

**Keeping Maine's Commitment to Education
By Steering from a Distance**

by

David Silvernail

Good evening. I have entitled this lecture, Keeping Maine's Commitment to Education by Steering from a Distance, because I think it captures what has happened in Maine's education system over the last four decades. We have come a long way since 1960. Our teachers are better prepared. Our schools are better equipped. Our school curriculum is more rigorous. And more and more of our students are being challenged to do their best work. Without question, we have made great strides in the last 40 years in **improving** the quality of our public school system, and in **expanding** educational opportunities for more and more of our children – children who will be the workers, teachers, and policymakers of tomorrow.

Clearly, we in Maine should be very proud of our public schools. Today our schools are among the best in the nation. In fact, in 1999 the National Education Goals Panel ranked Maine's education system first in the nation. In the same year, the Children's Rights Council designated Maine as the best place to raise a child – primarily because of our education system.

I will have more to say about the state of our education system today later in this lecture, but suffice it to say that our public schools are the envy of many other states.

How did we get here? How did we become one of the best public school systems in the nation?

We did not get here by happenstance. We got here, in my estimation, in very large measure, because of three phenomena: (1) the continued dedication

and hard work of our educators; (2) the increased financial commitment made by Maine's citizens to our schools; and (3) by some key legislative actions taken by our policymakers.

I will discuss all three in this lecture, but the first two only briefly. The third phenomenon is actually the passage of three pieces of legislation, what I consider to be watershed pieces of legislation that have been the principal drivers of the many changes we have seen in our public schools in the last 40 plus years. These three are:

1. The Sinclair Act of 1957;
2. The 1985 Education Reform Act; and
3. Passage of the Maine Learning Results in 1997.

With these three pieces of legislation, we have continued to fulfill our constitutional commitment to our youth and their parents and, in so doing, improved and expanded education opportunities for more and more of our children. And we have accomplished this through a series of legislative actions like the three I just mentioned, all designed to steer the development of our public school systems from a distance. Hence, the title of this lecture.

Dedication and Dollars. Turning to the first two phenomena, the first is the dedication of our educators. This is not really a new phenomenon. In fact, it is merely a continuation of a very long tradition among Maine's educators that goes back as far as 1647, the first year our public schools were established by law here in Maine. Reading the annual reports written by Maine's state school superintendents, reports that were first published beginning in 1853, one comes across example upon example of the unwavering dedication of Maine's teachers to our children; dedication under very adverse conditions, and for very low pay.

And this dedication continues even to today. One only has to visit a few of Maine's schools and classrooms to witness the fundamental commitment our teachers make day in and day out to educating our children. And they continue to fulfill this commitment at very low pay. In the late 1950's, the salaries of Maine's teachers were 27 percent below the national average. Today

salaries are only 17 percent below the national average, and still further below the New England average. Maine's teachers are earning approximately 30% less than their counterparts in other New England states. To use a much overused cliché, but one that is very appropriate, we could not be where we are today in our public schools without the hard work and dedication of our teachers and administrators. We can institute many new reforms, we can encourage and even mandate changes, and we can increase the amount of resources in our schools, but in the final analysis, it is the expertise and experience of our teachers and school leaders, and their commitment to their profession, and to helping our children, that determines the quality of our education system.

A second phenomenon that I think explains, in part, how we got to where we are today, is the major financial commitment Maine's citizens continue to make in our schools; and this commitment has increased exponentially in the last four decades. In 1960, the state, and local communities together were spending, on average, a little over \$300 per student to educate our children. That figure is equivalent to about \$1870 per student in today's dollars.

Where are we today? In 2002-03, we spent approximately \$8000 per student statewide. In other words, there has been a four-fold real increase in education spending over the past 40 years. As one of our legislative leaders, Speaker Patrick Colwell, put it recently: "Maine is not a wealthy state, but we take care of our own and we do a lot better than our neighbors when it comes to school funding."

