from the Beginning School Study”, *New Directions for Youth Development*, volume 114.  
19 See <http://treestreetyouth.org/> 20 See <http://www.learningworks.me/Community-Programs/after-school-summer-programs>  
21 Conversation with program founder John T. Gorman Foundation 22 See <https://usm.maine.edu/publicaffairs/gateway-opportunity-sparks-learning-and-discovery-22-portland-high-schoolers>



# STRATEGY 5: FINISH IMPLEMENTING PROFICIENCY SYSTEM-WIDE

## The Problem

What does a high school degree mean to an employer or college admissions officer? Maine has worked diligently toward a nationally high graduation rate of 87% but test scores and feedback from colleges and employers indicate that not all are leaving high school prepared for the next chapter. The gap is even more pronounced for low-income students.<sup>23</sup>

In 2012, Maine enacted a proficiency-based high school diploma requiring demonstrated proficiency in eight content areas to reverse this equation. In 2016, through a rigorous review process, educators and legislators amended the law to address obstacles and extended the deadline for full implementation of the diploma to the graduating class of 2025.<sup>24</sup> The policy framework is in place. The challenge will continue to be implementation.

Because Maine is one of the first states to actively advance proficiency diplomas,<sup>25</sup> there are few national examples to draw from. Maine has developed many of the system components itself. The good news is that Maine educators, with support from groups like the **Maine Curriculum Leaders' Association** and **Great Schools Partnership**, have been hard at work and continue to make advancements and are realizing the benefits.

USM researchers conducted a two-year evaluation of the initial implementation of the diploma system and identified an important challenge. Successful implementation requires that parents, educators, and the broader community understand and support the changes.

Their research showed that there remains a large gap in understanding among parents and educators. This must be addressed in order to complete the successful implementation of this system change.<sup>26</sup>

## Action 8: Stay the Course Legislatively

Good work has been done to evaluate the initial implementation and changes have been made to right size the law. The Legislature should stay the course and provide the Maine Department of Education (DOE) and schools with the resources needed to finish implementation.

## Action 9: Provide Leadership and Certainty at the State Level

The Maine DOE **must communicate** what needs to be done to the public and to educators and make available

the resources needed to complete implementation. This includes resources and expertise from inside and outside of Maine.

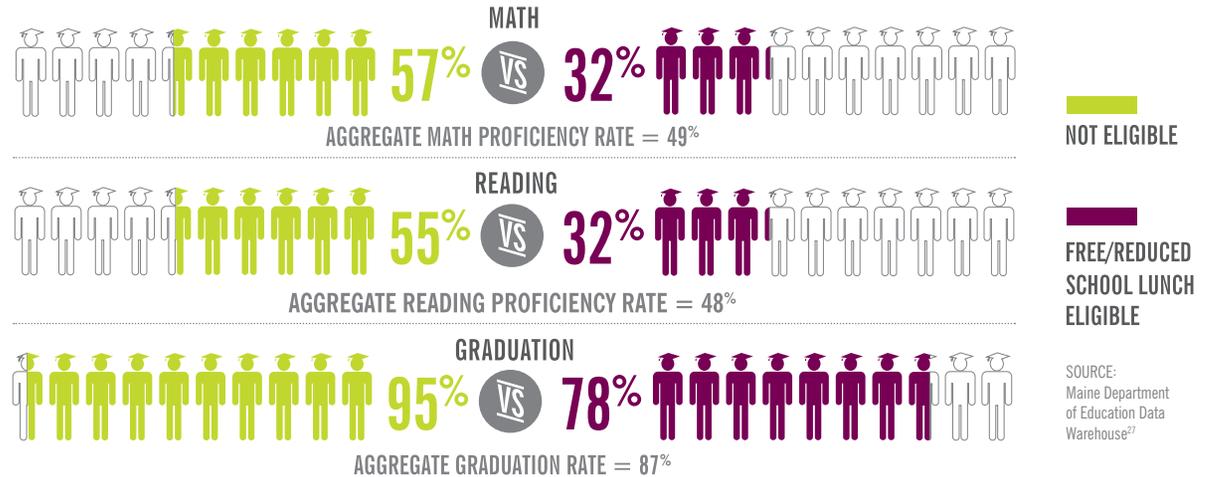
## Action 10: Invest in School Leadership Development

System change requires effective leaders. **The Maine Principals' Association**, the **Maine School Management Association**, and teacher groups like the **Maine Education Association** and the **Maine State Teacher of the Year Association** should be engaged in this work.

## Action 11: Provide Greater Learning through Business Partnerships

The business community has a role it must play at the district level by providing mentors, internships, and resources to provide schools and students with greater learning opportunities.

## PROFICIENCY AND GRADUATION ACHIEVEMENT GAP IN MAINE



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SOURCES: <sup>23</sup> Education Indicators for Maine 2015 <sup>24</sup> See <http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/getPDF.asp?paper=SP0660&item=3&num=127>  
<sup>25</sup> See <http://www.competencyworks.org/reflections/maine-at-the-forefront-of-proficiency-based-learning/> <sup>26</sup> Page 47, IMPLEMENTATION OF A PROFICIENCY-BASED DIPLOMA SYSTEM: EARLY EXPERIENCES IN MAINE Erika K. Stump, David L. Silvernail, Maine Education Policy Research Institute, University of Southern Maine May 2014 <sup>27</sup> <http://dw.education.maine.gov/education/MEDW> (Maine data)



# STRATEGY 6: REDUCE ABSENTEEISM

## The Problem

You can't learn, you can't be supported, you can't raise your aspirations, and you can't go on to higher education if you don't show up regularly at school. There is an abundance of national research proving this.<sup>28</sup>

Chronic absenteeism (missing 10% of the school year) is a problem in Maine but it is not tracked statewide. The **Maine Department of Education** only tracks average daily attendance (ADA), which is at 94%. This figure can mask the fact that significant numbers of students are chronically absent. The national organization **Attendance Works** reports "Schools with ADA rates of 93% or below are almost certainly dealing with high concentrations of absenteeism." One in seven Maine public schools - and one in three Maine public high schools - have average ADA rates below 93%.