But as important as these two phenomena are – and make no mistake about it, they are very, very important – I would like to turn our attention now to a third phenomenon, which I believe has contributed enormously to the development and character of our public schools today. I believe one of the major accomplishments in the last 40 plus years, if not the most important accomplishment, is that we have made significant strides in increasing **equity** of opportunities in and among our schools, and improving **access** to a quality

education for more and more of our youth. And we have accomplished this by keeping our constitutional commitment to Maine's citizens.

What is our constitutional commitment? To quote from Maine's constitution: "A general diffusion of the advantages of education being essential to the preservation of the rights and liberties of the people; to promote this important object, the Legislature are authorized, and it shall be their duty to require, the several towns to make suitable provision, at their own expense, for the support and maintenance of public schools..."

Let me repeat a key phrase in this constitutional language: "...the Legislature are authorized, and it shall be their duty to require, the several towns to make suitable provision, at their own expense, for the support and maintenance of public schools..."

It is the duty of the Legislature to insure that all of our children, regardless of where they are born or raised in Maine, and regardless of their economic and social station, they will receive a high quality education. In other words, it is the duty of the Legislature to *steer the development of our education system from a distance*.

Many, many reforms have taken place in education over the past 40 plus years here in Maine, as well as nationwide. Some of these have come and gone very quickly, while others have had a lasting impact on our schools. An important national example of the latter is Public Law 94-142, passed by the national Congress in 1975 – The Education for All Handicapped Children Act.

Today we take for granted that states must provide a free and appropriate public education for all children, including children with special needs. But as late as the mid 1970's this was not the case.

Passage of Public Law 94-142, required, for the first time, all states to provide an appropriate education for children with disabilities. To give you some idea of the impact this law has had here in Maine, it is estimated that in the early 1960's total state and local expenditures for special education here in Maine were less than \$100,000. By 1978, three short years after passage of PL94-142, we were spending approximately \$14 million dollars annually and

provided special education services to over 21,000 students. By the late 1980's we were serving over 28,000 students at a cost of \$75 million dollars per year and today state and local expenditures for special education equal about \$225 million dollars annually providing educational services to over 36,000 Maine students with special needs, a number that represents 17% of our public school student population. Clearly, this piece of legislation has had a major effect on who we educate, and how we attempt to provide an appropriate education for special needs students mainstreamed into our schools and classrooms.

Maine has also instituted many reforms on its own in the last four decades – some also short lived, but others have had a lasting impact on our schools. Many could be mentioned here, but I would like to discuss three in particular.

The Sinclair Act. My first candidate is a piece of legislation that actually was passed in 1957. This was the Sinclair Act.

In 1955, the 97th Legislature authorized a study of the needs in Maine's schools. This study, conducted by the Jacobs' firm from Chicago, in conjunction with a Legislative Research Committee, found our public school system wanting. For example, the Committee found that per pupil expenditures in Maine were 22 percent below the national average, ranking us 11th lowest in the country. Average teacher salaries were 6th lowest in the country. There was a shortage of teachers for our schools, and only about 45 percent of the teachers who were employed had an earned bachelor's degree. A majority of school districts had enrollments under 750 students, and half of our individual schools had enrollments under 200. We had over 120 high schools with less than 100 students enrolled in them. Teachers in these small schools were being paid 30-50% less than in our larger schools. Yet, our smaller schools were considerably more costly to run; about a third more costly in the case of our high schools.

The Jacobs' Report concluded, among other things, that:

“...such substantial inefficiencies as exist in the expenditure of education funds, are caused by improper and inadequate organization of school systems at the local level.”

“The existence of the many small town school administrative units, designated as the responsibility of individual town governments, places major handicaps on the establishment of a most effective school finance system, and on the attainment of adequate educational opportunity for all children throughout the state.”

As one might expect in a state so deeply steeped in local control, the report caused a great deal of angst in many towns and in many corners of the state. Nevertheless, in late 1957, under the very able leadership of Senator Roy Sinclair of Somerset County, and Governor Edmund Muskie, the Legislature passed the Sinclair Act.

The Act was a combination of incentives and mandates designed to increase the amount and distribution of state aid to local schools, and to distribute it differently among the towns; to create new, larger school districts by consolidating smaller ones; and to improve teaching conditions in our schools. Thus, the Act included for the first time:

- (1) Creation of what is known as a foundation funding program. Prior to 1957, the state simply reimbursed schools a percentage of their expenditures, and in effect, provided greater support for those school districts that had more resources to spend on their schools. A foundation program, on the other hand, provided funds to insure at least a minimum level of education funding for all schools all across the state. This program not only increased state funds for education, but helped equalize education opportunities by shifting funds to poorer communities.
- (2) Provision of a 10 percent bonus in state aid, as an incentive for smaller school districts to consolidate into larger ones;
- (3) State assumption of a larger share of debt for the construction of the new larger schools; and,
- (4) Creation of the first statewide minimum teacher salary.

In addition to these incentives, the Act also included provisions to:

- (1) Reduce the amount of state funds paid to communities deemed to have too many unnecessary small schools;
- (2) Require school districts that consolidated into larger ones to have at least one high school of 300 or more students to qualify for the bonus in state aid;
- (3) Require schools to employ only certified teachers, and to adhere to state established teacher-student ratios; and,
- (4) Require towns to pay at least the minimum teacher salary, under penalty of loss of state aid.

Passage of this Sinclair Act led to major changes in our public schools. In 1957 over one-third of Maine's youth were attending small high schools, high schools of 300 or fewer students. By the mid 1960's this had been cut in half. By 1965, per pupil expenditures in high schools over 300 students was \$66 less per student than in smaller high schools, an amount equivalent to \$400 per student today. By 1967, over 230 of the 492 Maine towns, almost half, had chosen to reorganize their smaller school districts into larger ones. These towns joined together and formed 64 new school administrative districts, districts, most of which still exist today. And even today, these consolidated school districts created by the Sinclair Act are less expensive than smaller districts. Also by the mid-1960's, teacher minimum pay had increased approximately 60 percent, and the opportunities for students to take a much wider range of high school courses increased substantially.

Clearly, the Sinclair Act changed the way our schools were organized and run, beginning in the early 1960's, and, the effects of these changes can still be seen today. The Act took us several steps closer toward creating greater student equity of education opportunities by creating larger school districts and by establishing more comprehensive school programs for more of our children. It provided more funds for education, and it distributed these additional funds among our schools differently, based on need and ability to pay.

The 1985 Education Reform Act. My second candidate for a piece of legislation that has played a major role in changing our education system in the last 40 years is the 1985 Education Reform Act. This act was Maine's response to a national movement.

In 1983 the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued the now famous A Nation at Risk report. This report warned that:

“...the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people” (p. 5).

And although Guthrie and Pierce described the report as “...slender in terms of paper, and even thinner in terms of empirical evidence,” the alarm sounded by the report, nevertheless, was heard all across the country. By one account, nationwide, over 700 pieces of legislation affecting education were passed between 1984 and 1986.

Maine's principle contribution to the list of 700 was the 1985 Education Reform Act. In 1984, Governor Joseph Brennan appointed a 25-member “Commission on the Status of Education in Maine.” A year later the commission concluded that, indeed, our schools needed help. Accordingly, the commission issued a series of recommendations that were patterned after those found in many other states – recommendations that many thought would bring about improved performance in our schools by increasing requirements on students and teachers.

Most of the Commission's recommendations were incorporated into the Education Reform Act of 1985, which included provisions to:

- (1) Increase the number of credits high school students had to earn in English, mathematics, science, and social studies before they could be graduated from our high schools;
- (2) Require schools to provide guidance and counseling services to all Kindergarten through grade 12 students, services which were to be provided by trained and certified guidance counselors;

- (3) Require all elementary schools to offer fine arts and physical education programs;
- (4) Establish more rigorous teacher certification standards, and required all teachers, for the first time, to pass the National Teacher Exam; and,
- (5) Establish our first statewide achievement testing program, the Maine Education Assessments, or MEAs. Designed primarily as an accountability tool, the MEAs provided information for the first time for comparing performance of our schools all across the state.