**Count ME In** is a Maine organization affiliated with the national organization **Attendance Works**. It is working with several Maine school districts to identify chronically absent students and provide support to address underlying issues.<sup>29</sup>

At **Windham Primary School** about 13% of the school's K-3 students had fifteen or more absences. There was no system to deal with them—just a letter home every so often warning the student and family to do better. Principal Kyle Rhoads worked with **Count ME In** and created a new system where educators and administrators make phone calls regularly to follow up with families of absent students and will convene a

family meeting or provide additional support services when needed. They effectively reduced the rate to about 9%.<sup>30</sup>

At **Mount Ararat High School** about one out of seven students missed eighteen or more days of school. The administrators partnered with **Count ME In** to develop a new system. Now teachers contact families when a student misses three times each quarter. An intervention team meets monthly to review trends and individual needs. As a result, chronic absenteeism is down 20%.

## Action 12: Define and Track Chronic Absenteeism at the State Level

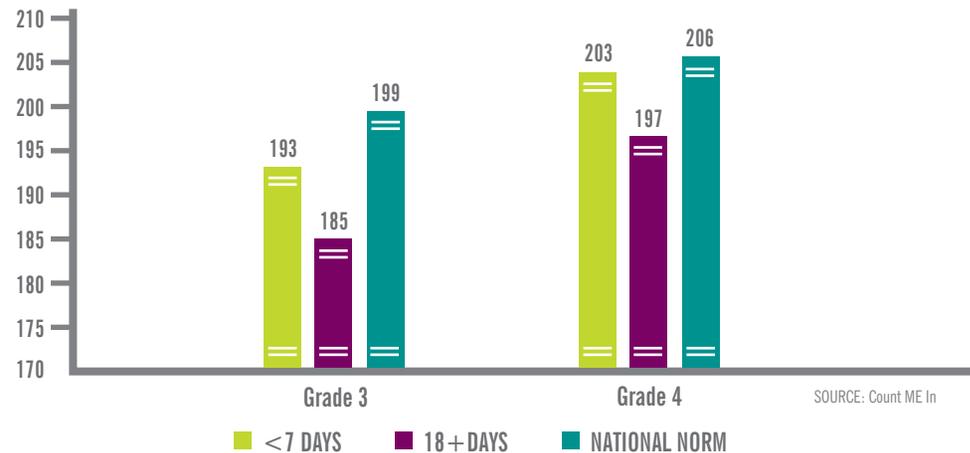
The Maine DOE should adopt a standard definition of chronic absenteeism as missing 10% of the school year

for any reason and local schools should collect this data to submit to the State. School improvement plans should include this data as an indicator to address.

## Action 13: Address Absenteeism Regularly and Proactively

School districts should incorporate an early warning system that monitors when students miss 10 percent or more of school starting in September (excused or unexcused). Schools should work with **Count ME In** to develop a comprehensive approach with personal outreach and relationships with families and partner with community mental health agencies and mentoring programs like **Big Brothers Big Sisters**.

ABSENTEEISM AND NWEA READING SCORES – COUNT ME IN PARTICIPANTS SPRING 2015



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SOURCES: 28 See <http://www.attendanceworks.org/research/> 29 See [http://countmeinmaine.org/site/?page\\_id=233](http://countmeinmaine.org/site/?page_id=233)  
 30 Jay Field, MPBN, Maine Schools Grappling With Chronic Absenteeism, FEB 4, 2016



# STRATEGY 7: FUND TARGETED NEEDS

## The Problem

During the recent recession, state budgets all across the nation were hit hard, and funding for elementary and secondary education fell. Per student support for elementary and secondary education has roughly recovered to its 2006 level in Maine (see attached graphic). But national data shows that other states in New England—New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island—have increased their spending well above pre-recession levels.<sup>31</sup>

This report has identified a number of strategies and actions that require more resources for students to achieve success (see Actions 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 12). In addition, there are other pressing financial needs that schools need to address. Starting teacher salaries need to be increased statewide. More needs to be done to recruit and train teachers in specialized areas like special education, math, world languages, and English as a Second Language (ESL), particularly in rural districts. The need for “wrap-around” services to help students from low-income families is not being met.

All of these issues require funding. But not just a blank check. Additional funding must be targeted to those activities that “move the needle,” that are proven by experience and research to result in better student outcomes. More money needs to be accompanied by more accountability particularly as school enrollment continues to decline in Maine.

## Action 14: Strengthen the Equity and Effectiveness of Public Education Funding

The current **Blue Ribbon Commission to Reform Public Education Funding and Improve Student Performance in Maine** should be reset, with support from the Executive and Legislative branches and given enough time and support to develop actionable recommendations for how Maine invests in its citizens' education from birth through adulthood.

## Action 15: Establish NEW Competitive Fund to Support Innovation in Education

In the same spirit as the **Maine Economic Improvement Fund (MEIF)**, the State of Maine should establish a

competitive fund that Maine schools can apply to for targeted projects and work that meet unmet needs, that close achievement gaps, that advance college and career readiness, and that propose innovative, replicable and scalable solutions to improving student performance statewide. Like the MEIF, this fund would be used to leverage additional federal, corporate, and philanthropic dollars, building partnerships and expanding impact.

**MAINE STATE GENERAL FUND EXPENDITURES: GENERAL PURPOSE AID FOR LOCAL SCHOOLS (2015 DOLLARS)**