The 1985 Reform Act moved us several more steps closer toward achieving student equity of opportunities. Many educators did not, and to this day still do not believe this was a good piece of legislation, but it is difficult to argue with the facts. It did result in more children being taught by more qualified teachers, greater access to support services for all students, and greater accountability for improved academic performance. In many parts of the state, the publication alone of MEA results forced local school boards and educators to take a much closer look at what they were doing, and to make needed program changes. As a result of the provisions I just described, and others found in the 1985 Reform Act, over a 15 year period, from 1986 to 2000, average performance on the MEAs increased fully 25%.

Learning Results. My third and final candidate for a piece of legislation that has had a major impact on our schools is passage in 1997 of Maine's Learning Results. Actually a precursor to this 1997 legislation was the development of what was called Maine's Common Core of Learning in 1990.

Unbelievable as it may seem, prior to Maine's Learning Results, there was no expressed agreement among Maine's citizens, policymakers, and our educators as to what we wanted our children to know and be able to do by the time they graduate from high school. The Common Core of Learning took the first step toward forging this agreement by articulating a common vision for education in Maine, and by identifying four core areas of learning that all children should be well versed in: (1) personal and global stewardship; (2)

communications, (3) reasoning and problem-solving; and (4) the human record. But the Common Core was not a mandate. In fact, the Common Core task force concluded in their report that “we do not believe the types of changes proposed by the Common Core can be mandated.”

However, by the mid-1990’s, views began to change. Maine’s legislators and citizens, like their counterparts all across the country, demanded higher standards in our schools, and a plan for holding schools accountable for achieving these standards. Consequently, in 1997 the Legislature codified into law the Maine Learning Results.

The Learning Results established 67 specific standards of learning in eight different content areas. As a result, for the first time, we had an agreement on what we expected our children to know and be able to do by the time they exit our secondary schools. Additionally, as a result of the 1997 Legislation, schools must now put into place local assessment systems to ensure that the students are, in fact, making progress toward and ultimately achieving these high standards. Equally importantly, if not more importantly, we now have an agreement that all our schools are expected to insure that **all** children are achieving these; that is, that in the future we will have *equity* in student outcomes.

While still relatively early in its full implementation, we already can see evidence that the Learning Results legislation is bringing about major changes in our schools. Three quarters of our schools report that they have aligned their local curriculum to match the content standards in the Learning Results; schools report purchasing new instructional materials to match the Learning Results, teachers report that they are designing their lessons to meet the new standards; and almost two-thirds report that they now have a local assessment system in place for determining if their students are achieving the new learning standards. So already the 1997 legislation has had a major impact on what now is being taught in our classrooms, how it is being taught, and what is being assessed. Already we can see it has had an impact on increasing student

equity of opportunities, and it holds great promise for achieving even more in the future.

So, where are we now? What has been the combined impact of our dedicated educators, our commitment to funding school improvements, and legislative initiatives on our public school system? Are we better off than we were 40 years ago?

Yes. By many, many criteria, we have one of the best public school systems in the nation. Here are just a few of our many achievements in the last 40 plus years:

- In the mid 1960's the teacher-pupil ratio was 1:24 here in Maine, meaning, on average, one teacher for every 24 students. Today it is 1:14, ranking us 6th highest in the nation in terms of favorable teacher-pupil ratios.
- In 1960 there were fewer than 180 school guidance counselors across the entire state. Today there are over 800 guidance counselors and social workers working in our schools – over four times as many as in 1960.
- In the mid 1960's only three Maine high schools, Deering High School, Hebron Academy, and South Portland High School, offered advanced placement courses in the core disciplines; today over 85% of Maine's high schools offer one or more of these courses in the core areas.
- We rank 12th highest in the country for the amount of money we spend per child on education; over \$750 per child more than the national average.
- Year in and year out, Maine's 4th and 8th graders score in the top five in the country on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the so-called NAEP, a series of tests give to samples of students in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.
- Maine's students also score very high on international tests. On the Third International Mathematics and Science Study, a test

administered to students in over 40 countries, Maine ranks in the top 10 in performance, ahead of countries such as France, England, Germany, and even our own United States.

- Our high school graduation rate is 11th highest in the country.
- Almost 70 percent of our high school students take the SAT tests in their junior or senior year, 20 percent higher than the national average.
- And the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education ranks Maine 7th highest in the country for how well we prepare our students for college.

These accomplishments attest to the fact that Maine has made substantial progress in the last four decades in improving our public school system, and improving it for a larger and larger number of our students.

What price have we paid for these gains, and has the price been too great? The economic costs have not been small, by any means, and some would argue that by investing so much in our schools we have neglected other social and economic needs in the state. Others argue that the economic costs have been worth it, but that too much of the burden of funding our schools has fallen on local communities. And the facts support this claim. The economic costs have been much greater for our towns. In the last decade alone, expenditures statewide on education have increased approximately 20 percent in real dollars. But while the state amount has increased about 10 percent, local communities have increased their share of funding for our schools by about 30 percent, three times as much as the state.

For others, the most important price has been of a different type. The most important price has been the continued erosion of local control of our schools – a greater and greater shift in power and control of our schools away from our local communities and to the state level.

It is likewise difficult to argue with this claim. Prior to the 1960's, towns and districts all across Maine had considerable latitude to decide on how much money they would spend on their local schools; whom they would hire, what

programs and curriculum they would offer, and whom they would graduate from high school. Today it is quite different. Each piece of legislation I have just described, and many more minor ones, has resulted in the state having a larger and larger voice in how our schools are organized, who our teachers and school leaders are, what is taught in our schools, and who may be granted a high school diploma.

So has the price been too great? It depends, of course, upon your perspective. But from my perspective, I would contend that the three pieces of legislation I have just described are very much in line with what the writers had in mind when they crafted our state constitution. The Legislature's job was to insure that the towns provided a good education for all our citizens. Remember the constitutional phrase: "...the legislature are authorized, and it shall be their duty to require, the several towns to make suitable provisions . . . for the support and maintenance of public schools..."

To put it simply, equity and access to a good quality education here in Maine was not, is not, and should not be, a local option.

So, where do we go from here? It is easy to develop a false sense of accomplishment and completion. When looking at our public school system, all the accomplishments I just described are real; and in the aggregate, they paint a very appealing picture of our public school system. But, to paraphrase Paul Harvey, here is some of "the rest of the story:"

- True, we do rank very high in performance on national and international tests. We rank first, for example, in 8th grade performance on the reading section of the NAEP, yet over two thirds of our students still score below the accepted proficiency level. The same is true for 4th grade mathematics. In essence we are first among the mediocre.
- An examination of our own MEA results reveals that we are not yet succeeding in helping all our students to achieve at high levels. Over three quarters of our students score below the proficiency

levels we as a state have established for our youth in mathematics and science.

- And while we have increased educational spending four-fold in the last four decades, the gap between higher and lower spending school districts has not changed significantly. We still have many Haves and Have Nots. Some districts still can afford to spend 2½ times more per student on education than other school districts.
- And we often brag about our graduation rate. It is true that we have one of the highest high school graduation rates in the country but it is also true that the rate has not changed much in over 40 years. In 1960 our high school graduation rate was about 74%; today it is 76%.

These facts suggest that there is still much work to be done in insuring a quality education for all of our children. We have steady work ahead of us. Equity of educational opportunities is essential to the future well being of our citizens and the economic viability of the state. Existing jobs will require more education in the future, and more and more of the new jobs and careers in the future will require additional education. We not only have a moral imperative, but an economic imperative, to insure equity of educational opportunities.

So where will we be in 2010 and beyond? It is difficult to say. The crystal ball is still cloudy. But I think some key decisions we make in the next 2 – 3 years may well chart the future course of public education for a long time to come here in Maine. Two initiatives I believe may move us even closer to our goal of student equity for all Maine's children while some opposing forces could take us back to earlier times.

But before describing these, I would be remiss if I didn't comment, at least briefly, on the 800 pound gorilla sitting in our classrooms, and, indeed, in classrooms all across the country. This is the new federal Elementary and Secondary School Act (ESEA) entitled "The Leave No Child Behind Act of 2001." Over the last four decades Maine has received considerable amounts of money from the federal government to support specific school reforms, and with these

reforms have come many federal regulations. But prior to 2001, the impact of these regulations on the way we run our schools has been rather limited, with the exception of the PL 94-142, the special education law.

But this is all changing with The Leave No Child Behind Act. Currently, the federal government pays for only about 7.5% of the yearly cost to educate our children here in Maine but The Leave No Child Behind Act is, and, in all likelihood will continue, to have a major influence on Maine's schools. The Act includes many, many reforms, but at the core of the 1100 page piece of legislation are new assessment and accountability requirements. This act calls for yearly testing of all 3rd through 8th graders. It provides a timeline for insuring that standards are being met by all children, and it calls for sanctions on schools that are not demonstrating adequate yearly progress.

On the surface the Act is surely laudable; it appears to make us even more accountable for ensuring that no child shall be left behind as we raise standards. But the devil is to be found in the details. And this Act has many, many devils in many, many details.

Just to mention a couple, there is no accepted body of scientific knowledge that supports the concept of adequate yearly progress, as it is defined in the law, yet there are over 85 ways a school may qualify as not meeting yearly progress. And the number of ways will double next year. Additionally, most existing state tests still lack sufficient validity and reliability to insure fair assessments of student achievement and progress on high stakes tests. Yet, by some estimates, 75-80% of our schools nationwide will score poorly on these tests, and consequently will fail to demonstrate adequate yearly progress, and be subject to possible sanctions.

Here in Maine we are already beginning to see the effects of this flawed piece of federal legislation. In the first year alone, over 120 Maine schools have been identified as not making sufficient progress. This represents 15 percent of our schools, and this percentage will be even higher next year. One only has to recall the recent newspaper articles listing our so-called failing schools to see

the unfortunate impact this piece of national legislation is having on our schools, teachers, parents, and students.

Some will say that “this too shall pass,” that The No Child Left Behind Act will be nullified in the courts or substantially modified by the U.S. Congress. True, some modifications are likely to occur. But I would just remind us that both former President Bush, the father, and President Clinton called for the development of national tests as early as 1992. And The No Child Left Behind Act, a Republican backed piece of legislation, was nevertheless co-sponsored by several democrats, including Senator Edward Kennedy, and it was passed by wide margins in both houses of the Congress. So, even though The No Child Left Behind Act may undergo major changes, it could still have a major influence on how we run our schools in future years.

Returning to the Maine context, what actions can we take in the coming years that will move us ever closer to equity of opportunity for all Maine’s children? Many initiatives could be mentioned, including universal day care, Head Start programs for all who qualify, and the creation of true K-16 education options. But I would like to focus my comments on two additional ones: (1) the school funding formula; and (2) regionalization.

First, we need a new school funding formula for Maine schools. The present one has outlived its usefulness. It is flawed. It now draws more and more education dollars away from classroom instruction. It encourages the inefficient use of education resources. It increases the gap between the Haves and the Have Nots. And it will not get us to the goal of all children achieving our new learning standards.

Fortunately, we have taken an important first step toward creating a new formula. Last spring, the Legislature passed, and Governor Baldacci signed into law, L.D. 1623, An Act to Implement School Funding Based on Essential Programs and Services. This act established, a new school funding formula, one that spells out what it will cost to achieve the Learning Results. It tells us how much more money is needed to insure that the all in our Learning Results legislation becomes a reality. More fundamentally, it establishes, for the first

time, that if all Maine's children are to achieve high academic standards, there needs to be a more equitable distribution of our education resources. That is to say, some schools and areas of the state will need more funds than others. This redistribution of funds is necessary so that it truly won't matter where our children are born and raised in Maine. And the target for achieving this more equitable distribution of resources is 2010. If we can stay the course and reach this target, we will, I believe, have substantially increased student equity here in Maine.

However, the results of the referendum vote two weeks ago places this new funding formula in substantial jeopardy. Question 1A, the so-called MMA initiative, maintains our current formula. If this referendum passes in the coming months, it will, in my estimation, deal a severe blow to our schools. It will prevent us from insuring that all children have access to the resources and teachers needed to help them achieve high standards of learning.

1A is a quick fix that will have many unintended consequences. Although many would argue that they have waited far too long for the state to pay its fair share of the cost of education, the quick fix found in 1A would require an immediate increase in taxes, or a decrease in programs and services, or both. And it would actually increase the tax burden on local property owners once again in a very few short years.

I think we will all agree that the cost of financing our schools places a tremendous burden on local property owners. And I think we would all also agree that we need real tax reform here in Maine. The referendum vote two weeks ago, and the proponents of the upcoming so-called tax cap referendum, are seen by many as providing the quick relief they desire. But the long term negative impact could be immense. If 1A or the tax cap passes, both student equity and taxpayer equity will suffer. Not only our school budgets, but our municipal budgets will be dealt catastrophic blows, and the distance between the Haves and the Have Nots will increase not only for schools and kids, but also for communities. By 2010 and beyond we will be painting a much different picture of our education system and accomplishments.

The second key area where our actions in the coming years could have a lasting impact on our schools is the area of regionalization and consolidation. We, the Maine citizens, cannot sustain in the future the exponential increase in school funding we have seen over the last 40 plus years. As Richard Sherwood pointed out in his earlier lecture in this series, we as a population are becoming older, grayer, and in the future those of us who fall into this category will demand an even larger share of the economic and social services resource pie. At the same time, we must continue to fulfill our constitutional, and ethical, commitment to our children. Thus, we must find ways, in the future, to insure that we are using our limited educational resources in the wisest and most efficient ways.

As I mentioned earlier, in the last 10 years alone, school expenditures have increased over 20% in real dollars. At the same time, student enrollment has actually decreased over 3%. We cannot continue this trend in the future. Enrollments are projected to decrease by an additional 10% by 2010. That is a decline of over 18,000 students in a little over six years. At the same time many citizens, policymakers, and educators alike are steadfastly attempting to hold onto our many small school districts all across the state. At present we have 286 separate school districts attempting to provide education to approximately 208,000 students. That is, on average, one school district for every 730 students, one administrator for every 200 students, and one school board member for every 115 students. The evidence indicates that many of these districts and schools are very costly; in some cases, approximately \$400 - \$600 more per child than in larger districts. And there is evidence that these larger school districts can achieve the same or better results as the smaller ones. But the resistance to regionalization and consolidation, at least so far, has been strong and is deeply embedded in our views of local control.

The good news is that some progress is being made in this area. At least a few communities are beginning to discuss consolidation openly, and Governor Baldacci has introduced legislation to incentivize municipal service districts, districts that consolidate and regionalize service delivery for greater

efficiency and economy. Additionally, the governor has appointed a task force charged specifically with recommending ways to consolidate school districts and services. But make no mistake about it, this is going to be hard work. It is about shifting power, and sharing power, two very difficult pills for us to swallow. However, the longer we resist change and do not increase the efficiency in our use of valuable resources, the greater jeopardy we place our children in the future.

In closing, we are fast approaching another historic opportunity for the legislature and citizens here in Maine to rise to the occasion – to move us even closer to the ultimate goal of student equity of opportunities. But as Robert Kennedy, Jr. reminds us “the present shouts, while the future whispers” – that is to say, that it is easy for the decisions we make today, the push for quick fixes to immediate needs, to have many long term adverse impacts in the future. My hope is that the present shouts for narrow quick parochial solutions will not drown out the whispering hopes we have for the future of our children and grandchildren. Thank you.

David Silvernail is Professor at the University of Southern Maine’s College of Education and Human Development. Educated at Indiana University in philosophy and education, Dr. Silvernail has been at the University of Southern Maine for some 26 years, in a variety of posts, including associate provost, and founder and director of the University Assessment Center. He is now director of the Center for Education Policy, Applied Research, & Evaluation; and co-director of the Education Policy Research Institute jointly supported by the Maine Legislature and the University of Maine System. Of late, Dr. Silvernail has been deeply involved in development of both Maine’s highly respected Learning Results Program and the new Essential Programs & Services approach to school funding.